key role in training young ecologists who are attracted to his Center for African Ecology from various parts of Africa and abroad. According to one former student, "Norman provides a role model for African ecologists by demonstrating that we can aspire to international recognition by conducting good research in our own ecosystems."

Dr. Owen-Smith epitomizes the best of our profession: an unusual ability to combine meticulous field studies with ground-breaking theoretical models, a concern for preserving wildlife and maintaining biodiversity, and, not least, a commitment to improving the lives of others. He is a role model for us all.

Honorary Member Award Subcommittee: Laurel R. Fox (Chair), James Coleman, Denise Dearing, Anthony Ives, Richard Ostfeld, Sarah Woodin, John Zak

GEORGE MERCER AWARD

The George Mercer Award is the oldest of the awards granted by ESA, and is given in memory of a young British ecologist who was killed in action in World War I. The award is given to an author under 40 years old in recognition of a single outstanding paper in ecology published during the past 2 years. The winners of the Mercer Award for 2000 are David Hooper, now at Western Washington University, with Peter Vitousek of Stanford University. The award is made for their 1998 paper, "Effects of plant composition and diversity on nutrient cycling," published in *Ecological Monographs* 68(1):121–149. The study is the culmination of Dr. Hooper's dissertation work while at Stanford, working under Peter Vitousek's guidance. This year's Mercer Award winners used a creative set of field experiments to address a critical and controversial question in ecology: the extent to which species richness and species identity affect ecosystem processes.

David Hooper

In this research, David Hooper experimentally evaluated the effects of plant functional group richness and plant composition on seasonal patterns of soil nitrogen, phosphorus, and water availability in a California serpentine grassland community. Whereas previous investigators have mostly used correlative approaches or small-scale laboratory experiments, the authors took a manipulative and mechanistic approach to examine the interface between functional group richness and ecosystem-level processes directly in the field. Another major strength of the paper is its examination of both *direct* effects of plant uptake on nutrient retention and *indirect* effects of plants on microbial processes. In fact, the authors conclude that indirect effects of plants on ecosystem processes can be at least as important as direct effects.

The study represents an excellent example of a field-based, empirical test of current ecosystem theory at the long-neglected interface between community and ecosystem ecology. The Mercer Award subcommittee is happy to be able to present this year's award for such an outstanding paper.

Mercer Award Subcommittee: Nichlas Gotelli (Chair), Catherine Bach, Margaret Palmer, Mary Price, Alison Brady, Aaron Ellison, Mark McPeek