

Fire ants have met their match

Dr. Nathan Sanders, new Assistant Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB), grew up in Conway, Arkansas. Living in a rural setting, he spent much of his time walking through the woods examining the flora and fauna. Although he found ants to be the most interesting species during these walks, he chose to be a



Navigating a river in southern Oregon

physical therapist when he went off to college. However, a Principles of Zoology class changed his perspective and he decided to major in biology and return to his first love – ants.

While in school he became the curator of the ant collection at the Henderson Museum of Natural History. He received his B.A. degree in 1995 from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

After he returned to Arkansas to be a high school teacher, Dr. Sanders realized that he wanted to further his education. At Stanford University, he worked on the impact of an invasive ant species at the Jasper Ridge

Biological Preserve as well as a project involving interactions among a suite of species in the desert near the Southwestern Research Station in Arizona. He received his Ph.D. in 2000.

He was a Postdoctoral Fellow at UT in Dr. Daniel Simberloff's laboratory in 2001 where he studied ants, but with the added impact of rising atmospheric CO₂ and the spread of invasive plant species.

He is now on his first professorship with Humboldt State University in Arcata, California where he has taught Principles of Ecology for the past two years. He will move to UT in January 2004.

Dr. Sanders studies behavioral and community ecology, the spread and impact of invasive species, global climate change, and macroecological patterns. His main focus has usually been on ants, specifically the invasive Argentine ant, *Linepithema humile*.

The Argentine ant most likely found its way to California by stowing away on boats from Argentina and Brazil. It immediately worked to out-compete native ant populations by finding food faster and keeping others from food sources. While it is aggressive, it does not sting. It lives primarily

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From the Director

By Otto J. Schwarz, Ph.D.



Greetings. The summer has more than rapidly dissolved into a bright and shiny new academic year for those of us focused on the

profession of academe. We have successfully closed out another fiscal year and have begun in earnest to execute our plans for this new one.

First, I am very pleased to have accepted the position of Division Director, no more interim. The interview process occurred late in the spring—early summer and was just made official at the end of the third week in August. My appointment is open-ended and is at the call of the Dean of Arts and Sciences, the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and the Chancellor. For those of you interested in such things, the Knoxville campus top executive is now under the very capable hands of Chancellor Dr. Loren Crabtree. We no longer have a sitting Provost.

Also, in case the news has not traveled to your corner of the universe,

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From the Head

By Christine Boake, Ph.D.

As I write this, we are in the breathing space between the end of one busy year and the start of another. The hard work of the previous Heads, **Tom Hallam** and **Sandy Echternacht**, paid off this year when we were chosen to receive two of eight new faculty lines that were given to the College of Arts and Sciences. That doubled the number of searches we conducted, but the department rose to the challenge.



As a result of our searches this year and last, we will be welcoming four new faculty members in the next 12 months. **Tom Near**, a molecular systematist, and **Jim Fordyce**, who studies plant-insect interactions, will join us this August, and **Nate Sanders**, a community ecologist, will arrive in time for the spring semester. We are delighted to welcome them to the department; they are featured in this newsletter. Furthermore, **Mike Gilchrist**, who specializes in evolutionary bioinformatics, will arrive in summer 2004.

EEB was honored this year when two department members, **Susan Riechert** and **Gordon Burghardt**, were named as James R. Cox Professors. This is a new award that focuses on academic excellence combined with research that involves the Smokies. A total of four faculty received the awards, so EEB did ex-

tremely well.

Other faculty accomplishments of note included the promotions of **Sergey Gavrilets** and **Massimo Pigliucci** to Professor. **Dan Simberloff** was President of the American Society of Naturalists this year, and gave the keynote address at the national meetings in Chico, CA. **Lou Gross** has just taken the reins as President of the Society for Mathematical Biology.

Faculty members continue to

publish books: this year **Hazel** and **Paul Delcourt** signed a contract with Cambridge to publish a scholarly book, **Sergey Gavrilets** agreed to publish a book with Princeton, and **Jim**

Drake will edit the first book in a new series on biological invasions (he is also the series editor, plus being the managing editor of the journal *Biological Invasions*). **Dan Simberloff** and **Tom Near** both had the good fortune of traveling to Antarctica this year; **Dan** as a member of an NSF review committee and **Tom** to do research. Of course, **Jackie Grebmeier** and **Lee Cooper** maintain a very active polar research program, so trips to frozen regions are not unusual for them!

