

Matthew Budd

PhD Student in Robotics at the University of Oxford

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| 🌐 | matthew-budd.com | ✉ | mbudd@robots.ox.ac.uk |
| 🔗 | matbudd | 👤 | Matthew Budd |
| in | linkedin.com/in/matthew-budd | ☎ | +44 (0) 7825 795410 |

Research Interests

Sequential decision-making under uncertainty, including: model-based reasoning, deep RL-based robotic meta-reasoning with resource constraints and time-varying dynamics, Bayesian reinforcement learning, Markov decision process (MDP) safe exploration, and formal methods.

Education

DPhil in Robotics and Machine Learning

University of Oxford

2020 – 2024 📅

Oxford 📍

- Supervised by Prof. Nick Hawes and Dr. Bruno Lacerda (Goal-Oriented Long-Lived Systems lab, Oxford Robotics Institute).
- DPhil Research Studentship supported by an Amazon Web Services Lighthouse Scholarship.

Master of Engineering in Engineering Science

Pembroke College, University of Oxford

2016 – June 2020 📅

Oxford 📍

- First class (average 81%, 87% for Master's project). Placed 5th in a cohort of ~160 students.
- MEng research project: “**Safe Planning for Markov Decision Processes with Unknown State Features**”. Proposed and analysed a novel MDP safe exploration algorithm, which outperformed the state of the art and generalised the class of model that could be safely explored. Available: matthew-budd.com/static/doc/M_Budd_Thesis.pdf
- Awards: recipient of the Head of Department's Prize for Excellent Performance (2020), the Paul Martins - BP Scholarship in Engineering (2019), Gibbs Prize - Practical (2017), college Scholarships (2017, 2018, 2019), and an IET Diamond Jubilee Scholarship.

Research Experience

PhD field research / robotic trial experience

2021 – 📅

Working with a number of robot platforms to carry out experiments in the real world.

- Field trial for HUDSON project (below) – 4 weeks total deploying underwater robots and running experiment regimes at Loch Ness in Scotland, in adverse conditions and fighting hardware issues.
- 3-day safe exploration evaluation in underground bunker setting using a Boston Dynamics Spot. Responsible for experiment planning and monitoring/debugging system components on-the-fly.
- Demonstrated with the Spot robot at UK Atomic Energy Establishment “RACE” robotics test facility in Culham, as part of the Robotics and AI in Nuclear programme grant.

Research assistant

July – October 2020 📅

Autonomous planning - HUDSON project, orcahub.org/engagement/partnership-fund/hudson

- As the main researcher on the Oxford team, I was responsible for the research, design and implementation of a novel autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) planning framework. This enables AUVs to collect data from sensor networks under high uncertainty, and has been validated in a field trial.
- This is the first AUV planning system to reason about uncertainty in: sensor data availability, underwater navigation outcomes, acoustic communications quality and safe vehicle recovery.
- Took a lead role in coordinating work packages between teams of researchers at several institutions.

RoboCup @Home League

July 2019

Team ORIon: ori.ox.ac.uk/student-teams/team-orion/

Sydney, Australia 📅

- **Manipulation sub-team leader and acting team leader** for 2022 RoboCup (Thailand) [link].
 - Overhauled manipulation & simulation system, assigned work packages to the 3-person sub-team.
 - Improved team-wide processes and managed the whole team as acting leader at the competition.
 - Researched and implemented robot manipulation behaviours for the Toyota HSR platform.
- 2019 (Sydney): design/implementation of manipulation behaviours, network/hardware debugging.

MEng 3rd-year group design project

October 2018 – May 2019 📅

“A New Beam-Profile Monitor for the Large Hadron Collider at CERN”

- Research and design development for a proposed cutting-edge proton beam imaging instrument. Team of 3 Oxford MEng students, collaborating with LHC Beam Instrumentation Group (BIG).
- Optimised the design of high-speed gas jet apparatus with a GPU-accelerated simulation regime.
- Travelled to CERN in Geneva to give final technical presentation to Beam Instrumentation Group.

