

A Brief History of the Duke University Department of Biology

With the founding of Duke University in the 1920s, the Biology Department was created around a pair of Trinity College professors, Bert Cunningham, a zoologist, and Hugo Blomquist, a botanist. In 1927 they were joined by Arthur Pearse, a prominent ecologist and former president of the Ecological Society of America. Pearse added to the prestige of the department with his founding of *Ecological Monographs*, the first scientific journal published by Duke University Press. As the department moved to the Biology Building on the newly constructed West Campus, tensions between the botanists and zoologists led to a departmental rift. Eventually this rift led to the dissolution of the department in 1935 and the creation of the Botany Department, led by Blomquist, and the Zoology Department, led by Pearse.

The growth in the new departments was complemented by the addition of new facilities. These included the first greenhouses in 1930, the Herbarium in 1931, the Sarah P. Duke Gardens in 1934, and the Phytotron—one of the nation's first—in 1968. The departments were also instrumental in launching the Department of Forestry in 1934, the Marine Laboratory in 1937, and the Organization of Tropical Studies in 1967. Both departments along with the School of Forestry were moved to the present Biological Sciences Building on Science Drive in 1962. Overcrowding resulted in the Developmental, Cell and Molecular Biology faculty moving their labs and offices to the Levine Science Research Center in 1994. The move to the new French Family Science Center in 2007 allowed many faculty members to move to state-of-the-art research facilities and physically reunited the department.

After World War II, the departments gained strong reputations in the fields of ecology, physiology, and systematics. During the 1970s and 1980s, greater research emphasis was placed on botany and zoology at the cellular and molecular level. Emphasis was also placed on interdisciplinary research across the Duke campus with faculty members participating in interdepartmental graduate programs. The first one, the University Program in Genetics, was founded in 1967 and was followed by the University Program in Ecology, the Developmental Biology Program, the Cell and Molecular Biology Program, and the Bioinformatics and Genome Technology Program.

Eventually the separate Departments of Botany and Zoology began to drift back together. The two departments began co-teaching introductory biology in 1966 and offered a biology major in 1978. In 2000 the two departments dissolved and re-formed as the Department of Biology. Research interests within the department include genomics, cell and molecular biology, developmental biology, ecology and population biology, evolution, genetics, organismal biology and behavior, and systematics.