School of Forestry & Wildlife Sciences

FEATURE STORY
A Hunt to Remember
Wildlife students get their first shot at waterfowl hunting

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Spring/Summer Commencement, 8/8 & 8/9

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Cannon Retirement
Future of Packaging Panel Discussion
Advisory Council Meeting
Dean Alavalapati serves on panel to explore role of forests and markets in climate change mitigation

Dean Janaki Alavalapati recently joined a group of expert panelists to participate in the Research for the Future live event, Forests and Climate Change Mitigation: The Role of Markets, in Washington, D.C.

Hosted by Resources for the Future, or RFF, the event offered the opportunity for experts to engage in a discussion about the important role that forests—and the forest products sector—play in climate change mitigation. There were 135 attendees and 186 others who joined the international discussion via livestream.

The in-depth conversation examined how a healthy forest products sector is critical in this context, and its encroachment on the reforestation and management of forests.

Panelists included representatives from the forest industry and experts in forest science and policy. Serving with Alavalapati were panelists Robert Bonnie, a research scholar at Duke University’s Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions; neverrseventeen’s new president David Wear; and Julie Gatto of the National Alliance of Forest Owners. Ann Barnett, an SEF senior advisor, moderated the discussion, followed by a question-and-answer session between panelists and attendees.

The event began with a short background presentation on forest management and forest products from Bliz. To show how forest markets interact with the carbon sink in the U.S., it pointed out that in the southeastern United States alone, since 1942 to the present, forest biomass has grown from more than 60%—from roughly 2 trillion acres of forested land in 1942 to about 8 trillion acres today. Wear emphasized the enormous growth curve in response to marketing incentives. In short, forest products market, build the forest carbon sink with incentives to retain and add forests and expand production, revenue for forest fuel reductions, and carbon storage and emission reductions. Forests in the U.S. store 125% of the year’s worth of carbon emissions; and, while the U.S. carbon sink remains in a period of 40% increase, it is predicted that net growth will play a critical role in the country’s ability to mitigate climate change.

Gatto added, “It’s important to keep in mind that deforestation is a significant issue on a global scale; and the need for forest products continues to increase, driving demand for the sustainable production of forest-related products. The production of sustainably sourced forest products is crucial not only in terms of meeting consumer demand, but also in contributing to the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity.”

A Message from the Dean

Dear alumni and friends,

On behalf of the faculty and staff of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, I cordially wish you a prosperous and successful year ahead. I wish you good health and continued safety and success as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these challenging and uncertain times, we have witnessed great strength and character within the Auburn community. Our dedicated faculty, staff and students adjusted to enable us to continue to progress successfully, and I know that our relay mission continued forward. Despite these troubling and uncertain times, we have our beloved traditions to recognize our graduates and welcome our new students, we have discovered outreach missions continued forward.

Wishing you all continued good health and wellness!

Dean Janaki R.R. Alavalapati
Klingbeil co-authors pioneering study on animals’ sensitivity to forest fragmentation

An Auburn University scientist was part of a team that recently found that unmanaged forests worldwide vary in animal sensitivity to forest fragmentation, even when evolved in environments subject to major habitat alteration — such as roads, towns and cities — and are better equipped to handle human-caused forest fragmentation than species in low disturbance areas. Brian Klingbeil, a postdoctoral scientist in the Auburn School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, was a co-author of the international collaborative study led by scientists at Oregon State University. Their findings show the closer a forest is to the equator, the more sensitive an average wildlife species are to fragmentation. Tropical species have historically encountered much less disturbance than those in temperate zones.

Almost every study on biodiversity has shown that tropical forests are rich in species and that these species are more sensitive to habitat alteration than species in temperate zones. But the new study gives a more detailed explanation of why this might be the case.

Klingbeil and fellow researchers hope the work provides an important road map as conservation managers consider the impact of forest edges on wildlife.

“We already know that biodiversity greatly increases as we move toward the equator,” Klingbeil said. “Our research identified that tropical species are more sensitive to forest fragmentation because they are being broken up for logging, road construction and farming rather than forest clearing.”

