

Nigel Kurgan

POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW

Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Basic Metabolic Research

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Exercise physiologist with expertise in metabolism, proteomics, and bioinformatics. I'm interested in combining these approaches to better understanding interorgan communication mediated by secreted proteins during exercise and in individuals with metabolic diseases. I am an avid R user for data processing, visualization, communication, reports/dashboards, shiny web applications and am passionate about open science and the development of digital tools for research.

Current Appointments

Universidad San Francisco de Quito

ADJUNCT ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, INSTITUTE OF MICROBIOLOGY, COLLEGE OF BIOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Quito, Ecuador

Mar 2020–Present

Burnet Institute

HONORARY RESEARCH FELLOW, VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES AND TROPICAL PUBLIC HEALTH GROUP [↗](#)

Melbourne, Australia

Mar 2019–Present

Australian Centre of Research Excellence in Malaria Elimination [↗](#)

POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW

Melbourne, Australia

Feb 2019–Present

Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research

POSTDOCTORAL SCIENTIST, POPULATION HEALTH AND IMMUNITY DIVISION [↗](#)

Melbourne, Australia

Feb 2019–Present

The University of Melbourne

HONORARY RESEARCH FELLOW, DEPT OF MEDICAL BIOLOGY AND BIO21 MOLECULAR SCIENCE & BIOTECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE [↗](#)

Melbourne, Australia

Feb 2019–Present

Education

Brock University

B.SC. BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES

St. Catharines, Canada

2015

- Undertook courses in immunology, human physiology and public health policymaking
- Recipient of the Presidential Scholarship (2008-2012) awarded to students with outstanding academic and extracurricular achievement

Brock University

M.SC. APPLIED HEALTH SCIENCES

St. Catharines, Canada

2017

- Recipient of the James Wilkes Memorial Prize in Biology (2011) awarded to the most outstanding undergraduate minority student in Biology
- Thesis: Sclerostin influences body composition adaptations to exercise training

Brock University

PH.D. HEALTH BIOSCIENCES

St. Catharines, Canada

2022

- Recipient of the Melbourne International Engagement Award and Melbourne International Fee Remission Scholarship (2014-2018) awarded to a limited number of international students based on academic merit to cover full tuition and living costs
- **Thesis:** Genetic epidemiology of the *Plasmodium falciparum* reservoir of infection in Bongo District, Ghana [↗](#)

Research Experience

Universidad San Francisco de Quito

VISITING SCIENTIST, INSTITUTE OF MICROBIOLOGY

Quito, Ecuador

Oct 2021–Present

- Provide support for the coordination and data analysis of a population-based cohort study in Quito to understand vaccine and infection-induced immunity to SARS-CoV-2
- Support data analyses on the genomic epidemiology and phylogenetics of different SARS-CoV-2 variants circulating in Ecuador

Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research

Melbourne, Australia

POSTDOCTORAL SCIENTIST, POPULATION HEALTH AND IMMUNITY DIVISION, MUELLER AND ROBINSON LABS

Feb 2019–Present

- My postdoc work involves the application of a suite of genomic epidemiology approaches to better understand residual and resurgent malaria transmission dynamics in the Asia-Pacific and Americas regions
- Support the field implementation and lead the overall analysis of a 12-month longitudinal cohort study in Papua New Guinea. The aim of this study is to understand the spatiotemporal risk factors for malaria infections in 1000 individuals of all ages residing across four villages on the North Coast of PNG.
- Apply novel genotyping and molecular diagnostic techniques to samples collected from several large-scale epidemiological field studies in Asia-Pacific to identify and track malaria infections over space and time and within individuals. Downstream analysis involves relating genetic data to epidemiological data to better understand spatiotemporal infection dynamics and risk factors
- Outputs: Co-author publications(2), Honors and awards/grants (9), Student/staff supervision (5) PNG

