

RESEARCH IN THE SCIENCES AT DAVIDSON: PART II

The birds and the bees: One facet of research in biology at Davidson

BY SARAH SCHMIDT
Guest Writer

What do bluebirds in Davidson have to do with evolution? Dr. Mark Stanback, a behavioral ecologist on faculty in the Biology department, finds plenty of associations. He is engaged in research to explore the evolutionary significance of animal behavior, and bluebirds are his current study subject.

Stanback is a 1984 Davidson graduate. He did graduate studies at U. C. Berkeley in cooperative breeding in woodpeckers as the subject for his dissertation. At the University of Washington in Seattle, Stanback took his post-doctoral research into the lab to investigate the hormonal basis for woodpecker behavior he observed in Berkeley. Following Seattle, he went to Namibia on a Fulbright fellowship to conduct post-doctoral research on the unusual reproductive biology of hornbills.

Although his research has an obvious con-

This is the third in a series of four articles focusing on the research activities of faculty members in the Psychology, Physics, Biology, and Chemistry departments. One faculty member from each of these departments will be interviewed.

centration on birds, Stanback does not identify himself as an ornithologist. He feels that his role as a researcher is "not defined by his study subject, but by the questions he asks." His current research is centered around the issue of how behavior influences evolutionary fitness. Stanback considers birds to be useful tools to approach these questions.

Bluebirds, like all animals, make decisions that either help or hinder their fitness (survival and reproduction). Stanback and his students perform tests to discover what decisions take priority in the evolutionary fitness of bluebirds.

For example, Stanback and his students found that if a bluebird is given the option of nesting in

a low nestbox or a high nestbox, the bird will tend to choose the higher one, presumably because this is safer from predators. If the bird is given the option of a clean or dirty nestbox, it will usually choose the clean nest, because such nestboxes contain fewer blood-sucking parasites. After identifying this pattern, Stanback and his students gave the birds an option of either a high, dirty nest, or a low, clean nest. The bluebirds were then forced to prioritize. Overall, the birds tended to choose the high nest, despite the parasites. Avoidance of predators is a higher priority for their fitness than is avoidance of parasites.

For the upcoming breeding season, Stanback will take his research to a new level with DNA

fingerprinting. With this technique, he hopes to identify the paternity of chicks within nests in order to explore the decisions female bluebirds are making in their mating choices. Females of many bird species (including bluebirds) are now known to pair socially with one male, but "cheat on" their mate and have another male (usually of higher quality) father some of the offspring. In 2000, Stanback and his students will be manipulating the timing of breeding in bluebird neighbors to test the influence of this on "extrapair paternity".

Stanback relies on students to help with his research. Last summer David Lamar '01, Suzanne Moore '00, and Annie Welsh '01 stayed on campus to help with the study. For spring semester, Catherine Walsh '00 will be working with the bluebirds and a purple martin project. Jenny Roberts '01 will be spending the summer at a biological station in California performing the DNA fingerprinting.

Student Health Advisors sponsor Diversity Dinner

PRESS RELEASE
Student Health Advisors

When the doors finally closed in Chambers Gallery on Tuesday, November 16, night was already well underway. The Gallery had played host to the Health Advisors' Diversity Dinner—a program designed to bring students together for discussion and appreciation of the diversity here at Davidson. Originally scheduled from 6:00 - 7:00 p.m., the discussion portion of the program lasted an hour and a half longer than planned. The purpose of the Diversity Dinner was, in the words of sophomore program director Seth Davis, to celebrate the diversity here at the college and to be "a small step in the effort to create a true sense of community here at Davidson."

The idea of a Diversity Dinner began in late August, at the first Health Advisor meeting. It sprouted from an idea proposed by sophomore Seth Davis. Seth, a Health Advisor, proposed that diversity programming should be done on the freshman halls in order to inform the freshman about diversity at Davidson and to engage them in the community. From this proposal sprang the idea for a Diversity Dinner geared toward presenting information and engendering discussion in the freshman class. Eventually the Health Advisors decided to open the dinner to a larger

audience than just the freshmen, in the hopes of affecting a whole range of students here on campus.

