

# Robin Decker

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Department of Integrative Biology  
2415 Speedway Stop C0930  
University of Texas, Austin  
Austin, Texas 78712  
email: [Robin.Decker@utexas.edu](mailto:Robin.Decker@utexas.edu)  
website: [robinrdecker.github.io](https://robinrdecker.github.io)

## RESEARCH INTERESTS

My research integrates theoretical ecology and global change biology, with a focus on the spatial population dynamics of plants with changing ranges. I develop mathematical models, use simulations and incorporate ecological data to uncover the causes and consequences of spatial spread in a world with increasing anthropogenically-driven environmental change.

## EDUCATION

**Ph.D. Population Biology** September, 2019

Advisor: Alan Hastings

Dissertation: Plant population dynamics under climate change: Invasions, range shifts, and resilience

*University of California, Davis*

GPA: 4.000

**B.S. Mathematics** May 2014, with Distinction in Applied Mathematics

**B.S. Biology** May 2014

*Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California*

GPA: 4.000

## APPOINTMENTS

**Postdoctoral Fellow** 2019 -

Advisor: Caroline Farrior

Department of Integrative Biology

*University of Texas, Austin*

## PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

**Decker, R.R.** & Hastings, A. (2022). Sea-level rise can reverse the conditions that promote the spread of ecosystem engineers. *Theoretical Ecology*, in press.

Dallas, T.A., Santini, L., **Decker, R.**, & Hastings, A. (2020). Weighing the Evidence for the Abundant-Center Hypothesis. *Biodiversity Informatics*, 15(3), 81-91.

Beckman, N., Aslan, C., Rogers, H. Kogan, O., Bronstein, J., Bullock, J., ... **Decker, R.**, ... Zambrano, J. (2020). Advancing an interdisciplinary framework to study seed dispersal ecology. *AoB Plants*, 12(2).

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Aslan, C., Beckman, N., Rogers, H., Bronstein, J., Zurell, D., Hartig, F., ... **Decker, R.**, ... Zhou, J. (2019). Employing plant functional groups to advance seed dispersal ecology and conservation. *AoB Plants*, 11(2).

Dallas, T., **Decker, R. R.**, & Hastings, A. (2018). Multiple data sources and freely available code is critical when investigating species distributions and diversity: a response to Knouft (2018). *Ecology Letters*, 21(9), 1423-1424.

Dallas, T., **Decker, R. R.**, & Hastings, A. (2017). Species are not most abundant in the centre of their geographic range or climatic niche. *Ecology Letters*, 20(12), 1526-1533.

Ferraro, M. S., **Decker, R. R.**, Costa, D. P., Robinson, P. W., Houser, D. S., & Crocker, D. E. (2017). Evaluating gain functions in foraging bouts using vertical excursions in northern elephant seals. *Animal Behaviour*, 129, 15-24.

## MANUSCRIPTS AVAILABLE

**Decker, R.R.**, Baskett, M.L., & Hastings, A. (In Revision). Trailing-edge zombie forests can increase population persistence in the face of climate change.

<https://doi.org/10.1101/2021.12.07.471250>

**Decker, R.R.**, Cinoglu, D. & Farrior C.E. (Manuscript Available). Successional dynamics do not guarantee the evolution of succession-based niche differentiation.

**Decker, R.R.**, Case, E.J., Hastings, A. & Harrison, S. (In Revision). Post-invader-removal community recovery is resilient to major climate perturbations.

## FELLOWSHIPS

National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship (2015-19) - \$102,000

University of California Institute for the Study of Ecological Effects of Climate Impacts (ISEECI) Natural Reserve System (NRS) Graduate Research Assistantship (Summer 2015, Summer 2016) - \$2800 for research + 1 quarter full-time GSR + 1 quarter part-time GSR

Department of Defense National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate Fellowship (2015) - \$102,000 (*offered and declined*)

Department of Energy Computational Science Graduate Fellowship (2015) - \$152,000 (*offered and declined*)

Loretto Godoy Memorial Fellowship (2015) - \$1000

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

**Department of Integrative Biology, UT Austin, Austin, Texas USA**

*Postdoctoral Research*

September, 2019 - present

Exploring how fundamental, underlying tradeoffs in community interactions shape the dynamics of plant communities in response to global environmental change.

