

Life Sciences Newsletter

Department of Life Sciences

April 2014

Welcome to all New Staff

Support Staff - **Natalie Elizabeth Crawley**, Administrator to the AXA Chair Programme.

Research Associates - **Megan Christine Kopp**, supervised by Maruf Ali; **Chiara Pastore**, supervised by Stephen Curry; **Gabriel Piedrafita**, supervised by Mark Isalan; **Benjamin David Stocker**, supervised by Colin Prentice; **Chwen Ling Tay**, supervised by Jacob Baum and **Rhiannon Rose White**, supervised by Katerina Artavanis-Tsakonas.

Research Assistants - **Anthony Michael Dancer**, supervised by Aidan Michael Keane; **Ronan McCarthy**, supervised by Alain Filloux; **Mireia Torello Raventos**, supervised by Jon Lloyd and **Liqin Zhou**, supervised by Ben Raymond.

Research Technicians - **Archana Jayanthi**, supervised by Mark Isalan and **Nicolas Ortiz Vaquerizas**, supervised by Colin Turnbull.

Visiting Researchers - **Michael Kaelo**, supervised by Michael Keane; **Joseph William Bull**, supervised by E.J. Milner-Gulland; **Francois Lefebvre**, supervised by Pietro Spanu and **Ignacio Morales-Castilla**, supervised by Miguel Bastos Araujo.

DoLS Athena Swan

The [Academic Opportunities Committee \(AOC\)](#) will be carrying out staff and student surveys at the beginning of Summer Term 2014. The purpose of the surveys is to explore the experience, knowledge and views of staff and students on how Department of Life Sciences supports staff and students of both sexes. Understanding staff and students' views on our departments' current position will help us take necessary actions to ensure equality of opportunity to all staff. Therefore your input and support is essential and we will be 'haunting' you, and the students, to complete a survey as soon as the Easter Break is over!

Departmental Events

•••

Special Seminar

25 April 2014, 14:00-15:00 pm,
SAF building - room 121

"Gene regulatory networks, epigenetic landscapes and morphogenetic models: plant systems and cancer" by Elena Álvarez-Buylla & Juan Carlos Martínez-García (Center for Complexity Sciences, National Autonomous University of Mexico)

If you would like to meet the speakers please contact [Giovanni Sena](#)

Departmental Seminar

30 April - Oliver Daumke from the Max-Delbrück Centre for Molecular Medicine in Berlin

The 5th Emmanuelle Caron Lecture

(8 May 2014)

For further details click [here](#).

Academic Staff Meeting

18 June 2014, 2.30 pm
Silwood Campus

Appointments

Pietro Spanu has been appointed by the BBSRC to their Pool of Experts who support the Grant Application review process.

Maggie Dallman has been appointed to sit on the BBSRC Council from 1st April 2014 for the period of 4 years **and** on the College of Science Visiting Committee, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore from June 3rd 2014 for the period of 3 years.

Stephen Curry been appointed to the HEFCE committee that will undertake an independent review of the role of metrics in research assessment. The committee, formed on the initiative of David Willetts, Minister for Science and Universities, will investigate and deliberate over the next year and is due to report in the Spring of 2015. Its findings may influence the conduct of future Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercises.

In recognition of his contributions to scientific excellence, **Vincent Savolainen** has been elected a Member of [EMBO](#), an organization of more than 1500 leading researchers that promotes excellence in the life sciences.

Research Grants Awarded

Morgan Beeby has been awarded a Leverhulme Trust research grant, £117,620.00.

Prizes and Awards

James Barber was presented with the 2013 RSC Interdisciplinary Medal by Baroness Verma, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Department of Energy & Climate Change, and gave his medal lecture at the Royal Society of Chemistry in Burlington House entitled "From Natural to Artificial Photosynthesis for Solar Fuel Production" on the 4th April 2014.

Stephen Curry has been awarded the Society for General Microbiology's 2014 Peter Wildy Prize for "an outstanding contribution to microbiology education and/or communication in order to stimulate interest and understanding in the subject" and will be delivering the Prize Lecture at the SGM meeting in Liverpool on Monday 14th April

Will Pearse, who did his PhD at Silwood, has been awarded the 2013 Robert May Prize, for the best paper in the journal *Methods in Ecology & Evolution*, by the British Ecological Society, for his paper "phyloGenerator: an automated phylogeny generation tool for ecologists".

