

Nature's insight into what makes scientists tick.

Summarize yourself in the form of a title of a paper in Nature.

Patterns of adaptive evolution and ecological diversification.

What was your first experiment as a child?

When I was eight, I mixed hydrochloric acid and ammonium hydroxide. I'm proud that I identified the product as 'sal ammoniac' — ammonium chloride. I also remember alarming my parents with the odour.

Who has been the most important mentor in your career?

My PhD adviser, Sue Wessler, who gave me the freedom to do some of the first molecular evolution work in her laboratory. That laid the foundation for my current scientific interests.

What makes a good scientific mentor?

Someone who is both supportive and challenging, and makes sure you don't get away with sloppy thinking.

What single scientific paper or talk changed your career path?

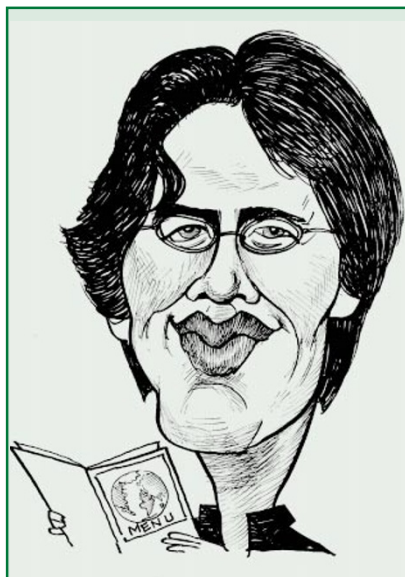
'Adaptive evolution in the stomach lysozymes of foregut fermenters' by Caro-Beth Stewart (C. B. Stewart, J. W. Schilling and A. C. Wilson *Nature* **330**, 401–404; 1987). I read it while browsing in the library at Columbia where I was a graduate student. It got me thinking about the molecular basis for evolutionary adaptations.

What book has been most influential in your scientific career?

One day I went into a used bookstore across the street from the café where I was studying and I saw William Bateson's *Problems of Genetics*. I started to read and was engrossed. Two things struck me: first, that the early geneticists were describing phenomena that we could more readily interpret today (I scribbled notes like "transposable elements!" on the margins). The second was that early geneticists were looking at species that would never be considered 'model organisms' today. This book made me begin to study the evolutionary genetics of natural populations using the modern tools of molecular and developmental genetics.

What literary character would you employ as a postdoc?

P. G. Wodehouse's Jeeves. He is highly intelligent (it's all that fish he eats), able to solve complex problems, unflappable, has a mastery of detail and is well-read. My current postdocs, however, although they have many of these qualities, lack one Jeeves trait — what Bertie Wooster describes as 'the feudal spirit'. It may be for the best.



Michael Purugganan

Michael Purugganan is an associate professor of genetics at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, where he studies plant molecular evolution. He likes modern art, tequila and is inordinately fond of black clothes.

What's your favourite conference destination, and why?

Bodega Bay, California. There is nothing to do there but eat barbecued oysters and sample the local vintages.

What book currently resides on your bedside table?

Felipe Fernández-Armesto's *Civilizations*, and a collection of Dorothy L. Sayers' detective stories featuring her *bon-vivant* sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey.

What music heads the playlist in your car or laboratory?

The Joshua Tree by U2, and a compilation of the Verve recordings of the Brazilian bossanova master Antonio Carlos Jobim. The latter keeps me calm when stuck in traffic. Road rage is such an ugly thing.

Where and when would you most like to have lived or worked?

I would love to live 1,000 years from now and see how it all works out.

Assuming the dead can be raised and/or time travel exists, who from the world outside science would you most like to have dinner with?

Paul Gauguin, Gabriel Garcia Marquez — and José Rizal, the nineteenth-century Filipino nationalist writer, scholar and

renaissance man whose work helped spark the Philippine revolution against Spain.

You are on a plane behind two students obviously going to the same conference, who start to talk about your work. What do you do?

I would join in without saying who I am.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

Never, ever take anything for granted.

What do you most dislike about having research published?

People treat publications as if they are carved in stone. Research is a dynamic enterprise, and a publication is only a chapter in on-going debates.

The Internet is the bane of scientists' lives because...

I never go to the library any more. I used to go at least once a week and browse the journals. It was a great way to keep up, and glance at papers far from my own interests.

What do you do to relax?

I'm a big foodie, so I'm always on the lookout for good restaurants. Some of my lab folks think that if they give me the name of a city I can probably tell them where to get a great meal.

What would you have become, if not a scientist?

I moonlighted as a journalist to put myself through college in the Philippines, writing on politics and economics — not the safest thing to do in a dictatorship. When I was in my third year at the University of the Philippines, I got a call from the Manila bureau chief of Associated Press (AP) and offered a position — on the spot — as one of AP's Manila correspondents. I turned it down, but it was tempting.

What single discovery, invention or innovation would most improve your life?

Do you think matter-energy transport is possible?

Name one extravagance you can now get away with because of your eminence.

Not having to buy the cheap airline ticket with the Saturday-night stayover.

What music would you have played at your funeral?

John Williams' *The Raiders March*, the theme for the Indiana Jones movies. Death is just another adventure.

What's just around the corner?

Evolutionary and ecological genomics. It's already happening, and suggests the ability to scan genomes and study links between molecular, organismal and ecological phenomena. ■