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**Population Biology, UC Davis**, Davis, California USA

*Graduate Research*

October, 2014 - September, 2019

Investigated how climate change affects the spatial population dynamics of plants (Dissertation Committee: Alan Hastings, Susan Harrison and Marissa Baskett). Projects included:

- Development of a spatial mathematical model of coastal ecosystem engineers and changes in their population spread rate in response to increasing rates of sea-level rise.
- Field work examining how invasive removal treatments affect native community dynamics through extreme climatic events.
- Development of a moving habitat model to investigate how individuals left behind a moving habitat patch contribute to the population's response to climate change.

## SELECTED CONFERENCE SEMINARS & POSTERS

\* Invited

\*\* Undergraduate mentee

\* **Decker, R.R.** 2024. "Using evolutionary game theory to understand forest diversity" (invited seminar). *Sonoma State University Math Colloquium*.

C.E. Farrior, **R.R. Decker**, \*\* M. Bradley, D. Cinogu, & X. Yan. 2022. "Can we predict the evolution of differences among species that allow for their coexistence?" (seminar). *Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting*.

**Decker, R.R.** & C.E. Farrior. 2021. "Evolutionarily stable coexistence in a metacommunity model with successional dynamics" (seminar). *Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting*.

\*\* Bradley, M., **R.R. Decker**, D. Cinoglu, & C.E. Farrior. 2021. "Evaluating Janzen-Connell dynamics as a potential driver of plant coexistence" (poster). *Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting*.

**Decker, R.R.** & C.E. Farrior. 2021. "Can successional dynamics in a metacommunity cause tree diversification?" (seminar). *UT Austin Department of Integrative Biology Eco-Lunch*.

\* **Decker, R.R.** 2020. "Moving habitat models and the trailing edge: The role of zombie forests" (invited seminar). *Life on Planet Earth: Above and Below workshop. Mathematical Biosciences Institute (MBI) at the Ohio State University*.

**Decker, R.R.** 2019. "Moving habitat models and the trailing edge: The role of zombie forests" (seminar). *UT Austin Department of Integrative Biology Eco-Lunch*.

**Decker, R.R.** & A. Hastings. 2018. "Moving habitat models and the trailing edge: what individuals left behind reveal about a population's response to climate change" (seminar). *Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting*

\* **Decker, R.R.** 2018. "Theoretical spatial ecology: An introduction with applications" (invited seminar). *Sonoma State University Pi Mu Epsilon Conference*.

\* **Decker, R.R.** & A. Hastings. 2018. "The impacts of ecosystem engineering and sea-level rise on the spread of invasions" (invited seminar). *Joint Mathematics Meetings*.

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**Decker, R.R.** & A. Hastings. 2017. “The impacts of ecosystem engineering and sea-level rise on the spread of invasions” (seminar). *Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting*.

**Decker, R.R.** & A. Hastings. 2017. “The impacts of ecosystem engineering and sea-level rise on the spread of invasions” (poster). *Society for Mathematical Biology Annual Meeting*.

\* **Decker, R.R.** 2016. “Mathematical ecology of climate change and invasive species” (invited seminar). *Sonoma State University Math Colloquium*.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**College of Natural Sciences Concentration in Teaching and Mentoring**, *pending*, Texas Institute for Discovery Education in Science, UT Austin (2023)

Helps faculty learn and practice teaching and mentoring skills; includes specializations in mentoring undergraduate research, online teaching, and inclusive teaching.

**Certificate in Inclusive STEM Teaching**, Improving Undergraduate STEM Education (IUSE) Inclusive STEM Teaching Project (2022)

Certificate in inclusive STEM teaching practices, designed to advance the awareness, self-efficacy and ability of STEM faculty, so that they may cultivate inclusive learning environments for all of their students.

**Volunteer Instructor**, High School Research Initiative, UT Austin (2020-2021)

I trained high school science teachers to incorporate research experiences in the classroom and taught methods of scientific inquiry using mathematical modeling and simulations. I demonstrated applications of math modeling to theoretical ecology.

