

Clippings

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Dan Peck Joins Cornell Turf Team

The position of soil ecologist and leader of the soil insect ecology group at Geneva, which has been vacant since the death of Mike Villani in May of 2001, will be filled in January 2003 when Daniel C. Peck joins the Cornell faculty as an assistant professor in entomology.

“It will be very difficult to replace Dr. Mike Villani, who was a world-renowned leader on soil insects,” said entomology department chairman Wendell Roelofs. “However, we are very pleased to have a person of Dan Peck’s qualifications and enthusiasm join our department and continue this program. We are excited that he will be continuing many of the projects that are ongoing in the soil insect ecology lab, and branching into new areas as needed.”


“I consider myself an applied insect ecologist,” said Peck. “Geneva is a place where you can do some very satisfying work which combines applied entomology and theoretical ecology.”

The research program focuses on insect pests associated with the soil, and the horticultural crops for which these insects are significant, particularly turfgrass. Peck has a special interest in applying questions of soil ecology to pest control—how better soil management would also provide better pest management. “There’s

still a lot of work that needs to be done in identifying the patterns and variation, and in overcoming some of the challenges of studying insects in the soil,” he said.

In particular, Peck said he wants to investigate the potential of biological controls for these pests. “Turfgrass is very pesticide intensive,” he said. “We’re seeing more and more public support for reducing those chemical inputs because of safety concerns, pesticide phaseout, and cost.” He hopes to collaborate with other Geneva researchers to evaluate new systems for insect control that combine different biological controls, or biological and chemical controls, that will reduce the amount of pesticides used.

Peck has considerable experience with soil-borne insects that he gained in his six years at the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Colombia. At CIAT, one of his areas of research was pasture grass pest management. His research included control of spittlebug species, which are also a minor pest of turfgrass in the southeastern United States. He said he became interested in the complex soil/insect system while conducting that work.

Peck grew up in Minnesota, earned his undergraduate degree in entomology and zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1988, and his Ph.D. in entomology from Cornell in 1996. He spent the next six years in Cali, Colombia, at CIAT, as a post doc, then as a senior research fellow. 

Peter Seem