Publications

1. **Budd, M.**, Duckworth, P., Hawes, N., & Lacerda, B. (2023, March). Bayesian reinforcement learning for single-episode missions in partially unknown environments. *6th Annual Conference on Robot Learning (CoRL)*.
2. **Budd, M.**, Salavasidis, G., Kamarudzaman, I., Harris, C. A., Phillips, A. B., Hawes, N., Duckworth, P., & Lacerda, B. (2022, October). Probabilistic Planning for AUV Data Harvesting from Smart Underwater Sensor Networks. *IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS)*.
3. **Budd, M.**, Duckworth, P., Hawes, N., & Lacerda, B. (2021, August). Mission Planning in Unknown Environments as Bayesian Reinforcement Learning. *IJCAI'21 Workshop on Robust and Reliable Autonomy in the Wild (R2AW)*.
4. **Budd, M.**, Lacerda, B., Duckworth, P., West, A., Lennox, B., & Hawes, N. (2020, October). Markov Decision Processes with Unknown State Feature Values for Safe Exploration using Gaussian Processes. *IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS)*.

Teaching

Teaching Assistant / Programme Designer

March 2022 📅

AIMS Centre for Doctoral Training Robotics Course

- Improved the documentation, design and administration of a 4-day course which teaches mobile robotics to early doctoral students.
- Taught the course to ~ 12 doctoral students, alongside one other TA.

General Technical Training

2021-2022 📅

ORI Robocup @Home League, team training

- Teaching assistance for two short courses introducing new graduate and undergraduate team members to ROS, software development best practices and Team ORIon's software stack.

Technical Skills

Research

- Confident with Python, NumPy, C++, ROS, Git, L^AT_EX, deep RL frameworks (OpenAI Gym, Stable Baselines 3).
- Working knowledge of ML DevOps (Weights & Biases), PyTorch, MATLAB, Simulink, containerisation (Docker), GPU-accelerated (CUDA) programming, cluster and cloud computing (AWS).
- Experiment design, robotic trial skills.

Systems Engineering

- Linux, web development, mechanical & electrical CAD and prototyping, Wireshark network analysis, embedded (microcontroller, FPGA) systems, real-time OSs (FreeRTOS), databases (SQL), internet protocol systems, industrial computer vision systems.
- Robotic research platforms: Boston Dynamics Spot, Clearpath Jackal, ecoSUB, Toyota Human Service Robot (HSR).

Industrial Experience

Technology Scholar at Cambridge Consultants Ltd.

July – September 2019 


Summer internship placement in a software and electronics group

Cambridge

- **Software engineer** on a medical inhaler test rig project.
 - Design, development and testing of embedded software (embedded C++ and a FreeRTOS-based framework) and the front-end user interface (JavaScript and Python with a Tornado webserver).
 - Responsible for modelling elastic light scattering from microscopic vapour particles. Designed and ran a CELES (github.com/disordered-photonics/celes) simulation regime with CUDA.

Control Engineering Intern at Archangel Lightworks

June – August 2018


Summer internship placement in a satellite optical communications start-up Harwell, Oxfordshire 

- **Pointing, Acquisition and Tracking (PAT) Prototype Development** for Free-Space Optical Comms.
 - Completed a literature review and requirements identification/justification for the PAT system.
 - Produced a project plan, cost analysis and interface definitions between systems.
 - Carried out integration of multiple hardware and software components (a custom FPGA-based controller, actuators, IMU/GPS, and imaging devices) to prototype a high-speed PAT system.

Micro-Intern at Ensoft Ltd.

December 2017

Week-long internship, adding functionality to the Ensoft intranet


Harpden 

- **Python web-app development with Django**, for the front- and back-end of the site.
 - Added new functionality to automatically handle desk allocation changes by updating large IP phone configuration files and mailing lists, and front-end interface design work for these features.

Technology Scholar at Cambridge Consultants Ltd.

September 2015 – July 2016, Summer 2017

Gap-year placement and summer internship in a software and electronics group

Cambridge 

- **Embedded Low-Power Communications Engineer** and Linux Kernel Software Developer.
 - Network architecture research and design for full-fledged IPv6 communications on IoT devices.
 - Designed and implemented: Linux kernel-space software in C including kernel modules and adding functionality to the kernel network stack, user-space software in C and Python, embedded software in C for Cortex-M microcontrollers. Cross-compiled custom designed Embedded Linux distributions with Yocto and OpenEmbedded.

- **Electronics and Low-Level Software Lead** on an internal cross-disciplinary robotics project.
 - Successfully delivered and presented a prototype robot arm system to be demonstrated at a company-wide meeting, overcoming significant time/budget constraints.
 - Took a lead role in the engineering design process, from requirements specification onwards.
 - cambridgeconsultants.com/insights/robots-from-golden-fairy-to-iron-serf