The University of Melbourne

Melbourne, Australia

RESEARCH FELLOW IN MALARIA POPULATION GENETICS, DAY LAB

May 2018–Feb 2019

- Applied genomic epidemiology approaches that employed bioinformatic and population genetic methods to better understand the diversity and geographic population structure of *var* genes in Ecuador and Ghana
- Lead the analysis and preparation of manuscripts on the epidemiology and population genetics of malaria in Ecuador and Ghana
- Outputs: Co-author publications (1), Student supervision (1)

Center for Research on Health in Latin America

Quito, Ecuador

VISITING SCIENTIST

Nov 2017–Feb 2018

- I was awarded a JD Smyth Postgraduate Student Travel Award by the Australian Society for Parasitology to support a Researcher Exchange to establish an international research collaboration
- Implemented protocols and novel population genetic analytical methods to examine malaria field samples to better understand malaria transmission patterns in Ecuador
- Trained laboratory staff on molecular genetic protocols and developed analytical skills workshops

The University of Melbourne

Melbourne, Australia

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHER, DAY LAB

Feb 2014–May 2018

- Developed a high-throughput amplicon sequencing genotyping tool and customised computational and analytical methods for characterizing antigenic diversity in *P. falciparum*
- My PhD work involved the generation of microsatellite genotyping and *var* gene illumina sequence data and downstream analysis using population genetic, bioinformatic, phylodynamic and epidemiology approaches to relate parasite diversity data to epidemiological data collected in the field
- Visited our field site in Bongo District, Ghana in 2014 and was directly involved in the field coordination and data collection as part of a cross-sectional survey in Bongo
- Outputs from my PhD: First-author publications (2), Co-author publications (3), Honors and awards (7), Student supervision (1)

New York University of School of Medicine

New York, USA

RESEARCH ASSISTANT, DAY LAB, DIVISION OF MEDICAL PARASITOLOGY

Jun 2012–Jan 2014

- Analyzed the molecular epidemiology and population genetics of the *Plasmodium falciparum* *var* multi-gene family encoding the major variant surface antigen of malaria

New York Blood Center Lindsley F. Kimball Research Institute

New York, USA

RESEARCH INTERN, LUSTIGMAN LAB, MOLECULAR PARASITOLOGY

Jul 2011–Aug 2011

- Research project: Polymorphisms in invasion ligand genes from Peruvian, Colombian and Brazilian *Plasmodium falciparum* field isolates
- Identified novel polymorphisms in DNA sequences coding for proteins critical to the invasion process and pathogenicity of *P. falciparum*

Teaching and Supervision

In addition to the formal supervision roles listed below, I am also actively involved in the supervision, mentorship and capacity-building of researcher officers and technical staff in partner institutions in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Ecuador. I am also serving on 2 PhD committees at the University of Melbourne.

Guest Lecturer

Quito, Ecuador

UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO

44531

- Guest lecturer for the Masters of Innovation on COVID-19 epidemiology, variant dynamics and implications for public health in Ecuador

Honours Student Co-Supervisor

Melbourne, Australia

WALTER AND ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

Feb–Dec 2021

- Designed and co-supervised an Honours research project in seroepidemiology for a Biomedical undergraduate student
- Research project: Application of Serological Markers for the Assessment of Spatial Heterogeneity of *Plasmodium vivax* infections in Papua New Guinea

Undergraduate Student Supervisor

Melbourne, Australia

WALTER AND ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

Feb–Dec 2021

- Designed and supervised a six-month research project in genomics (both lab and analytics) for a Biomedical undergraduate student
- Research project: Amplification of six novel markers for *Plasmodium vivax* genotyping by targeted amplicon sequencing

Guest Lecturer

NOSSAL INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

- Guest lecturer for the Nossal Institute for Global Health Masters of Public Health on Malaria and Child Health (POPH90086: Global Child Health)

Melbourne, Australia

Oct 2019–Present

PhD Student Co-Supervisor

WALTER AND ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

- Co-supervise a Medical Biology PhD student on *Plasmodium vivax* genomics and bioinformatics
- Research project: The role of transcription and translational regulation in *Plasmodium vivax* sporozoites

