

ESA Member Profile: Paula M. Shrewsbury

This month's member profile focuses on Paula M. Shrewsbury, an associate professor and extension specialist at the University of Maryland's Department of Entomology.



Paula M. Shrewsbury

When did you first become interested in insects?

My interest in insects began when I was an undergraduate at the University of Rhode Island. While majoring in plant science, I took a course in entomology. This "special projects" course was

taught by an extension specialist, Dave Wallace. It involved visiting growers and participating in plant clinics. Watching Dave help growers and homeowners by diagnosing plant problems and providing recommendations for management was very exciting, and I realized that I wanted to be able to do that. My next epiphany came in Dick Casagrande's lab, where I caught the "bug" while working on Colorado potato beetles. I was hooked on insects, plants, and pest management.

What made you choose entomology as a career?

After completing my B.S., I worked in a retail nursery as their diagnostician, where I identified plant problems and helped customers resolve issues with pests. This experience brought me to a disturbing realization about the amount of pesticides used by gardeners and landscapers. I soon knew I wanted to make a bigger contribution—both to the field of pest management and in helping people and the environment. As an extension entomologist, I could conduct applied research and help growers solve problems using ecologically sound practices. Once I figured this out, it was easy. I worked hard and got my M.S. and Ph.D. in entomology with the emphasis on IPM of pests in ornamental systems. I am very fortunate to be one of the lucky people who has attained her dream job.

What are you currently working on, and why is it important?

The overall goals of my program are to develop sustainable ornamental and turf-grass systems that prevent pest outbreaks; to provide unique opportunities for undergraduate and graduate education in the discipline of IPM, landscape and community ecology; and to increase the adoption of IPM practices by providing educational outreach programs to clientele. This is important because it reduces detrimental environmental and human-health impacts related to pesticide use and non-sustainable

plant management practices.

Currently my research projects include:

1) Habitat manipulations to create favorable environments for natural enemies. These studies evaluate the benefits of adding flowering plants and bunch grasses to nursery and golf course systems; altering groundcover type and planting methods in nurseries; integrating the use of cover crops in nurseries; and altering habitat structural complexity. My goal is to increase natural enemy abundance and ecosystem services provided by natural enemies. Results of these studies provide fundamental knowledge of tri-trophic interactions and practical information to design sustainable production systems.

2) Defining and comparing arthropod communities associated with native and alien plants in landscapes. These studies examine current ecological theory on relationships between plants, herbivores, and natural enemies. Results provide practical information on the use of native and alien plants in urban settings as it relates to pest management.

3) Examining the influence of alternative food resources on omnivorous predators and the ability of omnivores to suppress herbivorous pest insects. Results from these studies examine current theory relating to conservation biological control, and add to a central theme in ecology, i.e., the effect of variation in food resources on trophic cascades. Results provide practical information on how to refine conservation biological control practices to more effectively reduce or prevent pest outbreaks.

4) Determining the effect of transgenic corn on non-target organisms and elucidating possible effects on ecosystem function.

How has being a member of ESA helped you?

Most importantly, ESA provides opportunities—through meetings, journal publications, and committee participation—to meet and network with colleagues and students. I have made wonderful collaborations that keep my research and extension activities current. Networking within our discipline enables me to learn what colleagues are doing and to inform others of projects my students and I are working on. Meetings are a great way to stay in touch with friends. ESA also provides similar opportunities for my graduate students.

What ESA-related activities have you participated in, and which did you enjoy the most?

I have served on program and nomina-

tion committees within the Eastern Branch, in addition to the Awards Committee at the national level. I have worked with students relating to the Linnaean Games and career mentoring workshops. I have also coordinated and participated in symposia at national and branch meetings.

Interacting with graduate students is always the most rewarding aspect of my membership. However, I have enjoyed participating in all of these ESA activities. They have provided me with the opportunity to get to know my colleagues, especially those outside my immediate sub-discipline; to work with others as a team with the common goal of making the Society better; and to develop lasting friendships.

What advice, if any, would you give to new ESA members?

Participate! Start at the branch and work your way up to the national level. Attend meetings, present in student competitions, organize symposia, and volunteer for committees. Networking is the key to success in the field of entomology. You need to know what others are doing and to let them know what you are doing.

What do you do in your spare time? What other interests do you have?

Although this may sound geeky, I most enjoy being outside looking at plants and insects, especially traveling to new places to do this. I also enjoy running in an effort to stay healthy and to be able to eat dessert.

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