



2007 George Mercer Award

Jordi Bascompte

The Mercer Award is given for an outstanding ecological research paper published within the past two years by a younger researcher (the lead author of the paper must be 40 years of age or younger at the time of publication). If the award is given for a paper with multiple authors, all authors will receive a certificate, and those 40 years of age or younger at the time of publication will share the monetary prize. Nominees may be from any country and need not be ESA members. This year's recipient is Jordi Bascompte for his paper "Asymmetric coevolutionary networks facilitate biodiversity maintenance" (2006, *Science* 312:431–433). Coauthors on the paper were Pedro Jordano of the Biological Station of Doñana, Spain, and Jens M. Olesen of the University of Aarhus, Denmark.

Perhaps the most central question in ecology is what determines the distribution and abundance of species. The role of coevolution in shaping diversity patterns has become increasingly recognized, but many studies of coevolution have focused only on pairs of species. Dr. Bascompte and colleagues used a novel analysis of mutualistic networks and demonstrated the importance of weak, asymmetric, and highly heterogeneous interactions. They used an innovative combination of general analytical approximations, meta-analysis, and natural history to achieve their results.

The results of Dr. Bascompte and his colleagues are of interest not only to ecologists and evolutionary biologists, but also to those working in the growing field of complex networks. The array of communities covered in their data set spans a geographic range from the tropics to the poles and confers generality to the results. In addition to presenting their important results, the paper also provides a data set that is truly remarkable. By making the data freely available, the paper does extra service to the broader scientific community.