The graduate students continue to make me proud. In the fall they presented a full day of research talks, showing a consistently high level of scholarly quality and intellectual excitement that is rare even at professional meetings. **Erin Gillam** received an EPA Star Fellowship in support of her dissertation research on bats as predators on plant pests. **Marc Cadotte** received the Canadian

Governor General's Award for Excellence, which is a very impressive gold medal. Two recent graduates, **Amy Russell** and **Tad Fukami**, are moving on to prestigious postdoctoral appointments. **Amy** will hold a Donnelley Fellowship at Yale, where she will work with **Anne Yoder** on lizard phylogeography. **Tad** will move to New Zealand to continue his work on community structure, with the support of a Marsden Fund postdoctoral award.

Last fall we welcomed **Pam Howell** as a new member of the office staff after **Linda McMillan** returned to school full-time. This spring **Cheryl Lynn** passed the Certified Professional Secretary exam on her first try. This is a rigorous exam and we are delighted that she joins **Phyllis Bice** in having the certification. **Anne Mintz** has continued to help us out by staffing the satellite office in Hesler; this is very important for the well-being of the faculty and students who are over there.

EEB continues to be involved in a variety of outreach projects. **Susan Riechert** greatly expanded her "Biology in a Box" program at the request of school districts from most of the counties in East Tennessee. Biologists from numerous institutions came to Knoxville to learn about the mathematics of biological complexity in a series of three NIH-funded short courses led by **Lou Gross** and **Jason Wolf**. **Darwin Day** also continued to be successful, with leadership by **Massimo Pigliucci** and an outreach to the schools organized by **Paula Kover**.

Like many universities, UT has had a difficult year financially. The President and Chancellor decided that budget cuts should come out of administration as much as possible, and so far the academic programs have not suffered. One of the new faculty lines that we had been given was frozen, but we anticipate being

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Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Department

569 Dabney Hall
Knoxville, TN 37996-1610
(865) 974-3065 Fax (865) 974-3067
<http://eeb.bio.utk.edu>

Christine Boake, Department Head
cboake@utk.edu

Cliff Amundsen, Prof. Emeritus
amundsen@utk.edu

Phyllis Bice, Sr. Admin. Ser. Asst.
pbice@utk.edu

Dewey Bunting, Prof. Emeritus
dbunting@utk.edu

Gordon Burghardt, Professor
gburghar@utk.edu

Marguerite Butler, Asst. Professor
mabutler@utk.edu

Lee Cooper, Research Professor
lcooper1@utk.edu

Hazel Delcourt, Professor
hdelcourt@utk.edu

Paul Delcourt, Professor
pdelcourt@utk.edu

James Drake, Associate Professor
jdrake@utk.edu

Arthur Echternacht, Professor
echtena@utk.edu

Dave Etnier, Professor Emeritus
dipnet@utk.edu

James Fordyce, Asst. Professor
jfordyce@utk.edu

David Fox, Assoc. Prof. Emeritus
djfox@utk.edu

Sergey Gavrilets, Professor
gavrila@utk.edu

Jacqueline Grebmeier, Res. Prof.
jgrebmei@utk.edu

Neil Greenberg, Professor
ngreenbe@utk.edu

Louis Gross, Prof., Assoc. Dept.
Head lgross@utk.edu

Thomas Hallam, Professor
thallam@utk.edu

Pamela Howell, Prog. Res. Spec.
plhowell@utk.edu

Aaron King, Assistant Professor
king@tiem.utk.edu

Paula Kover, Assistant Professor
pkover@utk.edu

Cheryl Lynn, Principal Secretary
cjlynn@utk.edu

Gary McCracken, Professor
gmccrack@utk.edu

Anne Mintz, Senior Clerk-Typist
amintz@utk.edu

Thomas Near, Assistant Professor
tnear@utk.edu

M.L. Pan, Professor Emeritus
mpan@utk.edu

Massimo Pigliucci, Professor
pigliucci@utk.edu

Susan Riechert, Professor
sriecher@utk.edu

Nathan Sanders, Assistant Prof.
Effective January, 2004

Gary Sayler, Professor
sayler@utk.edu

Terry Schultz, Professor
tschultz@utk.edu

Daniel Simberloff, Professor
dsimberloff@utk.edu

Jake Weltzin, Assistant Professor
jweltzin@utk.edu

Steve Wilhelm, Assistant Professor
wilhelm@utk.edu

Jason Wolf, Assistant Professor
jbwolf@utk.edu


SANDERS, from page 1

in the ground, but has also set up residence in human homes.