“Many high-diversity tropical habitats were once primary forest, not secondary forest as is the case in temperate zones. That has a greater negative impact there.”

“The findings of this study have worldwide implications on the effects of fragmentation on biodiversity and the future survival of ecosystems,” said Jeff Anderson, professor of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences.

This research findings include an important message for conservationists:

“It’s a matter of scale,” Wolf said. “Comparisons to the tropics, in temperate zones the focus should be on conserving habitat itself rather than any specific population for fragmentation purposes.”

Two Auburn University researchers are part of a team that has launched a study on the viability of species that dwell in the estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico and have experienced a steep population decline in recent years. The work, which seeks to strengthen the creatures’ resilience to damaging environmental factors, could play a large role in ensuring their future sustainability.

L Luft Kahn, professor of hydrology in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences and OSI delegate to the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity, is leading the SmackDance for Oyster, Blue Crabs and Spotted Seatrout to Environmental Threats and Values project. The funding is provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, as part of its NOAA-MORST program. For the past five years, $1.6 million from NOAA has been used by the research team to study threats to key organisms in the Gulf of Mexico, such as oysters, blue crabs and spotted seatrout. (Photo by Lynn Von Hagen)

The goal of the project’s so-called “SmackDance” is to identify the threats to the Gulf of Mexico’s oysters, blue crabs and spotted seatrout populations. The research team is conducting workshops that seek to identify the threats to the Gulf of Mexico’s oysters, blue crabs and spotted seatrout populations, and the resulting data is crucial to developing effective policies and programs to improve the health of the Gulf’s ecosystems.

“SmackDance is a unique and innovative approach that is being used to enhance the management of the Gulf of Mexico’s estuarine resources through a collaborative and participatory process,” said L Luft Kahn, an assistant professor of hydrology in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences. “This approach is designed to identify the threats to the Gulf of Mexico’s oysters, blue crabs and spotted seatrout populations and the resulting data is crucial to developing effective policies and programs to improve the health of the Gulf’s ecosystems.”

Hawaii species invasion brings risk and reward

A new FAH research study, involving invasive species in Hawaii, will help scientists improve control efforts on the island. The study was published in the journal Biological Invasions.

Two Auburn researchers were part of a team that studied invasive species’ invasion sequences and discovered significant findings that could lead to improved control efforts.

The papers, “Hawaii as a Model for Invasions: Invasion Dynamics and Change in the Hawaiian Islands,” was recently published in the Journal of Invasive Species Research and “Invasive Species Surveying and Control in Hawaii,” was recently published in the Journal of Biological Invasions.

“Invasive species are a major threat to Hawaii’s biodiversity and economy,” said Christopher Wolf, professor of biology in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences and a co-author of the study. “We need to better understand the risk and reward of non-native species to improve management strategies.”

The team’s findings suggest that invasive species are more likely to be successful in areas with high diversity, which is a key finding for future control efforts.

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A hunt to remember
Wildlife students get their first shot at waterfowl hunting
By Teri Greene

When seven Auburn University wildlife students set off to hunt waterfowl for the first time, they knew it would be more than an action-packed excursion. It was a chance to experience firsthand a concept they knew about only in the abstract: the vital bond between the sport of hunting, and the funding needs of wildlife management and conservation.

“When a student in the wildlife field understands the importance of hunting as a undergraduate class at Auburn have stressed this point throughout my years,” said wildlife student Mariah McInnis, who is pursuing her master’s in wildlife conservation.

On the day before the hunt, students set off on the hunt along with Grider, also SFWS alumni, trained the students in firearm and safety guidelines. “We have been teaching students for three years and have been very successful,” he said.

During the hunt, students faced the challenge of being in a blind, surrounded by decoys and having to abide by strict safety guidelines. “I thought it was a great experience,” said McInnis.

The message was not lost on McInnis, who actually went on a waterfowl hunt the day after the trip. “I thought it was a great experience,” she said.

Wildlife students get their first shot at waterfowl hunting

While the school was responsible for selecting the participants, Grider took on the role as trainers and mentors. Dunning said the adventure went off without a hitch.

