

STUDENT NEWS

by Khong Lunaria

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Khong collecting beetles and flies at Big Dune, Nevada.

I am a first-year Master's student in Biological Sciences at Wright State University, working under the supervision of Dr. John Stireman. I obtained my BSc in Public Health in December 2023 from University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). During the summer of '22, I started an internship with the Washoe County Health Department, working for the Vector-Borne Disease Prevention Program where I found my fascination with insects. My supervisor at the time, Will Lumpkin, was a coleopterist and he taught me how to collect beetles and pin them. I've been in love with arthropods ever since. I took the only Entomology class available at UNR with Dr. Lee Dyer to be better at identifying critters for aquatic surveys. A family that really caught my eye in the Ento lab was Tachinidae. I remember seeing the most "metal" looking fly with yellow, orangey bodies, armored with dark bristles. I had never before seen a fly the size of my thumb so that was impressive. After taking Ento, I was an undergraduate elf for two different PhD students where I helped them sort insect samples and identify them to the family level. In July 2023, my professor told me that the 10th International Congress of Dipterology would be in Reno and the organizers need volunteers. I reached out to Dr. Martin Hauser and I was accepted as a volunteer. During the Congress, I helped in various capacities, registering attendees, running the information table, selling merch, cleaning up, and even bought COVID test kits when everyone got sick at the end of the meeting. I met so many cool dipterists, ranging in age from early 20s to mid 80s, and learned so much about flies, that this experience gave me an idea to pursue graduate school. I reached out to Dr. Hauser for a graduate school advisor recommendation based on my interests in flies and he recommended Dr. Stireman because he does great work with tachinids. So here I am, signing my life away to graduate school. Just kidding, I am having a great time with my project.

My thesis project is based on fly samples that were acquired from the *Thailand Inventory Group for Entomological Research* (TIGER). TIGER was a large-scale survey effort where arthropods were collected across 30 national parks in Thailand in the early 2000s. My project aims to shed light on diversity patterns of tachinid flies in Thailand and understand how their community composition varies across geography, habitats, and land use. I am super stoked about this project and expect that it will produce the first comprehensive baseline record of tachinid species richness and occurrence across Thailand. I look forward to sharing my findings with you all in the future.