Melbourne, Australia

Jul 2019–Present

PhD Student Co-Supervisor

WALTER AND ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL RESEARCH

- Co-supervised a PhD student on *Plasmodium vivax* genomics (both lab and analytics) and population genetics
- Research project: Development of novel genotyping tools for *Plasmodium vivax*

Melbourne, Australia

Jul 2019–Jun 2021

MSc Student Co-Supervisor

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

- Co-supervised a Genetics MSc student in genetic epidemiology, population genetics and statistical genetics
- Research project: The effects of seasonality on the population genetics of the reservoir of asymptomatic *Plasmodium falciparum* in Bongo District, Ghana

Melbourne, Australia

Feb 2018–Dec 2019

Guest Lecturer

UNIVERSIDAD DE LOS HEMISFERIOS

- Guest lecturer for the Masters of Entrepreneurship on the topic of Social Impact Business Models and The Artisan Project as a Case Study

Quito, Ecuador

43070

Undergraduate Student Supervisor

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

- Designed and supervised a six-month research project in statistical genetics and genetic epidemiology for a Computational Biology undergraduate student through the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program scheme
- Research project: Host genetic factors that influence malaria parasitemia in Ghanaian children

Melbourne, Australia

Jul 2016–Nov 2016

Laboratory Demonstrator

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

- Led groups of high school students attending the Victorian Certificate of Education Biology workshops in genetics

Melbourne, Australia

Jul 2015–Aug 2017

Tutor and Teaching Assistant

THE COLORADO COLLEGE

- Biology Department and Quantitative Reasoning Center, courses included: Introduction to Molecular Genetics, Introduction to Cellular Biology, Advanced Genetics Courses
- Spanish Department, courses included: Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Spanish and Cultural Context and Written Expression

Colorado, USA

Sep 2008–May 2012

Leadership, Service & Community Engagement

Manuscript peer-review: Journal of Infectious Diseases (1), PLOS Genetics (1), Malaria Journal (2), International Journal for Parasitology (1), Frontiers in Genetics (1), Infection, Genetics and Evolution (1), Scientific Reports (1)

PANELIST : UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO (QUITO, ECUADOR)

Jan 2021

- Panelist on the panel discussion "Lessons learned from COVID-19 variants" (Lecciones aprendidas con variantes COVID-19) hosted by USFQ and national newspaper El Universo

TV INTERVIEW : VISIONARIAS EC NEWS PROGRAM (QUITO, ECUADOR)

Dec 2021

- Interview on a national news program on the segment "Omicron - the new variant affecting the globe" (Ómicron - la nueva variante que está afectando al mundo)

LOCAL ORGANIZING COMMITTEE: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON *Plasmodium vivax* RESEARCH (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Aug 2021–Present

PRESIDENT AND CO-ORGANIZER: R-LADIES MELBOURNE (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Aug 2021–Present

- R-Ladies Melbourne is a non-profit organization aiming to promote gender diversity in the R statistical programming community

MEMBER, WEB-BASED APPLICATIONS WORKING GROUP: WALTER AND ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Jul 2021–Present

MENTOR: CAREERTRACKERS YOUNG INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN STEM ACADEMY (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Dec 2020–Present

MEMBER, POSTDOCTORAL ASSOCIATION: WALTER AND ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Dec 2020–Present

CROWDFUNDING FOR SARS-CoV-2 SEROSURVEILLANCE IN QUITO, ECUADOR: COLLABORATION WITH ECUADORIAN RED

CROSS (QUITO, ECUADOR)

Sep 2020–Present

- Led the establishment and provide ongoing support for serosurveillance of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies in blood donors in Ecuador to support COVID-19 epidemiological surveillance. Early in the pandemic, crowdfunding for this initiative raised US\$2,500

CONSULTANT EPIDEMIOLOGIST: NATIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE EMERGENCY COMMITTEE IN ECUADOR (QUITO, ECUADOR)

