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ACA NEWS



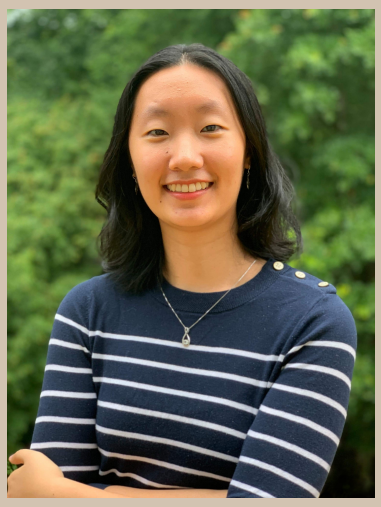
Vol. 12 #11 November 10, 2026

Grant Recipients

The Board of Trustees reviewed the applications for grant awards for this year and

selected 9 student recipients as well as a study of the genetics of endangered Lake Tanganika cichlids. Four of the recipients have been sent their checks. We are waiting for paperwork from the remaining 5 students.

Below is biographical information for five of the students and a description of their research projects. We will post the biographies and research project summaries for the other 4 students when they send it in.



Karen Gu

Karen is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Oxford who has been studying cichlids for about 10 years now. What first drew her to cichlids was their range of amazing behaviors, especially their mating behaviors and parental care. She now studies the evolution and development of varying body shapes in cichlids in the Lake Malawi system.

Research Summary:

How do cichlids develop such an extraordinary variety of shapes, colors, and behaviors? One way to investigate this is to alter specific genes in developing fish, which requires collecting eggs very soon after fertilization. With support from the American Cichlid Association, I'm developing a video system that recognizes spawning behavior and alerts us when it happens. This will help us collect eggs at the right time and learn how spawning behavior varies among cichlid species.

Anna Linsky

Anna is a senior pre-med student at Loyola University Maryland double-majoring in Biochemistry and Biophysics with a minor in Health and the Human Experience. She is in her second year doing research with cichlids. Previously she did a year-long independent study last year and is currently



completing a year-long honors thesis, both under the guidance of Dr. Natalie van Breukelen in the biology department. After she graduates, she plans to pursue an M.D/Ph.D. joint program in neuroscience as she ultimately wants to practice as an anesthesiologist and do research in neuro-anesthesia.



Sarah Muh

Sarah is a PhD candidate at the University of Texas at Austin. There she studies the neuromolecular mechanisms of collective animal behavior using a “multi-omics” approach and with a focus on fish shoaling behavior. In her free time she enjoys dance, crafts, and volunteering at the local bunny shelter.
Research summary: Several animals travel in groups but it is unknown how this is coded in the brain. I aim to determine the neural mechanisms of collective behavior, such as fish shoaling, using cichlid fish. To do this, I combine automated video tracking, transcriptomics, metabolomics, and proteomics to determine the genes, molecular pathways, and cell types involved in collective behavior.

Khalil T. Russell

Khalil is a fifth-year PhD candidate studying fish ecology, evolution and biomechanics at the University of California, Davis under Dr. Peter C. Wainwright. Her interest in cichlids began when she bred her first pair of Kribensis at age 11 and has since developed into a PhD dissertation focused on the remarkable diversity



of the Cichlidae.

Research Summary: My research combines high-speed videography, performance experiments and morphological analyses to understand how feeding behavior and morphology interact to shape trophic ecology in cichlids. My current work investigates how behavioral specialization allows some cichlids to overcome these functional constraints. In particular, I have found that mbuna cichlids from Lake Malawi escape the expected feeding tradeoff through a combination of generalized morphology and specialized behavior. With support from the American Cichlid Association, I will expand this work across multiple cichlid radiations - including Central and South America, Lake Tanganyika, Lake Malawi and other African Systems - to quantify behavioral diversity and test how behavior mediates the relationship between morphology and ecology across the family.



Desiree Thomas

Desiree is a 4th year undergraduate student at California State University, Sacramento. Her research centers around understanding evolutionary behavior, e.g., mate choice and parental investment in cichlids. She worked with them in the lab and in the field. Her long-term goal is to do a Masters and a PhD in evolutionary ecology focus on the behavior of neotropical freshwater fishes.

Research Summary: My current research interest is quantifying size assortative mating in neotropical cichlids in Costa Rica. This research involves me snorkeling in freshwater streams, rivers, and ponds to locate mating pairs of several species of cichlid and collecting their length data. As an evolutionary

ecologist, my goal is to understand what shapes life history events within a highly diverse family.



July 21-25, 2027

Mark your calendars now for July of 2027 in Milwaukee, WI!

Preparations for The Great Lakes Fish Convention (ACA, AGA & ALA's combined convention) are well underway. Andy Hudson has things incredibly well organized. The website is LIVE. https://greatlakesfishcon.org

There are a variety of activities, 12 talks and killer swag to commemorate the event. Attendees will have the opportunity to participate in a "Poker Run" game. Each participant will get to choose a playing card when they attend a talk. At the banquet the person with the best hand will win a prize. The poker decks are going to be a "must have" momento for the event and will be available for sale on the website. The t-shirt comes in two colors this year - smoke grey and teal. The teal shirts are more fitted so order a size up if you want a looser fit. Teal shirts will only be available for pre-orders and will not be sold at the convention.

All of the speakers have been selected and include: Gary Bagnall, Johnaton Butkus, Charles Clapsaddle, Chantz Cramer, Mike Hellweg, Peter George, Rebecca Goldring, Gerald Griffin, Michael Köck, Lee Newman, Michael Pauers and the ALA Grad Student Poster Sessions.

There is a fun-filled schedule coming together including:

- the above mentioned biotope aquascaping contest (hosted by the AGA)
- an IBC betta show
- the ACA cichlid show

- the ALA livebearers show
- the KICK room for the kids
- a bowling & pizza party
- a collecting trip and barbecue
- a tour of the Miller Brewery
- a tour of Lambeaue Field & Advanced Aquarium Systems (an AWESOME local fish store)
- a Saturday swap meet
- the Saturday night banquet
- the ACA Friday night auction
- the hospitality room (AND a seeecret hospitality suite after the official room closes)
- Back by popular demand, the Sunday auction!





Thank you to Prestige Aquatics (Diamond sponsor) & Chemi-pure (Platinum sponsor) for their support of the convention.





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