
George Mercer Award
Daniel Bolnick, Richard
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Fordyce, Louis Yang,
Jeremy Davis, Darrin
Hulsey, and Matthew
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The **George Mercer Award** is the oldest of the awards granted by the ESA, and is given in memory of a young British ecologist who was killed in action in World War I. The award is given to an author under 40 years of age in recognition of a single outstanding paper in ecology published during the past 2 years.



This year, the Mercer Award honors a paper where all seven co-authors were graduate students at the time of publication. They are Daniel Bolnick, Richard Svanback, James Fordyce, Louis Yang, Jeremy Davis, Darrin Hulsey, and Matthew Forister, who have won the award for their paper, “The ecology of individuals: incidence and implications of individual specialization,” published in *The American Naturalist* in 2003. Daniel Bolnick is now an Assistant Professor at the University of Texas.

The paper argues persuasively for the importance of interindividual specialization and niche variation within species, using data assembled from the literature and offering a conceptual framework for describing and thinking about individual niche variation and its consequences. This is not a new idea; in fact, the magnitude and importance of individual variation has been debated for a long time. However, the idea has had relatively little “penetrance” into the way we study ecology, perhaps because empirical and theoretical treatments of interindividual variation have been less than definitive, and even conflicting. The Mercer Award subcommittee noted that Bolnick et al. do a superb and elegant job of articulating why individual niche variation deserves renewed attention, and how one might study it in natural systems.

Several members commented that this kind of paper opens one’s eyes to new things to look for in one’s own work. Interestingly, several members of the committee also commented that they had not decided exactly if they agreed with all the ideas in the paper—and this seemed a positive indication about the paper and its potential importance! The citation record for this paper is already impressive. ESA commends the authors for turning a graduate reading group into a piece of scholarship that promises to have impact for years to come.