Apr–Aug 2020

- GUEST CURATOR:** WEARERLADIES TWITTER COMMUNITY (ONLINE)

Feb 2020
- ICEMR WORKSHOP CO-ORGANIZER:** WALTER AND ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Sep–Dec 2019
- Co-organized an ICEMR-funded hands-on workshop to train six malaria-endemic country scientists on amplicon sequencing (AmpSeq) for *Plasmodium falciparum*, a novel and high-resolution genotyping technique that can be used to sensitively discriminate different clones of *Plasmodium* spp. infections
- STEM WORKSHOP CO-LEADER:** IT TAKES A SPARK MELBOURNE CONFERENCE 2019 (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Sep 2019
- Co-led the development of a workshop to teach high-school girls epidemiology and R coding skills to solve an outbreak and become a “disease detective”. (Materials here [↗](#))
- DISCOVERY TOUR VOLUNTEER:** WALTER AND ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Jul 2019–Present
- Volunteer for WEHI Discovery Tours to showcase the malaria research and expose the wider community to medical research
- MEMBER, RECONCILIATION COMMITTEE:** WALTER AND ELIZA HALL INSTITUTE (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Jun 2019–Present
- The RC aims to contribute towards reconciliation by working towards ‘closing the gap’ in life expectancy, disease incidence, and mortality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
- SECRETARY AND CO-ORGANIZER:** R-LADIES MELBOURNE (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Apr–Aug 2021
- R-Ladies Melbourne is a non-profit organization aiming to promote gender diversity in the R statistical programming community
- COMMITTEE CHAIR, ANNUAL CONFERENCE:** AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN MALARIA ELIMINATION (AUSTRALIA)

Mar–Oct 2019
- VOLUNTEER, ANNUAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE:** AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY FOR PARASITOLOGY (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Aug–Sep 2018
- SOCIAL IMPACT ENTREPRENEUR:** MELBOURNE ACCELERATOR PROGRAM (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Sep 2016–Feb 2017
- Selected to represent The Artisan Project (at the time I was CEO) in the MAP Social Velocity six-month competitive entry program for early stage social impact start-ups
- ENTREPRENEUR:** EUROPEAN INNOVATION ACADEMY (NICE, FRANCE)

Jul 2016
- Selected as one of four students to represent University of Melbourne at EIA, the world’s largest extreme accelerator program for tech and digital innovations
- CAMPAIGN MANAGER:** ECUADORIAN RESEARCH AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP NETWORK (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Apr 2016
- As president of EREN at the time, I co-managed a large-scale fundraising campaign across Australia to raise relief funds in response to the 7.8-magnitude earthquake in Ecuador (total amount raised: A\$17,963)
- OPEN HOUSE VOLUNTEER:** BIO21 INSTITUTE (MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA)

Jul 2015–Jul 2018
- Showcased our malaria research to members of the wider community at the Bio21 Open House events
- CO-ORGANIZER:** RESBAZ ECUADOR (QUITO, ECUADOR)

Feb 2015–Feb 2016
- The Research Bazaar is a worldwide festival promoting the digital literacy emerging at the centre of modern research. I was co-organizer of the first ResBaz in the Americas in 2015 and 2016

Additional training and professional development

- 2021

Short course: Multiple imputation (Victorian Centre for Biostatistics)
- 2021

RStudio Diversity Scholar Workshops (RStudio)
- 2018

Certification “Teaching Skills for Graduate Researchers” (University of Melbourne)
- 2017

Winter School in Mathematical Biology (Institute for Molecular Science, The University of Queensland)
- 2015

Short course: Spatial mapping and GIS skills (University of Melbourne)
- 2015

UOM subject: Epidemiology 1 (University of Melbourne)
- 2015

UOM subject: Biostatistics 1 (University of Melbourne)
- 2015

UOM subject: Linear and Logistic Regression (University of Melbourne)