Eoin O'Gorman has been awarded a NERC Fellowship that will enable him to continue undertaking research on a geothermally heated area of Iceland, which acts as a natural global warming experiment. Differential heating of the landscape means he can look at the impact of soil warming on above- and below-ground terrestrial communities to complement work already undertaken in the aquatic system (where we looked at freshwater communities in streams of different temperature). He will also couple this research with a field plot experiment at Silwood, which will look at interactions between soil warming and habitat fragmentation.

Publications

Konstantinos Beis had a paper published in *Nature Chemical Biology*: Indran Mathavan, Séverine Zirah, Shahid Mehmood, Hassanul G Choudhury, Christophe Goulard, Yanyan Li, Carol V Robinson, Sylvie Rebuffat & Konstantinos Beis. (2014) Structural basis for hijacking siderophore receptors by antimicrobial lasso peptides.

Nature Chemical Biology DOI: [10.1038/NCHEMBIO.1499](https://doi.org/10.1038/NCHEMBIO.1499)

Maruf Ali et al. had a paper published in *Nature Communications* entitled "Phosphoregulation of Ire1 RNase splicing activity" Prischi, F. Nowak, P. Carrara, M. Ali, MMU. The paper supports the ongoing drug development project at ICR into investigating Ire1 phosphorylation activity as a target for therapeutic intervention in Multiple Myeloma.

Issues of interest

PhD Journal Club

Helen Pennington, with the help of Rachel Vaux, recently started a student-led journal club for PhD students in the Department. The main aim of the club is to encourage students to get to know people outside of their research groups, and to meet them on a regular basis. The secondary aim is to allow students to share scientific ideas that they have found interesting, new methods that they have come across, articles on science in the media etc.

On February 28th, PhD students had a launch event at which they presented their research in one slide, and in less than three minutes. This was a challenge that made everyone focus on what their subject was really about. The launch event was great fun (many of the thesis summaries were quite comical).

Following the launch event the journal club had its first regular meeting on Friday 7th March, and now meets at **12-1pm on Fridays, in Room 213B, Sir Ernst Chain Building**. All PhD students are welcome to attend.

Reaching Further

A few synthetic biologists from the centre of Synthetic Biology and Innovation and some former iGEMers recently joined [Reaching Further Programme](#), where they create activities for school students and deliver the activities together with local teachers. This programme is designed for students to be aware of the latest research, it is also a chance to introduce synthetic biology/genetic engineering to school students, and discuss the future of synthetic biology with potential future synthetic biologists. Read [further information](#) about some activities based on the iGEM project.

Media/outreach activities

The press coverage of **Konstantinos Beis'** recent paper 'Structural basis for hijacking siderophore receptors by antimicrobial lasso peptides' was included on the front pages of the [BBSRC](#) and [Diamond](#) websites and he was also interviewed by an online magazine [LabNews](#).

During his one year sabbatical in the The Cyprus Institute, **George K. Christophides** is serving as acting Dean of Studies, a position that involves institutional decision making and leading of important events related to the institutional academic affairs, and requires meetings with various local and international policy makers (so far including the minister of education, minister of labour, ambassadors of several EU countries and USA, EU directors etc.

Talks

Ernesto Cota Segura gave an invited talk on 'Use of Structurally Informed Mutant Proteins to Assess the Contribution of the Peptide-binding Cavity and Amyloid-forming Region to *Candida albicans* Als3 Adhesive Function' at the 12th ASM Candida and Candidiasis meeting in New Orleans.

Morgan Beeby gave a talk at the Japanese Society for Bacteriology conference in Tokyo on the 27 March 2014.

George K. Christophides gave an invited lecture at Institute Pasteur on 3rd April 2014, entitled "Malaria in the vector: from basic understanding to disease control". He was also a co-organiser and a keynote speaker at a workshop on Genomics and Bioinformatics of Insect Vectors of Infectious Disease (24- 27 March 2014). The workshop was linked to [VectorBase](#), an NIAID/NIH-funded informatics resource of invertebrate vectors of disease.

And finally, just a reminder that College closes at your usual finishing time on Wednesday 16 April 2014 and re-opens on 23 April 2014.



Have a fantastic Easter Break!