

CONNECTIONS

Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology Newsletter



Greetings from your Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology

I hope you enjoy this update on some of the wonderful things happening in the unit. In many ways it has been a challenging start to 2025, but our faculty, staff and students continue to operate at a high level. You will see in the stories below that several faculty have received notable recognition of their achievements at regional and national levels. It is always rewarding to see high quality work appreciated by colleagues and organizations across the country.

Many national and regional meetings focused on plant pathology and entomology will be held in the coming months. We will have good representation at the upcoming meetings, including the Society of Nematologists, the American Phytopathological Society, and the Entomological Society of America. If you are working in the discipline and happen to attend such a meeting, please connect with our current department members in attendance. As alumni, former members, and friends of the department, we appreciate your input and support. Please reach out any time to share information or discuss what is going on in the department.

Best wishes,

Ken Korth
Department Head

Support our mission here:



SCAN ME

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Ken Korth

Alumni Update

Sandeep Sharma



Cell and Molecular Biology, Plant Pathology, 2018

Your graduate advisor(s): Burt Bluhm and Terry Kirkpatrick

Current position: Scientist at Novonesis (Formerly Novozymes)

Something important you learned in grad school? Expand your research area and not focus on one project, learn as much new techniques as possible, do not be afraid to take big tasks. Most importantly, establish good relationships with your peers.

A brief update about you: After my grad school, I did a postdoc at Cornell AgriTech, Cornell University for four years. I gave numerous interviews during that time in both Academia and Industry. Finally in November 2021, I was offered a Scientist position in Novonesis (formerly Novozymes) in Davis, California. I currently reside in Woodland, California. I enjoy working at Novonesis at the Davis site. We are a small R&D only site. Everyone is nice and the work environment is very chill. It kind of feels like working in an academic lab.

I enjoy outdoors and nature. In my free time, I love to hike local trails and parks. I explored numerous trails and waterfalls when I was in upstate NY. It was during this time I discovered my passion for photography. Even now in California, I try to explore new places almost every weekend and do a lot of local landscape photography.

Recent Events

Kariyat Lab Ph.D. Students Visit University of Arkansas Pine Bluff

Students from the Kariyat Lab recently traveled to the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff for a research exchange event hosted by Dr. Satish Ponniah. The Ph.D. students included Jessica Ayala, Devi Balakrishnan, Manish Gautam, Insha Shafi, and Alejandro Vasquez Marcano. The visit provided an opportunity for collaboration, idea-sharing, and strengthening research connections between institutions.



Left to right: Dr. Satish Ponniah, Manish Gautam, Alejandro Vasquez Marcano, Jessica Ayala, Devi Balakrishnan, Insha Shafi and Ajitha Ravikumar



Left to right: Ajitha Ravikumar, Dr. Satish Ponniah, Jessica Ayala, Alejandro Vasquez Marcano, Insha Shafi, Devi Balakrishnan, Manish Gautam, and Linda

Thien Ho Visits from California

We are always glad to host former members of the department for visits. Dr. Thien Ho is a former staff member who worked with Yannis Tzanetakis. He visited Fayetteville with his family in April. Thien is now based in California with Driscoll's, Inc. overseeing a pathology program in fruit and berry production. Thien continues to be an active collaborator and friend of ENPL. He is pictured here during his visit, with Kim Keeney and Sarah Hulett.



Recent Events cont.

ENPL Visits the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks

Ph.D. students Joshua Chavana and Cassie Steele, along with Lyn Beyersdorfer, an undergraduate Entomology minor, participated in the Earth Day Garden Market at the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks on April 26th.

The trio hosted activities in the Children's Area, sparking curiosity about insects and science. One of the biggest hits with kids and adults alike? The ever-popular hissing cockroaches!

Their involvement highlights the department's ongoing commitment to science education and community engagement.



Cassandra Steele, Joshua Chavana, and Lyn Beyersdorfer

Hannah Zima's Going Away Party



Everyone gathering around Hannah for one last picture together



Hannah Zima



Maryam Fallahi, Rylie Remon, and Hannah Zima

On May 25th we celebrated a going away party for Ms. Hannah Zima. She recently completed her M.S. degree at the University of Arkansas. Her thesis was entitled "Diseases of Cannabis sativa and the Epidemiology and Molecular Diversity of *Neofusicoccum parvum*" working with Dr. Jim Correll. Her thesis was the first on Cannabis at the University, and being a new legal crop in the state had presented various challenges including compliance, permit, and biological. Ms. Zima recently took a position with Steve Koike at TriCal Diagnostics in Hollister, CA as an Assistant Lab Manager.