Skills

Laboratory	Analytical	Programming	Software/Tools
DNA extraction	Epidemiological database curation/management	R (advanced)	Git/Github
PCR/qPCR	Univariate/multivariate data analysis	Rstudio	REDCap
Illumina amplicon sequencing	Population genetics	RMarkdown	LaTeX
PacBio long-read sequencing	Genome-wide analyses	SLURM/high-performance computing	CSS
Whole-genome sequencing	Reproducible research	STATA	HTML

Awards and Funding

- Dec 2021 **Seed Grant (Associate Investigator)** (Australian Centre for Research Excellence in Malaria Elimination): Awarded A\$15,379.98 as AI for the collaborative project: Artificial Intelligence-based drug resistance screening of malaria parasites using ,ÄRead Until,Ä
- Dec 2021 **Seed Grant (Associate Investigator)** (Australian Centre for Research Excellence in Malaria Elimination): Awarded A\$14,061 as AI for the collaborative project: Methodological comparison of *P. vivax* genotyping approaches for molecular surveillance within the ACREME network
- Sep 2021 **Research Grant (Associate Investigator)** (Australian Centre for Research Excellence in Malaria Elimination): Awarded A\$100,000 as AI for the collaborative project: Developing a MinION long-read deep amplicon sequencing assay for host variants relevant to 8-aminoquinolines administration
- Apr 2021 **COVID-19 Digital Grant (Chief Investigator)** (Australian Academy of Science & Dept of Industry, Science, Energy & Resources): Awarded A\$10,000 as CI for the collaborative project: Fit-for-purpose analytical tools to support COVID-19 sero-surveillance in Papua New Guinea [↗](#)
- Jan 2021 **Professional Development Award** (Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research): Awarded to attend the Victorian Centre for Biostatistics Summer School
- Jan 2021 **RStudio Diversity Scholar** (RStudio): Selected as a Diversity Scholar at the rstudio::global(2021) conference to attend the DS post-conference workshops
- Oct 2020 **Ideas Jam Award** (Burnet Institute): Awarded A\$10,000 as AI for the project: Superstars in STEM High School Program
- Oct 2020, Jul 2021 **Seed Grant (Associate Investigator)** (Australian Centre for Control & Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases): Awarded a total of A\$100,000 as AI for the collaborative project: Burden of neglected tropical diseases on the north coast of Papua New Guinea
- Sep 2020 **Seed Grant (Associate Investigator)** (Australian Centre for Research Excellence in Malaria Elimination): Awarded A\$14,400 as AI for the collaborative project: Validating molecular and serological tools for detecting hidden reservoirs of *Plasmodium* infections in Papua New Guinea
- Dec 2019 **Kellaway Excellence Award in Education** (Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research): Awarded to recognize the significant contribution to improve female representation in statistical bioinformatics through joint leadership of R-Ladies Melbourne, the R programming community for women in Australia
- Jul 2019 **Seed Grant (Chief Investigator)** (Australian Centre for Research Excellence in Malaria Elimination): Awarded A\$15,000 as CI for the collaborative project: Building capacity for an innovative amplicon deep sequencing tool to genotype *Plasmodium* infections for improved malaria surveillance
- Jun 2018 **Three Minute Thesis (3MT) Award 1st Place** (The University of Melbourne): Awarded to the best 3MT presentation by a Faculty of Science postgraduate student
- May 2018 **Travel Bursary** (Wellcome Genome Campus): Awarded to present my PhD findings at the International Genomic Epidemiology of Malaria Conference in UK
- Oct 2017 **Science Abroad Traveling Scholarship** (The University of Melbourne): Awarded to present my PhD findings at the 2017 international conference of the American Society for Tropical Medicine and Hygiene in USA
- Sep 2017 **JD Smyth Postgraduate Student Travel Award** (Australian Society for Parasitology): Awarded to undertake a researcher exchange at the Center for Research on Health in Latin America in Ecuador [↗](#)
- May 2017 **Dame Margaret Blackwood Seroptimist Scholarship** (The University of Melbourne): Awarded to an outstanding female student undertaking research in genetics & who is engaged in the world beyond academia. Recognized as a Dame Margaret Blackwood Scholar [↗](#)
- Jul 2016 **European Innovation Academy Travel Scholarship** (The University of Melbourne): Selected as one of four students to represent The University of Melbourne at the EIA and awarded with a travel scholarship to attend the three-week program in Nice, France
- Sep 2014 **Postgraduate Student Travel Award** (Bio21 Institute of Molecular Science & Biotechnology): Awarded to present my PhD findings at the 2014 international conference of the American Society for Tropical Medicine and Hygiene in USA