Dr. Sanders recalls frustrated home owners calling him to get ideas how to rid themselves of the pest. He said, "I told them to study them for me. I wasn't really that interested in helping them. That was until I got invaded." He still has not found a way to run them out of his own house.


He said, "Ants are important to us. They disperse seeds, move soil and are dominant predators. It is also easy to study their behavior patterns over the years because they don't move their mounds. It just amazes me how individual ants can accomplish what they do without central controls."

In terms of studying invasive species, he recently wrote, "Our results show that invasive species not only reduce biodiversity, but rapidly disassemble communities and, as a result, alter community organization among the species that persist."

He brings his wife **Aimée Classen**, who is also an ecologist, and his dog. He muses that he has always lived within a few miles of Interstate 40 and Highway 101, so coming to Tennessee is a natural choice. Although he is currently a professor in California, he feels that moving to UT will ultimately be a better place for him. He said, "I like doing research and Tennessee not only allows, but encourages it." 

HEAD, from page 2

able to complete the search this year. We have continued to rebuild the department after the spate of retirements, and this year there will be a net gain: no retirements and three incoming faculty. When Tom was Head, he worked to establish a field

station for EEB. This is an ongoing project that would give us far greater opportunities for nearby field research and teaching than we have now. Stay tuned for further news of this and other endeavors. 

cboake@utk.edu

UT's new "Butterfly Man"

New Assistant Professor, Dr. **James Fordyce**, is ready to move to Tennessee to begin his career in a part of the country that will be new to him. His only exposure to the southeast was when he was a child and he attended a Ranger Rick camp near Asheville, North Carolina. He is looking forward with great interest to begin work at UT where he will continue his study of butterflies.

Early on, Dr. Fordyce knew he wanted to be an ecologist, but he had trouble deciding between the study of amphibians or insects. He said, "I chose bugs because there are more of



Catching blues in Montana, west of Beartooth Pass

them." He eventually narrowed his research to two types of butterflies: the pipevine swallowtail and Nabokov's blues. He studies insect-plant interactions, more specifically plant defenses against insect offenses and also how geographic variation affects species divergence.

He is currently using DNA studies to create a systematic, molecular phylogeny of pipevine swallowtails to look for patterns of correlated changes in host plant use and behavior over evolutionary time. He has found that the pipevine swallowtails feed in large groups in California, unlike anywhere else in the world. Because of their group effort, the host plant chemistry has been altered and the butterflies

are able to feed faster.

Much of his work with blues is also based in genetics, but for a different reason. Though there exists a great deal of variation in host plant preference, mate recognition, and morphology among populations, DNA evidence suggests that these differences have occurred very recently. Thus, this system not only provides an opportunity to study the consequences of evolutionary divergence, but also the underlying process.

For example, populations that live above the tree line on mountain tops lay their eggs on the plants, but they do not stick as other butterfly eggs do. They roll off onto the ground, overwinter and hatch the following spring. If the eggs did not fall off, emerging larvae would have nothing to feed on because the above ground portion of the host plant is generally stripped off by strong winter winds.

Dr. Fordyce will be able to study the pipevine swallowtail residence of Tennessee and all of their mimics. Some butterflies mimic the pipevine swallowtail because it uses the toxic chemicals of its host plant for its own defense. He said, "The center of mimic diversity is here in East Tennessee and southern Kentucky." However, Nabokov's blues are absent from the Appalachians, so he will have to take trips to the Rockies, Sierra Nevada, and other high elevation areas to conduct field experiments and collect them for morphological and DNA-based study.

He is excited about his new laboratory that he will be setting up this August. It will enable him to do analytical chemical and DNA research. He is also happy to have all of the equipment in one location. Before, he had to go to his former laboratory at Western Michigan to accommodate his instrumentation needs.

He said that no one in EEB is


currently using this type of technology, but "those who study chemistry and chemical toxins in animals similar to butterflies, like poisonous toads, will have access to it."