Jenny Haggood, also a Health Advisor, was instrumental in making the dinner program a reality. She refined the structure of the program and worked out many of the details, including funding and discussion leaders. The Diversity Dinner wouldn't have come to fruition without the contributions of RLO, the Office of Auxiliary Services, and Campus Forums. Laura Battle, the cook at Rusk, prepared all the food for the event.

The dinner program was loosely structured, allowing all the participants to voice their views. After a few opening remarks the individual discussion leaders introduced themselves to the group of students that came. The dinner atmosphere allowed for intimate discussions at each of the tables. Discussion leaders, both Health Advisors and RLO staff members, mediated the discussions at each of the tables. The discussion leaders were able to present questions for discussion. For example, one question discussed was, "Is there a cohesive sense of community at Davidson?" Unlike a forum, the Diversity Dinner allowed groups of 10-15 students to discuss issues of diversity and inclusion within a very intimate, human setting.

Response to the dinner was significant. Due to limited seating, only so many students could join in the dinner and discussion. Seating was more than

full — approximately eighty students showed up to the program.

Students who came to the dinner entered into discourse about their experiences at Davidson and elsewhere, their beliefs about the current state of diversity at Davidson, and practical ways in which to deal with issues of diversity and inclusion. At some of the tables students debated as to what sort of programs would promote inclusiveness on cam-

pus. One solution suggested that Patterson Court's importance in the social scene could be used as a means to bringing together all students for events.

Student response to the Diversity Dinner was strong, with more students coming than were anticipated. Moreover, once they were engaged in discussion, many students expressed their desire that the steps toward a truly diverse and inclusive community would continue to be made.

The Davidsonian

ALENDA LUX UBI ORTA LIBERTAS

Editors in Chief

JOHN A. DUNWOODY II

WESLEY H. GOLDSBERRY

NEWS

Senior Editors

LAURA McCANDLISH
ANN GREGORY

Photographer

JAKE HARRINGTON

SPORTS

Senior Editors

MIKE ANDERSON
BURGIN HARDIN

Photographer

ANNA JULY

Layout Editors

BEN COVINGTON
CADER HOWARD

Business Manager

PETER CLARK

Advertising Manager

PETER CLARK

Ad Designers

BEN COVINGTON
CADER HOWARD

Circulation Managers

CINDY CLARK
INA SPECHAR

Circulation

DEREK KVERNO
IRENE MIDDLETON

DAN WINGATE

OPINIONS AND EDITORIALS

Senior Editor

MELISSA ANN
deCASTRIQUE

ARTS & LIVING

Senior Editor

SETH DAVIS

Photographers

JESSICA BOGO

ADAM SOTO

Health Copy Editors

Extraordinaire

WHITNEY BLAKE

IRENE MIDDLETON

Web Editor

STEPHEN GAMBOA

Founded in 1914

"The South's Foremost College Weekly"

You can also read The Davidsonian on the Internet at

<http://www.davidson.edu/student/organizations/davidsonian/davidsonian.html>

The Davidsonian is published Mondays during the academic year by the students of Davidson College. One copy per student. Please address all correspondences to: The Davidsonian, P.O. Box 219, Davidson, NC 28036. Phone (704) 892-2148 or -2149. E-mail Davidsonian@davidson.edu. Our offices are located on the third floor of the Union. Opinions expressed in letters to the editors or commentaries do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Board of The Davidsonian. Subscriptions cost \$40.00 per year. Advertising rates are available upon request.

Copyright is held by the Trustees of Davidson College.

**Lake Norman's
Best Mexican Food!**

Monterrey

**RESTAURANTE
MEXICANO**

**MEXICAN FOOD COOKED BY
AUTHENTIC MEXICAN CHEFS**

CORNELIUS
Magnolia Plaza Shop. Ctr.
Hwy 73 W. Exit 28
895-2363

MOORESVILLE
Port Village Shop. Ctr.
482 C River Hwy. (Hwy 150)
664-6363

Monday	11:00-10:00
Tuesday-Thursday	11:00-10:30
Friday	11:00-11:00
Saturday	Noon-10:30

ABC Permit
We Accept All Major Credit Cards