Publications

*indicates equal contribution

2022

Charnaud, S., Munro, J., Semenec, L., Mazhari, R., Brewster, J., Bourke, C., **Ruybal-Pesántez, S.**, James, R., Lautu-Gumal, D., Karuna-jeewa, H., & Mueller, I. (2022, *accepted*). *PacBio long-read amplicon sequencing for scalable high-resolution population allele typing of the complex CYP2D6 locus*. Communications Biology.

Ruybal-Pesántez, S., Tiedje, K. E., Pilosof, S., Tonkin-Hill, G., He, Q., Rask, T. S., Amenga-Etego, L., Oduro, A. R., Koram, K. A., Pascual, M., & Day, K. P. (2022). *Age-specific patterns of DBLα var diversity can explain why residents of high malaria transmission areas remain susceptible to Plasmodium falciparum blood stage infection throughout life*. International Journal for Parasitology. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpara.2021.12.001>

- This work was featured on the Herminthology #WomenBehindTheWork initiative 

Feng, Q., Tiedje, K. E., **Ruybal-Pesántez, S.**, Tonkin-Hill, G., Duffy, M. F., Day, K. P., Shim, H., & Chan, Y. (2022). *An accurate method for identifying recent recombinants from unaligned sequences*. Bioinformatics. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bioinformatics/btac012>

2021

Ruybal-Pesántez, S., Sáenz, F., Deed, S. L., Johnson, E. K., Larremore, D. B., Vera-Arias, C. A., Tiedje, K. E. & Day, K. P. (2021, *pre-print*). *Clinical malaria incidence following an outbreak in Ecuador was predominantly associated with Plasmodium falciparum with recombinant variant antigen gene repertoires*. medRxiv. <https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.04.12.21255093>

Mazhari, R., **Ruybal-Pesántez, S.**, Angrisano, F., Kiernan-Walker, N., Hyslop, S., Longley, R. J., Bourke, C., Chen, C., Williamson, D. A., Robinson, L. J., Mueller, I., & Eriksson, E. M. (2021). *SARS-CoV-2 Multi-Antigen Serology Assay*. Methods and Protocols, 4(4), 72. <https://doi.org/10.3390/mps4040072>

Argyropoulos, D. C.* , **Ruybal-Pesántez, S.*** , Deed, S. L., Oduro, A. R., Dadzie, S. K., Appawu, M. A., Asoala, V., Pascual, M., Koram, K. A., Day, K. P., & Tiedje, K. E. (2021). *The impact of indoor residual spraying on Plasmodium falciparum microsatellite variation in an area of high seasonal malaria transmission in Ghana, West Africa*. Molecular Ecology, 30(16), 3974–3992. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mec.16029>

- This work was chosen by the editors to be featured in the Molecular Ecology blog 

Tonkin-Hill, G., **Ruybal-Pesántez, S.**, Tiedje, K. E., Rougeron, V., Duffy, M. F., Zakeri, S., Pumpaibool, T., Harnyuttanakorn, P., Branch, O. H., Ruiz-Mesa, L., Rask, T. S., Prugnolle, F., Papenfuss, A. T., Chan, Y., & Day, K. P. (2021). *Evolutionary analyses of the major variant surface antigen-encoding genes reveal population structure of Plasmodium falciparum within and between continents*. PLOS Genetics, 17(2), e1009269. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgen.1009269>