“Our Delta and ADCNR mentors made this accessible, and it allowed our students to learn more about the importance of hunting and the role it plays in conservation,” said Grider.

Smith said the primary objective is to expose wildlife students to hunting in general.

“This is particularly important for all wildlife students who are non-hunters, especially given that probably 60 to 75% of our wildlife students are non-hunters,” he said.

The transition of student to wildlife manager is a role that requires a strong knowledge of the craft, and the funds that will provide future jobs for these students is dependent on the success of the hunting program.

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Auburn University students are shown with instructors standing from left to right, Daniel Morris, Caleb Parker, Lamar Jester, Justin Grider, guide Daniel Morris. Students are shown practicing their firearm skills with a sporting clay shoot. Shown on the sporting clay shoot are wildlife student Mariah McInnis and guide Daniel Morris.

“A lot of work and coordination went into putting it together,” Smith said. “DWF was the lead in all of this, supplying all the equipment, firearms, ammunition and other products regularly purchased by hunters.

“Additionally, hunters provide valuable data and insight into management and conservation, with agencies on a variety of projects, and volunteer for various projects that benefit both wildlife and wildlife,” he said.

“Research in conjunction with partner organizations, is providing an innovative opportunity that is not only educational but also fun and memorable for the students participating.”

Rekindling a significant tradition

Sewell said that since 1917, the Fitzsimmons Robertson Act has provided millions of dollars of wildlife management and conservation funding through user fees on archery equipment, firearms, ammunition and other products regularly purchased by hunters.

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Academics & Research

Undergraduate Degrees
- Forestry
- Forest Engineering Option
- Geospatial and Environmental Informatics
- Natural Resource Management
- Sustainable Forestry and Tourism Management
- Wildlife Ecology and Management
- Wildlife Sciences (M.S. and Ph.D.)
- Wildlife Enterprise Management

Undergraduate Minors
- Natural Resource Ecology
- Natural Resource Science
- Water and Watershed Sciences

Graduate Degrees
- Forestry, M.N.R., M.S., and Ph.D.
- Natural Resource Science, M.N.R., M.S., and Ph.D.
- Wildlife Sciences, M.S. and Ph.D.
- Earth Systems Science, Ph.D.

Online Graduate Certificates
- Forest Finance and Investments
- Restoration Ecology
- Natural Health

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- Restoration Ecology
- Natural Health

13% INCREASE in undergraduate enrollment

70% EMPLOYMENT RATE

Undergraduate Enrollment 2014-19

Graduate Enrollment 2014-19

Extension & Outreach

Economic impact of Extension programs nearly $23 MILLION

MORE THAN 30,000 people visit Kreher Preserve & Nature Center annually

OVER 1,000 acres of prescribed fire completed at the Dixon Center

MORE THAN 20,000 people served by Extension forestry, wildlife, and natural resources programs

NEARLY 7,500 children served by KPNRC environmental education programs

School of Forestry & Wildlife Sciences

2019 Annual Report

Tiger Giving Day

79% OVER GOAL Tiger Conservation Project

102% OVER GOAL KPNRC Birding Project

2019 SFWS Giving Breakdown

Faculty
- Alumni
- Faculty/Staff
- Corporations
- Parents of Auburn Students
- Other
- Friends

Total Extramural Funding 2011-2017

41% INCREASE OVER ANNUAL FUNDRAISING GOAL

Development

More than 13 people visit Kreher Preserve & Nature Center annually

More than 1,000 acres of prescribed fire completed at the Dixon Center

Nearly 7,500 children served by KPNRC environmental education programs

OVER $23 MILLION IN EXTRAMURAL FUNDING

11.4% of SFWS students on the DEAN’S LIST

37 RESEARCH FACULTY

9 AFFILIATED RESEARCH CENTERS & COOPERATIVES

97 PRESENTATIONS at national and international conferences

Presentations at National and International Conferences

More than 85 people served by Extension forestry, wildlife, and natural resources programs

More than 30,000 people visit Kreher Preserve & Nature Center annually

More than 2,000 acres of prescribed fire completed at the Dixon Center

More than 7,500 children served by KPNRC environmental education programs
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Extension & Outreach

You Tube to the rescue
Auburn forestry faculty team with major YouTube influencer to plant 20 million trees in the Magnolia State

Two Auburn forestry professors lent a hand to a hugely popular YouTube content creator as an effort to plant over 120 million trees for the Arbor Day Foundation, which has agreed to plant one tree for every dollar raised at teamtrees.org.