He enjoys teaching and looks forward to getting started spring semester. He has plans to study plant systems such as the milkweed to stir up interest in graduate students for plant-insect interaction research. Using systems, such as milkweeds, he hopes to encourage students to take a highly integrative approach to ecological questions, ranging from field experimentation, to analytical chemistry, to population genetics.

He wants to instill in his students the desire and ability to do science. He wants them to go from asking the question, to designing the experiments, and then to analyzing data. He said, "I'm not a fan of students being restricted to lab busy work."

Dr. Fordyce plans to teach ecology, chemical ecology, plant-insect interactions and biogeography. He is also interested in leading a mini boot camp for teaching experimental design during spring breaks. He wants to first get a grasp of the natural history of this area and then he will make his plans.

He hopes to secure grants from NSF, but also USDA as he studies native species of insects that have become agricultural pests.

Dr. Fordyce grew up near Ann Arbor, Michigan. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees in nearby Kalamazoo at Western Michigan University. For his Ph.D., he traveled to the University of California, Davis. At UCD he conducted his DNA research in the same lab as **Dr. Thomas Near** (see facing page). He is moving to Tennessee accompanied by his wife **Kristie** and their two children. 

jfordyce@utk.edu

“There’s no better place in the world to be an ichthyologist”

It is a pleasant irony that brings Assistant Professor, **Dr. Thomas Near** to UT. Dr. Near is an ichthyologist born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. In the spring of 1996 he made a trip to Knoxville that set the course for his career. That spring he met **Dr. David Etnier** (now Professor Emeritus) and toured the famous fish collection that he will soon manage. He said, “I stayed with the Etniers and the experience made a positive impact on my career, then and now.”

Dr. Near was educated in the state-supported universities of Illinois. He received a double bachelor’s degree in biological sciences and history from Northern Illinois University in 1993. He said, “I was interested in Ancient Greek history, particularly methods of learning and its impact on the history of biology. I wanted to see how these ancient scholars asked questions and made their observations of nature.”

He feels that it was his coursework in history that improved his writing skills. So much so that he plans to require writing in the ichthyology courses that he will teach here at UT. He said, “Many of these students will likely go into some type of management, state agency or research. A background in writing will be a big help to their careers as it has been to mine.”

He received his master’s degree in 1995, also from Northern Illinois University, before moving to the University of Illinois for his Ph.D. in 2000. It was during the late 1990’s that he met Dr. Etnier and became enthralled with his book *Fresh Water Fish of Tennessee*. Dr. Near said, “It’s the best regional ichthyology book in the world and that is not an overstatement. It is an incredible tool that led me to my interest in speciation, particularly in East Tennessee.”

Dr. Near’s research focuses on speciation and macroevolution of fishes. He is particularly curious as to

why there are so many species of fish in Central and East Tennessee.

He focuses primarily on two groups of fish: darters and centrarchids, which are the sunfish and black basses. He uses the rich fossil record of the centrarchids to substantiate rates of molecular evolution and estimate divergence times among the species. With the calibrated centrarchid phylogeny, he plans to estimate the divergence times of other groups of fishes that occur in Tennessee, but do not have adequate fossil records to allow for calibration of the phylogeny.

In the case of the darters, he hopes to find if the rate of speciation is based on the vibrant coloring of the males. Dr. Near wants to use North American freshwater fishes to examine these more general questions of rates of evolution and processes of speciation. He said, “Part of the effort is to take the study of the freshwater fauna into the bigger discussions of evolutionary biology. In this regard, North American freshwater fishes are understudied.”

Dr. Near will take over as curator of the fish collection here at UT in August and he has big plans. He intends to continue to make it available to any scientist who is working with fishes, particularly those who are trying to determine relationships among species and how particular characteristics evolved.

He also plans to create a tissue collection and make genetic resources available for investigations of population genetics and species relationships. Further, he will emphasize the use of genetic tools in ongoing programs of captive propagation for fish species reintroductions that are occurring in the Knoxville area. He said, “University-based collections are incredibly rare. We have a unique



Collecting samples at the Sipsey Fork River in Northwestern Alabama

opportunity particularly because this area is the ‘hot-spot’ of bio-diversity.” The current collection documents the species-rich Tennessee aquatic fish fauna with collections dating back to the 1960’s. Dr. Near and others can use this resource to develop sampling approaches that may help in the study of the rate of decline of native species, the spread of invasive species, and the impacts of invasive species on native species.

