DGE Report, May 2004

DGE Seminar

May 28 in the Global Ecology Seminar Room. Prof. José Sarukhán from the Univ. Nac. Autó. Mexico spoke about "Astrocaryum mexicanum revisited: 30 years of population studies." The Seminar was co-sponsored by the Dept. of Biological Sciences Center for Conservation Biology, Stanford Univ. Prof. Sarukhán's well documented study included pictures of different stages in the life cycle of this very thorny palm as well as data about its population dynamics in Mexican habitats.

Short-term Visitor

We are pleased to welcome Dr. Yingping Wang to the Department for a short visit until May 30. He is from the Atmospheric Research Unit of CSIRO in Melbourne, Australia and supported by an International Fellowship Program. While here he is working on Carbon-flux Modeling, specifically non-linear parameter estimations of terrestrial ecosystem models with the Berry and Field Groups.

Global Ecology Department Meeting

The first DGE meeting in the open lobby of our new building was convened by Director Chris Field at 4 PM, May 19. Most members were present including Mary Smith and Paul Sterbentz. Chris brought up several topics for discussion, most of which involved how we adapt to our new building and evolve culturally as a Department. Several housekeeping examples may be solved simply by remembering to be considerate of others. Others, such as how to control temperature and lighting will become clearer after directions are posted. Two major defects of the furnishings will have to be corrected within the next few months. One involves the edging around the desktops and the other, the carpeting on the second floor. Unfortunately, both of these will be disrupting. Security cables for portable computers and more chairs in the conference rooms are being looked into. Light refreshments were enjoyed by all at the end.

Our Own Member News

Halton Peters and three colleagues recently made the Science Section of the N.Y. Times on line with the publication of their paper Falling palm fronds structure Amazonian rainforest sapling communities. in The Proc. R. Soc. Lond. B (Suppl.) DOI 10.1098/rsbl.2004.0197 (Biology Letters). Their research showed that falling fronds from Iriartea deltoidea have a major influence on the makeup of the rain forest. For a sapling that stores its carbon reserves, produced through photosynthesis, in above-ground tissues, damage to a stem or branch can be fatal. By contrast, a species that stores its carbon underground, in the roots, should be better able to recover from a direct hit. Indeed, the researchers found that in areas directly beneath the palms, there was a greater prevalence of species with root storage than in control areas where there were no palms. “We know that tropical forests are incredibly diverse," Mr. Peters said. "This study indicates that just a few species can really drive the community dynamics of the whole system."

Editor on Sick Leave

The content of this page for May is less than it would be if the Editor had not been having knee replacements. The operation and recuperation time meant that she was unable to collect the news as it happened. Thus several seminars and a report on the going-away party for Brent are missing. Slowly she’s getting back on the job.

Editor Jan Brown

e-mail: jbrown@globalecology.stanford.edu

Towards the end of May, Brent Helliker will be leaving Carnegie at Stanford for Vienna. He expects to be there for a year working in the Isotope Hydrology Section of the International Atomic Energy Agency.
under the auspices of the United Nations. More specifically, he will be coordinating a program to sample H2O isotopes in plants on a global scale. A second project will be to develop a chemical method to sample atmospheric water vapor.