- This work was chosen by the editors to be featured with an accompanying Perspectives piece 

2020

Narh, C. A., Ghansah, A., Duffy, M. F., **Ruybal-Pesántez, S.**, Onwona, C. O., Oduro, A. R., Koram, K. A., Day, K. P.* , & Tiedje, K. E.* (2020). *Evolution of antimalarial drug resistance markers in the reservoir of Plasmodium falciparum infections in the Upper East Region of Ghana*. The Journal of Infectious Diseases. <https://doi.org/10.1093/infdis/jiaa286>

2019

Pilosof, S., He, Q., Tiedje, K. E., **Ruybal-Pesántez, S.**, Day, K. P., & Pascual, M. (2019). *Competition for hosts modulates vast antigenic diversity to generate persistent strain structure in Plasmodium falciparum*. PLOS Biology, 17(6), e3000336. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.3000336>

2018

He, Q., Pilosof, S., Tiedje, K. E., **Ruybal-Pesántez, S.**, Artzy-Randrup, Y., Baskerville, E. B., Day, K. P., & Pascual, M. (2018). *Networks of genetic similarity reveal non-neutral processes shape strain structure in Plasmodium falciparum*. Nature Communications, 9(1), 1817. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-04219-3>

Rorick, M. M., Artzy-Randrup, Y., **Ruybal-Pesántez, S.**, Tiedje, K. E., Rask, T. S., Oduro, A., Ghansah, A., Koram, K., Day, K. P., & Pascual, M. (2018). *Signatures of competition and strain structure within the major blood-stage antigen of Plasmodium falciparum in a local community in Ghana*. Ecology and Evolution, 8(7), 3574–3588. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.3803>

2017

Ruybal-Pesántez, S., Tiedje, K. E., Rorick, M. M., Amenga-Etego, L., Ghansah, A., Oduro, A. R., Koram, K. A., & Day, K. P. (2017). *Lack of Geospatial Population Structure Yet Significant Linkage Disequilibrium in the Reservoir of Plasmodium falciparum in Bongo District, Ghana*. The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, 97(4), 1180–1189. <https://doi.org/10.4269/ajtmh.17-0119>

Ruybal-Pesántez, S.* , Tiedje, K. E.* , Tonkin-Hill, G., Rask, T. S., Kamya, M. R., Greenhouse, B., Dorsey, G., Duffy, M. F., & Day, K. P. (2017). *Population genomics of virulence genes of Plasmodium falciparum in clinical isolates from Uganda*. Scientific Reports, 7(1), 11810. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-11814-9>

Digital tools

For other non-traditional academic contributions, I have also developed several R Shiny web applications to support COVID-19 surveillance efforts and R flexdashboard for real-time updates and data visualization of both programmatic/operational aspects and preliminary epidemiological trends as part of the coordination of population-based field studies. Check out my GitHub

CovidClassifyR

SHAZIA RUYBAL-PESÁNTEZ

Sep 2021

- This Shiny web application was developed to support COVID-19 serosurveillance in Papua New Guinea enabling classification of unknown samples as recently exposed to SARS-CoV-2. This tool makes the downstream processing, quality control and interpretation of the raw data generated from a validated COVID-19 serological assay (Mazhari et al 2020) accessible to all researchers without the need for a specialist background in statistical methods and advanced programming. Funding was provided by a COVID-19 Digital Grant, media release

COVID-19 VaccinationScore

RAÚL FERNÁNDEZ, SHAZIA RUYBAL-PESÁNTEZ, ESTEBAN ORTÍZ

Feb 2021

- This Shiny web application was developed during the initial vaccine roll-out in Ecuador to help individuals better understand their "priority status" to receive their COVID-19 vaccine. An algorithm was applied to calculate a priority score based on an individuals answers to a set of questions on socioeconomic status, occupation, exposure, risk behavior, comorbidities, etc. Newspaper article (in Spanish)

Serosurveillance of COVID-19 in Ecuadorian blood donors dashboard (not open-source)

SHAZIA RUYBAL-PESÁNTEZ

Jun 2020

- This R flexdashboard was developed to support COVID-19 serosurveillance in Ecuadorian blood donors in collaboration with the Ecuadorian Red Cross National Blood Bank as part of the emergency response to COVID-19 (active early in the pandemic, June 2020-Dec 2020). This dashboard presented anonymized and aggregated data generated from monthly screening of blood donation samples to visualize seroprevalence trends. Due to confidentiality and internal permissions at ERC this tool is not publicly available.