Professor Rodney Barlow and Research Fellow John Knuf of the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences joined up with Dustin Sandlin, whose channel “Smart Every Day” has more than 7 million followers, to share their site and raise awareness about the growth cycles and conservation of trees.

Sandlin’s videos How to Plant 20 Million Trees, which features Barlow and Knuf, has received more than 1.5 million views. It’s part of the National Arbor Day Foundation's initiative to plant and rate 20 million trees to 20 million trees. The goal was met well before the deadline with more than 12 million views issued.

Kush said he had no idea how a group of YouTubers could go in terms of raising awareness and advancing education.

“It was astounding,” Kush said of the million-plus views.

The “WhoTrees” campaign was started by internet content creator, spurred by a tweet from YouTube user Mr. Beast, who decides to consequence the million-subscriber mark by setting up a goal to plant 20 million trees. In May, fellow YouTuber Mark Rober teamed up with Mr. Beast and his come-to-life project by planting trees in austin, Texas.

On the project’s launch day, Oct. 25, Rober posted a video of that tree-planting and, with Mr. Beast and friends, including Sandlin, began to rally social media influencers to spread the word about the “WhoTrees” project, which ran throughout 2019.

Since the trees are scheduled to be planted in locations worldwide, this effort places an emphasis on planting trees that are native species, where local conditions and forest pace allow. The National Arbor Day Foundation’s motto sums it up: “Plant the right tree, in the right place, at the right time, for the right reason.”

Which trees, where to plant and why

Sandlin made a pitch to the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, including the idea to include Auburn University in the videos after finding out from a Brain gaud that the university had been growing trees for decades. Sandlin said of his contribution to the #TeamTrees project.

“My hope was that if we are going to plant 20 million trees, we should gain some scientific knowledge about what species will perform best in certain soils and climates,” Sandlin said of his contribution to the Magnolia State project.

Dr. Barlow and I think my passion for practical education, but also we were thinking to say facts in a clear, intelligent and respectful way,” he said. Barlow and Kush were enthusiastic to share their expertise with Sandlin and his viewers. Barlow explained the importance of silvics—the study of the life history and character of forest trees. In the video, she explained the importance of this place in which trees grow, their growth rates, need for sunlight and tolerance of shade. She also emphasized that some species require higher levels of maintenance than others.

In the video, Kush’s statement that certain trees need fire to survive seemed to take Sandlin—and probably his viewers—even to the sky. But Kush said getting the word out about the health of the forest’s future is one reason he was excited to work with Sandlin. He said the health of the forest—is particularly need of —is often overlooked.

“Need to be proactive and increase our use of prescribed fire. This will only help in long term climate change and improve wildlife habitat for game species as well as numerous threatened and endangered species in the most vulnerable cases,” Sandlin said of how that shared his fact with viewers.

“It can be quite a challenge to help people understand that at times, fire can be like God for the ecosystem,” Sandlin said. "We probably have got to go through that mindset of ‘We're cool. I don't care about the weather. I'm going to do it my way’ and try to change it to appropriate fire methods.”

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New scholarship opportunity established for geographical and environmental informatics students

Chuck and Deborah Hopkins have established a scholarship in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences to support students pursuing the geographical and environmental informatics degree. Deborah’s family has owned a tree business for far more than 100 years. They have especially encouraged their daughter to support the geographical and environmental informatics degree.

The school has created a scholarship to support students pursuing a geographical and environmental informatics degree. The funds come from the Hopkins’ family, which has agreed to plant one tree for every dollar raised at teamtrees.org.