**Guest Lecturer** - Ecology (ECL) 231 - Mathematical Methods in Population Biology, UCD (Fall 2018)

I was a guest lecturer in this graduate-level course for one week (two lectures).

**Guest Lecturer** - Wildlife, Fish and Conservation (WFC) 122 - Population Dynamics and Estimation, UCD (Spring 2016)

I gave one upper-division undergraduate lecture on fish and mammal population biology.

**Teaching Assistant** - Wildlife, Fish and Conservation (WFC) 122 - Population Dynamics and Estimation, UCD (Spring 2016)

I led two computer lab sections weekly, which consisted primarily of mathematical and statistical exercises performed in Microsoft Excel. I held weekly office hours and homework discussions, and graded students' lab assignments and quizzes.

**Teaching Assistant** - Environmental Science and Policy (ESP) 100 - General Ecology, UCD (Fall 2015)

I led three discussion sections weekly, facilitated discussion of scientific articles, developed materials for the discussion component of the course, conducted review sessions prior to exams, developed exam questions and graded students' assignments.

**Noyce Scholar Instructional Student Assistant** - SSU Department of Mathematics and Statistics (2012-2013)

Supported by funding from the Noyce Scholarship Program, I tutored four sections of

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Modern Geometry and one section of Symmetry in the Arts and Sciences over the course of three semesters. I led these lower division general education math courses during multiple weekly meetings structured as discussion sessions, and graded homework assignments. I also maintained gradebooks for both sections, reported summaries of students' learning and maintained a solutions manual for homework assignments, midterms and quizzes.

## **REFeree ACTIVITIES**

The American Naturalist

Ecology Letters

Bulletin of Mathematical Biology

Theoretical Ecology

Biological Invasions

Theoretical Population Biology

National Science Foundation Division of Environmental Biology

Ecology

## **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

Ecological Society of America

Society for Mathematical Biology

## **AWARDS & HONORS**

MathWorks Poster Prize at the Society for Mathematical Biology Annual Meeting (2017)

Graduated with Distinction, SSU Department of Mathematics & Statistics (2014)

SSU Department of Mathematics and Statistics Service Award (2014)

Honorary School of Science and Technology Student Banner Carrier for the Sonoma State University Commencement Ceremony (2014)

Dean's List, SSU (2011-14)

Meritorious Winner, COMAP Mathematical Contest in Modeling (2013)

## **COMMUNITY SERVICE & OUTREACH**

**Judge** for Lotka Volterra Awards (student oral presentations) in the Theoretical Ecology section of the Ecological Society of America (2021)

**Discussion Panelist** Subjects and Skills for Graduate Students in the Biological Sciences (BIO 389D), UT Austin (2020-21)

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**Member**, Equity and Inclusion Group, Department of Integrative Biology, UT Austin (2019-)

**Graduate Student Representative** Search Committee for Applied Ecosystem Modeler in Department of Environmental Science and Policy, UC Davis (2017-18)

**Founding member**, Population Biology Diversity Committee, UC Davis (2016-18)

**Student Assistant Planner**, Mathematical Association of America Golden Section Meeting and Sonoma State University Science Symposium (2014)

**Volunteer classroom assistant & tutor** Algebra Intervention program, Windsor Middle School (2012)

**President**, Pi Mu Epsilon Mathematics Honor Society, California Nu, SSU (2011-14)

- Coordinated and led annual Regional Applied Mathematics Conference
- Developed semester-long, weekly math competition
- Wrote grants and received over \$2400 from national math organizations to improve student attendance to math conferences

## REFERENCES

**Alan Hastings**, Distinguished Professor (Graduate Advisor)  
Department of Environmental Science and Policy, University of California, Davis  
amhastings@ucdavis.edu • 530/752-8116

**Caroline E Farrior**, Assistant Professor (Postdoctoral Advisor)  
Department of Integrative Biology, University of Texas, Austin  
cfarrior@utexas.edu • 512/232-6922

**Marissa Baskett**, Professor (Dissertation Committee Member)  
Department of Environmental Science and Policy, University of California, Davis  
mlbaskett@ucdavis.edu • 530/752-1579