ICEMR weekly dashboard (not open-source)

SHAZIA RUYBAL-PESÁNTEZ

Mar 2020

- This R flexdashboard was developed to support the ICEMR field teams in Madang, Papua New Guinea (active during the entire longitudinal cohort study March 2020 until Sep 2021). This dashboard was updated weekly and presented operational data (e.g. follow-up rates in each field site) that could be used by the team to plan field activities and identify any areas for improvement as well as preliminary epidemiological trends (e.g. RDT positivity, prevalence of fever). As this tool was meant for internal use within the ICEMR project, it is not publicly available.

processqpcr

SHAZIA RUYBAL-PESÁNTEZ

In development

- This Shiny web application is in development to support laboratory researchers with little to no programming skills with a tool for downstream processing of raw data generated from several qPCR machines (e.g. Lightcycler480, Quantstudio, etc). Functions will include automatic matching of sample IDs using a user-supplied 96-well or 384-well plate map, quantification of unknown samples using the assay standard curve/positive controls (e.g. to detect malaria-positive samples) and some preliminary visualizations of the data.

Selected presentations

I have participated in oral and poster presentations at 18 conferences (13 international, 5 national; 6 travel awards).

- 2021 **Understanding the factors underlying malaria resurgence in East Sepik, Papua New Guinea: a preliminary analysis**, Invited to speak at the Australian Centre for Excellence in Malaria Elimination webinar series. See recording
- 2021 **rstudio::global(2021) %>% filter(workshops == "diversity scholars") %>% summarize()**, Presented at the R-Ladies Melbourne meet-up, slides
- 2018 **Why are adults still infected in malaria-endemic areas? Insights from the epidemiology of *P. falciparum* var genes**, Oral presentation at the annual meeting of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, New Orleans, USA
- 2018 **Maintenance of the parasite reservoir in Ghana: parasite diversity and the epidemiology of *P. falciparum* var genes**, Invited to speak at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine Malaria Centre seminar series in London, UK
- 2017 **Why is it difficult to control malaria? (¿Por qué es difícil controlar la malaria?)**, Invited to speak at the University of San Francisco of Quito (USFQ) Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences seminar series in Quito, Ecuador
- 2017 **Var code: a new molecular epidemiology tool for monitoring *Plasmodium falciparum* in a high transmission area of Ghana, West Africa**, Selected to participate in the Young Investigator Award Poster Session of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, Atlanta, USA

About me

I am half Ecuadorian and half American, born in The Netherlands, I am fluent in English and Spanish (beginner French and Dutch), and grew up overseas in several countries in Africa and Latin America: Ecuador, Tanzania, Guatemala, and Honduras. I am an Australian Permanent Resident and have been living in Melbourne, Australia since 2014 when I moved to pursue my PhD. Apart from my research, I am highly committed to furthering health and development initiatives, particularly in my home country of Ecuador. From early 2016 until the COVID-19 pandemic, I was CEO and co-founder of the The Artisan Project, a social enterprise that worked hand in hand with talented indigenous artisans in Ecuador. We used fashion as a tool to create income-generating opportunities, particularly for indigenous women, and impulse social impact and innovation. During the COVID-19 pandemic I was actively involved as a consultant epidemiologist providing analyses on case and testing trends, importation dynamics, Reff calculations, among others, to the Ecuadorian National COVID-19 Emergency Response committee - most of this work remains unpublished due to competing political agendas and turnover of public health officials.