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In the Spotlight

Wildlife student receives multiple accolades for scholastic achievement

Written by Avanelle Elmore

Gabriella Ripa, a wildlife ecology and management student, has been selected as the 2019-2020 School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences President’s Award. The President’s Award was created to recognize one outstanding graduating student in each school or college who has completed at least three semesters at Auburn University with a minimum scholastic average of 3.40, including the transfer record, and who possess outstanding qualities of leadership, citizenship, character and promise of professional ability.

In recognition of her distinguished services within the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, Ripa was also chosen to lead her peers as the graduation student marshal in the 2020 spring commencement ceremony to be held in August.

"Gabrielle’s selection for the President’s award and position of student marshal is a reflection of her commitment to academic success and leadership within our school," said School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences Dean Janaki Alavalapati.

During her time at Auburn, Ripa undertook several internship experiences that grew her interest in wildlife conservation and research. In the summer between her freshman and sophomore year, she interned at EcoVivarium, a reptile and amphibian sanctuary and teaching facility in her hometown of Escondido, California.

“Once I finish school, it is my goal to either work as a research scientist or to be a state or federal wildlife biologist, focusing on non-game species. I am especially interested in conservation necessitated by habitat loss or degradation, associated with climate change and increasing urbanization,” Ripa said.

"Gabrielle's selection for the President’s award and position of student marshal is a reflection of her commitment to academic success and leadership within our school!" -Dean Janaki Alavalapati

In the Spotlight

Tiger Giving Day projects benefit Alabama’s people, wildlife

Written by Avanelle Elmore

The School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences Deer Lab and Kreher Preserve and Nature Center projects went above and beyond with proceeds exceeding their goals at the completion of the 2020 Tiger Giving Day campaigns.

The Deer Lab, established by Auburn University in 2007, is a 430-acre outdoor classroom that focuses on undergraduate and graduate student research projects throughout Alabama and the Southeast.

The facility’s main goal is to promote healthy, thriving white-tailed deer populations for this valuable environmental and economic natural resource. Data recorded at the lab helps researchers gain a better understanding of white-tailed deer genetics, health, reproduction and environment, as well as negative impacts, such as disease and feral hogs, all within their natural habitat.

"It is important to gain a better understanding of our white-tailed deer population to properly manage this species," said project coordinator Monet Gomes, an Auburn graduate student in the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences.

The lab’s original goal of $10,500 was surpassed with a final total of $11,805 from 84 donors.

“We are so grateful to be able to continually improve and innovate the conservation efforts of our wild white-tailed deer population because of the gracious donors to our campaign,” Gomes said.

The proceeds will provide supplies for genetic and immune system testing, hormone sampling, parasite analysis, supplements and feed to ensure the Deer Lab’s herd of approximately 100 deer are well-cared for and researchers have the resources needed for continued data collection and analysis.

The results of Tiger Giving Day will help the Deer Lab’s researchers continually improve and innovate the conservation efforts of their wild white-tailed deer population.

The Kreher Preserve and Nature Center, or KPNIC, also had great success in their turtle pond restoration project that includes the installation of an immersion landing and outdoor classroom right on the edge of the water. This will bring even more visitors to the center’s most popular spot and enhance the educational experience for students. Jennifer Lolley, KPNIC outreach administrator and Tiger Giving Day project coordinator, is grateful for the community’s hand in reaching the center’s goal.

“We are really excited to make some great changes to the pond area. We want to thank the community for their amazing support that made these improvements possible,” Lolley said.

“As a nonprofit nature center, we wouldn’t exist without private donations and dues revenue from memberships,” Lolley said.

With a goal of community involvement and outdoor education, the KPNIC will be more equipped to provide visitors with a connection to nature through recreation and a number of learning programs, including school field trips, science lectures, workshops and the center’s new Woodlands Wonders Nature Preschool.

The KPNIC will offer the Auburn community a new resource for water conservation education with their final fundraising total of $7,795 contributed by 122 donors, surpassing the original goal of $6,160.

Tiger Giving Day campaign donors.

Not only will visitors benefit from the new resources, but the pond will become a healthier habitat for native wildlife through the restoration effort that was made possible from Tiger Giving Day campaign donors.