As far as moving to the south is concerned, Dr. Near is enthusiastic there as well. Although he is currently completing his postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California, Davis, he said, “I’m not a California guy. The South is more courteous and I look forward to finding a nice neighborhood to live in and becoming a part of the community.”

tnear@utk.edu

From student to teacher

The Division's Microscopy Facility is housed on the first floor of the Science and Engineering Building. Originally dedicated to electron optics, it has diversified over recent years and now offers a broader range of services.



The facility was established under the direction of **Drs. John Kennedy** (BCMB) and **Patricia Walne** (Botany) in the early 1970's. Maintained now by **Dr. David Joy** and **Dr. John Dunlap**, the Microscopy Facility has acquired new equipment over the last several years, including a scanning electron microscope and a laser scanning confocal microscope. Coming in October will be the much anticipated atomic force microscope. The AFM will belong to **Dr. Gary Saylor's** group, but will be available to all researchers through the facility.

At the center of this research hub is Alabama native, Dr. Dunlap. He grew up in Huntsville and attended the University of West Alabama where he obtained his BS and MAT. While there he met a former student of Dr. Walne's who encouraged him to make the trek to UT to pursue his Ph.D.

He entered the Botany program as a graduate student in 1978 and completed his Ph.D. in 1984 under Dr. Walne's direction. His dissertation research focused on metal uptake and processing to the extra cellular matrix in unicellular euglenoid flagellates.

His research led him to the microscopy facilities at ORNL where he developed an interest in analytical application of electron microscopy.

In 1985, while completing postdoctoral work in **Dr. Jack Able's** laboratory, he moved his interest to the emergent EM Facility at UT and the rest is history.


Currently, Dr. Dunlap provides research support to the Division's four departments in addition to Engineering Sciences, Agricultural

Sciences and UT Medical Center. He is also working in collaboration with several groups at ORNL. He is basically a one-man operation in this financially self-sufficient facility.

Spring semester he will be offering a course, Techniques in Electron Microscopy, which is a hands-on course designed primarily for graduate students. The course was developed to train students on methods in electron microscopy and the role microscopy plays as a research tool. During the last five to six weeks of the class, students will have the opportunity to apply the techniques they have learned to samples from their own research program. (Notices for the class will be posted later this fall or you may contact Dr. Dunlap for detailed information about the course).

Dr. Dunlap's interests away from work center on his love of the outdoors. He enjoys hiking and backpacking with a group of like-minded friends. In addition to exploring in east Tennessee and western North Carolina, they enjoy yearly trips to more remote areas. His favorite to date was to the Gates of the Arctic National Park

in northern Alaska where they spent two weeks exploring the broad valleys and high mountains of the Brooks Mountain Range, the northernmost mountain range in the world.

He lives in historic Island Home Park with his two sons, **Daniel** and **Lee**, who share his interest in the outdoors. They often hike and backpack together with Daniel's Boy Scout troop where Dr. Dunlap serves as an Assistant Scoutmaster and outings coordinator. 

jrdunlap@utk.edu

Science Alliance Award Winners



Norris Muth and John Placyk
Not pictured: Marc Cadotte, Tadashi Fukami, Stephanie Hicks, and Amy Russell

The recipients of the Science Alliance Awards for Outstanding Scholarly Achievement by a Graduate Student are: **Marc Cadotte, Tadashi Fukami, Stephanie Hicks, Norris Muth, John Placyk and Amy Russell.**

Each year six students are chosen to receive an award of \$3,000 based on their achievements while at UT. The intent of this award is to provide significant recognition to the outstanding achievements of our graduate students. These achievements include research, teaching and service.

The awardees were judged on the scope, significance and balance of achievements as well as on their potential for future growth as evidenced by accomplishments while as a student.

Congratulations to all these fine students.

DIRECTOR, from page 1

UT is again without a permanent President. **Dr. Joe Johnson** has come out of retirement and agreed to serve as Interim President until the position is once again filled. Administrative changes at this level rarely produce ripples at the Division and Department level in the short term; however, the University's long term direction and success looks toward strong Presidential leadership guided by intelligence, insight and impeccable ethical standards. The search for a permanent replacement has already begun.