Recent Events cont.

Summer Picnic Brings ENPL Department Together

On June 17th, 2025, the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology gathered for a summer picnic filled with food, fun, and fellowship. Faculty, staff, and students enjoyed classic cookout fare, including hamburgers, hotdogs, and a wide variety of delicious potluck dishes brought by attendees.

The warm weather made for a perfect afternoon of lawn games, music, and conversation. From cornhole and badminton to relaxing in the shade with a plate of food, the event offered something for everyone. It was a great opportunity to connect outside the lab and classroom and celebrate the start of summer as a department.

Students and friends playing badminton



Dr. Rupesh Kariyat's Lab and Dev Crippen



Students, friends, staff, faculty, and family

Annual Tomato and Plant Sale

Like previous years, the 2025 tomato plant sale was a success, with over 700 plants sold and a lot of support from the community. Fifteen different plant varieties were offered this year, including traditional favorites, like the Arkansas traveler, and new tomato varieties, like the Roma brown sugar tomato and the Grappoli D'inverno cherry tomato. This year, the sale was led by Rachel Taylor, GSA president, and Catalina Rodríguez, GSA treasurer. The sale could not have been possible without the support from Devany Crippen, Tina Hart, and all the plant pathology students, including Brenna, Anmol, Yinka, and Maira.



Recent Events cont.

The ENTO-ROADSHOW Takes Off!

On April 16th, The ENTO-ROADSHOW made a lively stop at the Scott Family Amazeum in Bentonville, drawing around 120 visitors in just two hours. Dr. Austin Jones and Entomology Minor, Chloe Cooper, welcomed families to explore displays, handle live insects, and create arthropod-themed art. The event offered a fun and educational experience for all ages, highlighting the fascinating world of insects

On March 22, the ENTO-ROADSHOW visited the J.B. and Johnelle Hunt Ozark Highlands Nature Center for a special outreach event. Jones presented on the arthropods of Arkansas, with a spotlight on native pollinators. Visitors enjoyed an informative session highlighting the importance and diversity of vital insects in local ecosystems.

On April 26, Dr. Ashley Dowling, Emma Critchfield, and Jones participated in the NOARK Girl Scouts Wild-N-Wonderful Event with the ENTO-ROADSHOW. The team shared interactive insect displays with Girl Scouts, offering a fun and educational experience in the fascinating world of arthropods. The event was a great opportunity to inspire the next generation of scientists through hands-on outreach.



Faculty Awards & Recognition

New Software Advances Evolutionary Research



Dr. Rich Adams

A team led by Dr. Rich Adams of the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station has developed TraitTrainR, a powerful new software package that simulates how traits evolve in organisms over time. Published in *Bioinformatics Advances* (Dec. 2024), the tool streamlines large-scale evolutionary experiments, offering researchers a flexible and efficient way to explore biological diversity.

Graduate student Jenniffer Roa Lozano, served as lead author on the project, which integrates existing evolutionary models into a user-friendly platform. TraitTrainR can be used to study everything from pathogen resistance to crop traits, helping scientists better understand how traits emerge and change.

The software is part of a broader effort supported by multiple grants and institutions, and it holds promise for advancing research in biology, agriculture, and biomedicine.



Mataya Duncan, Rokeya Akter, Jenniffer Roa Lozano, and Adams

Dr. Rupesh Kariyat Receives Faculty Applause Award

Dr. Rupesh Kariyat, Associate Professor of Entomology and Plant Pathology, was honored with the 2025 Faculty Applause Award at the AFLS Student Awards Ceremony. Presented by the Associated Student Government and Office for Faculty Affairs, the award recognizes faculty who have made a meaningful impact on students through outstanding teaching and mentorship. Kariyat's dedication to student success and education was celebrated as part of Faculty Appreciation Week.



Dr. Ken Korth and Dr. Rupesh Kariyat

Faculty Awards & Recognition contd.

Dr. Fiona Goggin Recognized Among World's Most-Cited Researchers

More than 30 faculty members from the University of Arkansas have been recognized among the top-cited researchers in the world, according to a prestigious annual ranking compiled by Stanford professor John P.A. Ioannidis. The ranking, based on data from Elsevier's Scopus database, highlights researchers whose work is frequently cited by peers in their field—an indicator of significant impact and influence.

To be included, researchers must rank among the top 100,000 globally or in the top 2 percentile within their subfield. The latest list, released in the fall, reflects citation data through 2023 and includes metrics for both yearly and career-long impact.

Faculty from across five U of A colleges were represented: the College of Education and Health Professions; the College of Engineering; the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences; the Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences; and the Sam M. Walton College of Business.

