

Department of Anthropology

Dear Alumni and Friends,

Greetings from the [Department of Anthropology](#) at Stony Brook University! Having just taken over the chair's position from Fred Grine, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Fred for his many years of dedicated service and his leadership. This past year has been a tremendous mix of excitement, disappointment and loss. I hope that in these uncertain times this newsletter will be a bit uplifting and inspiring. As always, please send us your updates so we can include them on our forthcoming Alumni News page!



Stay safe and healthy,

Andreas Koenig
Professor and Chair

Alumni Impact

Your generosity makes a difference! This year the Department selected three of our outstanding undergraduate students, supporting their research efforts through our Travel and Excellence funds:

- Vincy Mathews (Smaers Lab) presented her research at the 2019 Annual JB Johnston Conference on Evolutionary Neuroscience in Chicago.
- Lydia Myers (Russo Lab) traveled to the AMNH and NMNH to measure specimens as part of her honors thesis project.
- Durr-E-Ajam Riaz (Koenig Lab) presented her research at the 2019 Northeastern Evolutionary Primatologist meeting at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Alumni Spotlight Shelby Mohrs '19

Shelby worked with Dr. Elisabeth Hildebrand at Luxmanda, Tanzania doing archaeobotanical recovery fieldwork and then carried out intensive work in Professor Hildebrand's laboratory at Stony Brook. Shelby was accepted by Northwestern University where she will be working with Amanda Logan, one of the only North American-based experts in the archaeobotany of West Africa. Under Dr.



Logan, Shelby intends to pursue a project focused on cash-cropping in colonial Senegal and its effects on Siin (Senegalese) peasants' diets and day-to-day lives. She also hopes to continue archaeobotanical analysis of macrobotanical remains from the early pastoralist site of Luxmanda. At Stony Brook's Turkana Basin Institute's Origins Field School, Shelby's interest in the African continent was amplified, and working in Dr. Hildebrand's Ethnobotany Lab gave her invaluable practical and methodological skills. This experience in archaeobotanical analysis (rare for an undergraduate) played a large part in Shelby's acceptance into the PhD program at Northwestern University.

Undergraduate Student Spotlight

This year's [May convocation ceremony](#) was held virtually due to COVID-19. To still have a sense of celebration, a Virtual Yearbook was created with individual contributions by our graduating seniors in Anthropology and Human Evolutionary Biology. Noteworthy, we celebrated the selection of four outstanding students: Jennifer Guo, Lydia Myers, Durr-E-Ajam Riaz, and Kristin Tomasini. We also celebrated the

completion of honors thesis by three of these students:

- Lydia Myers: "A Lorisoid-like distal humerus from the middle Miocene at Napudet, Kenya." (Russo Lab)
- Durr-E-Ajam Riaz: "Agonistic behavior among Nepalese gray langur females." (Koenig Lab)
- Kristen Tomasini: "Changes in Mesopotamian Domestic Burial Practices Between the 3rd and Early 2nd Millennium B.C.: An Examination of the Family's Influence at Ur." (Stone Lab)

Stony Brook Anthropology and
Human Evolutionary Biology



Virtual Yearbook 2020

Graduate Student Spotlight Steven Heritage

Steven Heritage, a doctoral candidate in our IDPAS Program, recently published a [project concerning the Somali Sengi](#). This charismatic little mammal, one of 20 species of elephant-shrews, was previously documented by only 39 museum specimens from northern Somalia. There have been no new scientific reports of the species since the early 1970s and there has been exactly zero published photographs of living individuals. The IUCN Red List considered the Somali Sengi to be Data Deficient and Global Wildlife Conservation listed it among the top 25 most wanted taxa in their Search for Lost Species program. Steven, was recently appointed as sengi coordinator (order Macroscelidea) at the IUCN Afrotheria Specialist Group, put together a team of US-based sengi specialists and Djiboutian-based field ecologists, and led a 2019 expedition to the Republic of Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. The team not only documented a number of new animals and new localities for the species, it also generated new data concerning substrate use, sheltering affiliations, communication behavior and conservation criteria. Among the most important findings is a positive recommendation for the conservation status of the species and a DNA-based phylogeny that has resulted in a new taxonomic genus. This research has been widely reported in the international press including coverage by NPR, CNN, BBC, USA Today, Nature Research Highlights, People, National Geographic, The Guardian, Bloomberg, Fox, CTV, and AFP France. Interviews with Steven have been aired on CBC As It Happens, PRI The World, NPR Morning Edition, BBC Radio One, and ITV.



[Learn more about Steven's research on NPR »](#)
[Learn more about Steven's research on CNN »](#)

Graduate Student Spotlight David Varnier

A PhD candidate in [Dr. Jeroen Smaers's lab](#) for Macroevolutionary Anatomy, David studies the evolution of brain regions linked to episodic memory, with a focus on the entorhinal cortex. This is the first region to show signs of Alzheimer's, and it is also the origin of adult epilepsy. David's research can help to determine if primates are good models for such diseases, and it can shed light on why memory-based human cognition may be special. He employs phylogenetic comparative methods in conjunction with neuroanatomical measurements to model how these brain regions have changed in size and connectivity in different primate lineages. David produced an impressive list of achievements over the past year that include:



- The Norman Creel Prize for Outstanding Student Research in Anatomical Sciences for "Distinct Patterns of Hippocampal and Neocortical Evolution in Primates," which he co-authored with Jeroen and Chet Sherwood
- a Germanistic Society of America Research Award
- a Fulbright Research Fellowship German-American Fulbright Commission
- a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship for a project titled "Diversification of the Neural Substrate of Navigation in Primates"
- a GSEU Professional Development Award Stony Brook Graduate Student Employment Union
- a Turner Fellowship

[Learn more about David's research »](#)

Faculty Spotlight

James Rossie

Associate Professor James Rossie came into the spotlight for his contributions to the description of a 66-million-year-old mammal that had been discovered in Madagascar. The animal, called *Adalatherium hui* (or crazy beast) is the most complete skeleton for Mesozoic mammals from Gondwana and is characterized by various unique traits on its snout and a very large body size. The study by an international team of scientists was led by IDPAS alumnus David Krause, Senior Curator of Vertebrate Paleontology at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science and Professor Emeritus at Stony Brook University and was published in the journal *Nature*.



[Learn more about James' research »](#)

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