

## **George C. Eickwort Student Research Award**

This award is given in memory of George Eickwort and is designed to recognize exceptional research and scholarly activity by students in the field of social insect biology. The award consists of a certificate, an honorarium, and a one-year subscription to *Insectes Sociaux*. The Eickwort Award Committee consists of Phil Starks, Bryan Danforth, Ulrich Mueller, Andy Saurez and myself (Kenna MacKenzie). A special thanks to Phil for his assistance this year.

### **General Statement**

This year, as always, the nominees for the Eickwort Student Award were of excellent quality making coming to a decision very difficult. However, one individual stood out. The North American Section of the International Union for the Study of Social Insects is proud to announce that **Christopher Smith, PhD (2008), the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign** was selected as the recipient of the **2008 Eickwort Student Award**. While Christopher's research has advanced our understanding of the evolution and ecology of social adaptations of ants, he is also recognized as an excellent teacher and very active in service to academia and his community.

For his doctoral studies, **Christopher Smith** was a student of Andrew Saurez at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. His PhD research examined the evolution of worker size variation in *Pogonomyrmex* seed harvester ants. Through the use of multiple techniques including microstatellite and stable isotope analyses, he was able to evaluate the relative contributions of genetics and nutrition in determining size and caste in this ant genus. As this work was completely independent of that of his major professor, he needed to and was successful in locating funding to carry out this work. He published his first paper as an undergraduate and has since published ten more in good journals (for all of these except one he is either first or co-first author). In addition, Christopher is noted for teaching and mentorship. During his tenure at the University of Illinois, he supervised four undergraduate projects – one which resulted in a publication. Perhaps the words of his references “a scientist who thinks carefully about the real lives of his real subjects and asks questions that are basic and important”, “knows more about ant biology than most professors I know”, and “Chris understands that mystery exists, is real, and drives the best science” best describe the attributes of this young social insect researcher. Christopher is currently working with Drs. Gadau and Hölldobler as a Post-Doctoral Associate Research Scientist in the School of Life Sciences at Arizona State University. The Award Committee is very pleased to announce that Christopher Smith is the recipient of the 2008 Eickwort Student Award.