Among those honored was Dr. Fiona Goggin, recognized for her outstanding scholarly contributions. The list includes both current and emeritus faculty, but only active faculty are featured in this year's departmental breakdown.



Dr. Fiona Goggin

Faculty Awards & Recognition contd.

Dr. Neel Joshi Receives Entomological Society of America Southeastern Branch Excellence Award in Teaching

Congratulations to Dr. Neel Joshi, who was honored with the ESA SEB Excellence Award in Teaching by the Southeastern Branch of the Entomological Society of America. This prestigious award recognizes educators who have made exceptional contributions to entomological education through innovative teaching, impactful mentorship, curriculum development, and outreach.

Joshi received the award at the ESA Southeastern Branch Annual Meeting, held March 9-12, highlighting his dedication to inspiring students and advancing the field of entomology through education.



Dr. Neel Joshi receiving his award

Dr. Joanna Kud Presents at NWA Biotech



Dr. Joanna Kud

Dr. Joanna Kud presented a talk on agricultural biotechnology and her research at a symposium aimed at building regional partnerships in biotechnology. NorthWest Arkansas Community College (NWACC) sponsored the day-long NSF-funded event on April 18th. The event was organized by former Plant Pathology Department members Drs. Gary Bates and LaShall Bates. Gary and LaShall are both faculty at NWACC and co-PIs on an NSF EPIIC grant. The EPIIC program seeks to work with institutions in growing external partnerships, building innovation capacity, and workforce development.

Faculty Awards & Recognition contd.

Dr. Ioannis Tzanetakis Honored as Fellow of American Phytopathological Society



Dr. Ioannis Tzanetakis

Dr. Ioannis Tzanetakis, Professor of Plant Virology and Director of the Arkansas Clean Plant Center, was recently named a Fellow of the American Phytopathological Society (APS)—an honor awarded to only 0.25% of APS members each year.

Tzanetakis has made significant contributions to plant pathology, including co-developing the widely used Virfind virus detection tool, leading a global initiative to improve plant certification standards, and advancing affordable methods for virus testing. He also plays a key role in the \$200 million Clean Plant Program of India and heads one of four national centers in the U.S. Clean Plant Network.

Beyond research, Tzanetakis is a committed mentor and leader at the University of Arkansas System, where he has guided numerous graduate students and postdocs while serving in various faculty leadership roles. He will be honored at Plant Health 2025 in Honolulu.

Dr. Camila Nicolli's Research and Outreach Excellence

Dr. Camila Nicolli, Assistant Professor and leader of the Rice Crop Care group, continues to excel in research and mentorship. At the 2025 Rice Technical Working Group meeting, her mentee Jocilene Pereira, a Ph.D. student from Brazil, earned second place in the poster competition for work on rice resistance to biotic and abiotic stress—highlighting the group's collaborative success.

Nicolli also recently gave a talk at LSU AgCenter, offering career insights to graduate students and postdocs.

Additionally, she is a key collaborator on a newly funded \$750,000 project through the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Climate Resilient Cereals, aimed at managing rice diseases amid climate change.

These achievements reflect Nicolli's strong leadership and dedication to advancing sustainable agriculture.



Dr. Camila Nicolli

Grad Student Awards and Recognition

ENPL Department Shines at AFLS Student Awards Ceremony

The Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology was well represented at the AFLS Student Awards Ceremony. Adriana Peissel, undergraduate research assistant to Dr. Rupesh Kariyat, graduated with honors, while Deepak Dilip, M.S. Student, and Alejandro Vasquez, Ph.D. Student, both from Dr. Rupesh Kariyat's lab, were named Best M.S. and Ph.D. Students in ENPL, respectively. Adding to the celebration, Dr. Kariyat received the prestigious University of Arkansas Faculty Applause Award, highlighting his outstanding mentorship and dedication to student success.



Ph.D. Student, Alejandro Vasquez Marcano



M.S. Student, Deepak Dilip



Deepak Dilip, Adriana Peissel, Dr. Rupesh Kariyat, Alejandro Vasquez Marcano

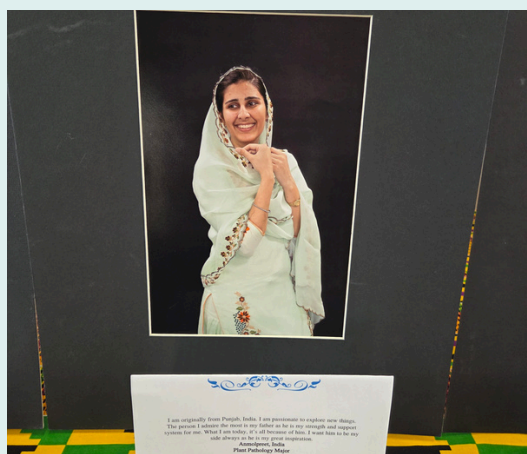
Grad Student Awards and Recognition contd.

