

Guest Speaker Quiz – Jonathan Farr

1) What did I learn from the entire speaker series?

From the entire speaker series, I gained what I hope is a holistic understanding of a few different ways of being a marine ecologist. In combination, these different perspectives helped me realize that in my career, what attracts me the most is the idea of developing strong quantitative and field skills that I can apply to ask applied questions. The work I found most inspiring was done by Dr. Godwin and Emma Atkinson, both of whom are quantitative ecologists with a strong field background and who are addressing applied questions. Overall, the speaker series inspired me to want to conduct socially responsible quantitative science with a variety of collaborators both inside and outside of academia and western science, which I believe will help me achieve both personal fulfilment and professional success.

2) Three vital pieces of information that were given to you to succeed as ecologists?

First, Emma Atkinson encouraged us to embrace and get curious about uncertainty. Emma meant this in terms of exploring both the “what” and “how” of science, and using observational field data and analytical skills to answer these kinds of questions. She also explained to us that the most interesting questions come from people’s curiosity!!

Second, Dr. Shannon Hennessey told us that observation is an essential part of science. She meant this in terms of understanding the system and organisms that you’re studying, because this will help ask interesting and fun scientific questions!

Third, Dr. Sean Godwin told us that an important part of science is to connect with people who are doing the work that we want to do in the future, and not just to wait until we need a job! In other words, he encouraged us to expand our networks and make legit friends/connections because otherwise you’re just using people to get jobs, and nobody likes leeches.

3) What information from the lectures you were able to use during the course/in the future?

In class:

First, I was able to apply the tips and insight that Dr. Hennessey provided about scientific illustration to our Species ID assignment. In our assignment, I got outside of my comfort zone and attempted a snail illustration. While drawing my snail, I tried my best both to use both her “observation is key” and “be creative” pieces of advice in my drawing. Secondly, I was able to apply Emma’s advice “good communication supports good science” when working on my group projects (the population matrix model and the biodiversity sampling). By putting in the extra work to make sure that my collaborators were all on the same page and felt comfortable exploring new ideas, we were able to avoid confusion and produce questions and projects that I’m really proud of! Lastly, Dr. Godwin’s tips to learn some basic programming and modern statistics helped keep me sane while struggling through Github and R Markdown, because I was able to remind myself that one day I might be able to ask some super cool applied ecological questions using these sweet skills!

In Life:

Emma's point to be curious will help me succeed as an ecologist because I often get intimidated by the things I don't know (e.g., how to do an analysis, what field methods to use on a question). Emma's advice reminded me that a LOT of the scientific process is exploring the big unknowns, and I'm excited to apply it in my future to get outside of my comfort zone and ask exciting questions. Shannon's point to get out and observe/understand your systems/organisms that you're studying will help me be successful in my career because it'll save me from becoming a desktop ecologist who is disconnected from the natural world (just kidding!). In all seriousness, it will help remind me to get outside and enjoy nature and all the curiosity that comes with that learning process. This will benefit me both professionally by inspiring new ecological questions and personally by helping me maintain a healthy connection with nature and work-life balance. Lastly, Dr. Godwin's point to make connections with people who work in areas you're interested in will help me source out what sorts of areas/jobs I may or may not want to work by gaining insight on what my "dream job" really looks like. After Sean's talk, I actually took a moment to reach out to an ecologist doing what seemed like cool work, and they were willing to chat with me and provided all kinds of cool information and insight! I'm looking forward to keeping in touch with them and other people doing cool work and hopefully one day it'll pay off professionally, and even if it doesn't it's still a big win, no downsides to talking with cool people!