Now that the Director's position is a bit more permanent, I will begin the process of gaining consensus and with it support for some, what I feel are, minor internal shifts in the way we go about our business of supporting teaching and research in the Division. We will start out by simply asking the departments to evaluate the Division's service facilities BSF, BBO, etc. I guess I want to make sure that if it's not broke, I won't attempt to fix it.

When the evaluations are completed we will then proceed or not depending upon their outcome. As I grow to learn the Division's inner workings I am sure I will find opportunities for improvement as well as opportunities for rewarding continued good works. More about these efforts as they unfold.

I will shortly take the "Bull by the Horns" so to speak and begin a hard look at our non-majors courses and

majors CORE curriculum. It has been almost ten years since the Division has evaluated its current non-majors and CORE offerings, a time frame during which the Biological Universe has continued to evolve. Therefore, I think our CORE should also.

Today, when I return to my office, I will ask my new office manager **Angela Gilley**, to make an appointment for me with Chancellor Crabtree. During the Director's interview process with the Chancellor the conversation hit upon the Conservatory concept drawings we showed you in an earlier issue of this newsletter. I just happen to have a rather large framed print of that very same concept drawing for Dr. Crabtree. Just in case he has some bare wall space in the Chancellor's office.

The idea of bringing together all aspects of the Division of Biology in such a facility, dedicated to a rainbow of functions that focus on teaching, research, K-12 and general public outreach as well as the opportunity to foster the much broader cultural mission of a great land grant university is most exciting. Much more about this later, I hope.....

Back to the start of the new academic year. The Division held its annual mandatory "Safety Meeting" this past Friday noon with an excellent turnout of faculty, staff and graduate students. "M. Missouri Clem" alias **Clem Small**, husband of **Dr. Pam Small**, Associate Professor of Microbiology, supplied 30 minutes of first rate musical entertainment just prior to the boring stuff. Best turnout we've ever had, s'pose the pickin' and singin' helped? After the formal safety stuff, all adjourned to a delicious "Buddy's BBQ" lunch all very well arranged by our newsletter editor **Laura Maples**. Thanks Laura.

This issue spotlights the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology (EEB). The new EEB faculty interviews range from ants and butterflies to fish, all

Faculty Kudos


Dr. Les Hickok, Professor of Botany, was one of four professors honored at the recent national meeting of the Botanical Society of America.

He received the Merit Award, the highest honor given by the society, because of his research and teaching efforts at all levels, from K-12 to international seminars, are groundbreaking, inspirational, dedicated and unselfish.

appropriate interests for modern day ecological/evolutionary investigation of our environment. The expertise of these new folks will fit very well in the existing background of EEB research interests.

Dr. Chris Boake has just completed her first year in residence as EEB department Head and as such offers an interesting update on departmental happenings. The Focus on Staff column presents the efforts of **Dr. John Dunlap** our resident electron microscope expert and hands on manager of the Division's Microscopy Facility. John is a contributing member of the Division's research and education support efforts. Personal experience has shown him to be an expert microscopist with a willingness and patience to assist to whatever degree necessary to complete the job at hand.

We would very much like to initiate a regular Alumni Happenings Column. I hope that I am not the only one in UT Biology that likes to learn of the members of our Biology family.

Please use the enclosed envelope with the short form to jot down a few comments for publication in such a column. We are interested in you and what's happening in your life; after all you are our investment in the future. 

Cheers from
"The Director"

oschwarz@utk.edu

In Vivo

An alumni newsletter published by the Division of Biology
Otto Schwarz, Director
Laura Maples, Primary Writer/Editor
lmables@utk.edu

The University of Tennessee
Division of Biology
M303 Walters Life Science Building
Knoxville, TN 37996-0830
(865) 974-6841 Fax (865) 974-4057
<http://web.bio.utk.edu/Division>



The University of Tennessee
Division of Biology
M303 Walters Life Science Bldg.
Knoxville TN 37996-0830

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IN VIVO

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AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 2003

Please take time to look at the enclosed envelope. There are two changes that need your attention. First, with the help of alumni and donors, we have established a **Biology Conservatory Fund** to benefit our Conservatory building project.

Second, there is a box to check if you would allow us to print your name as a donor in future issues of IN VIVO.

Also, as always, we want to hear from you as alumni on your recent professional and personal achievements. Please fill out that portion of the form as well.

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