Anmolpreet Kaur Receives Society of Nematologists Travel Award

Congratulations to Anmolpreet Kaur, who was awarded the prestigious Society of Nematologists (SON) 2025 Student Travel Award, supported by Corteva. Selected for the strength of her abstract and impactful research in nematology, Kaur received \$500 for travel and an additional \$500 toward conference registration. Kaur was honored at the SON annual meeting's closing banquet, highlighting a major milestone in her rising scientific career.



Anmolpreet Kaur Honored on International Women's Day



Graduate student Anmolpreet Kaur was recognized by the University of Arkansas during International Women's Day on May 7th for her academic excellence and contributions to science. Her recognition highlights the impactful work being done by women in STEM and celebrates her dedication to research and discovery. Congratulations to Anmolpreet on this well-deserved honor!

Strong Showing at Entomological Society of America Southeastern Branch Meeting

The University of Arkansas Entomology Team had an impressive showing at the recent ESA Southeastern Branch Meeting held March 9–12. Insha Shafi, Ph.D Student, earned 2nd place for her oral presentation, and Duy Trinh, Ph.D. Student, took 2nd place for his poster. Manish Gautam, Ph.D. Student, was awarded a registration scholarship from ESA SEB, and Dr. Neel Joshi received the prestigious ESA SEB Excellence Award in Teaching. Congratulations to all on their well-deserved recognition!



Ph.D. Student, Insha Shafi



Ph.D. Student, Manish Guatam

Newest Faculty

Dr. Taylor Klass Joins ENPL



Hired: February, 2025

Dr. Taylor Klass

B.S. institution: The Ohio State University (Double major in Animal Sciences and Agronomy)

M.S. institution: The Ohio State University (Plant Pathology)

PhD. institution: The Ohio State University (Plant Pathology)

As the lead diagnostician and manager of the Arkansas Plant Health Clinic, Taylor has a 100% extension appointment. In this role, she diagnoses plant disease problems within the state, provides management recommendations for these diseases, and conducts training and outreach efforts for stakeholders.

Taylor is originally from Columbus, Ohio. In her free time, she loves being outdoors—whether it's hiking, running, paddleboarding, biking, or playing soccer. She's also an animal enthusiast, with a special love for cats.

We are excited to have Taylor join our team!



U of A
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
RESEARCH & EXTENSION
University of Arkansas System



Recent Graduates

Spring Graduates

Deepak Dilip - M.S. ENTO - Advisor: Dr. Kariyat

Mataya Duncan - M.S. CEMB - Advisor: Dr. Adams

Jenniffer Roa Lozano - M.S. STAN - Advisor: Dr. Adams

My Tra Ly - M.S. ENTO - Advisor: Dr. Joshi



Deepak Dilip



Mataya Duncan



Jenniffer Roa Lozano



My Tra Ly



2025

In Remembrance

In Memory of Amanda Greer

The Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology is deeply saddened to share the passing of Amanda Greer, supervisor of the Nematode Diagnostic Lab and a vital part of the Southwest Research and Extension Center in Hope. Amanda's dedication, knowledge, and kind spirit left a lasting impression on all who had the privilege of working with her.

She will be profoundly missed by colleagues, friends, and the agricultural community she served with such passion. Our thoughts remain with her husband, Will, her daughter, Dakota, and the entire Greer family during this difficult time.

A memorial service was held in Lewisville, AR, on Friday, February 21st.

More information is shared at [Griffin-Culpepper Funeral Home](#).

Amanda's legacy lives on through the many lives she touched and the important work she led.



Dr. Amanda Greer



Dr. Amanda Greer

WHAT WE STAND FOR



The Department is a global leader in Entomology and Plant Pathology; promoting human, animal, and plant health, environmental sustainability and food security.

Our Mission:

Entomology and Plant Pathology serves science and society through discovery, translation and dissemination of knowledge and resources to promote human, animal, and plant health, environmental sustainability and food security.

Authored and adopted by the faculty, March 2021

If you would like to contribute to the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, please visit us at: https://onlinegiving.uark.edu/campaigns/53930/donations/new?designation_id=30003279& or scan the QR code to the right.



SCAN ME

CONNECT WITH US

Alumni, we would love to hear from you! Reach out to us with updates or let us know how you are using that ENPL degree at enpl@uark.edu. We would love to feature you in our department newsletter.



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