

First Grand Prize Winner experiences career snowball effect



For many young researchers, the transition to establishing your independence as a principal investigator can be challenging. However, for Daniel Streicker, receiving the *Science* & SciLifeLab Prize for Young Scientists gave him the visibility he needed to get the ball rolling. And it has gained momentum ever since.

In the autumn of 2013, Daniel Streicker had just left the United States to pursue a fellowship at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. Whilst spending an evening with friends at the local pub, he received a voicemail message from an editor at *Science* magazine announcing that he had been selected Grand Prize Winner of the *Science* & SciLifeLab Prize for Young Scientists. Daniel had applied for the award a few months earlier by submitting an essay describing his PhD studies on rabies in bats, which explored the transmission of infectious disease between species. Initially, he could not believe that he had actually won.

"The first emotion that struck me was disbelief", Daniel recalled. "But after listening to that voicemail several times and finding a confirmatory e-mail, I realized that the whole thing was real"

In December that year, Daniel Streicker and the three other category winners were invited to Stockholm to receive their awards and to participate in an eventful week.

"The prize ceremony at the Hall of Mirrors was really special for me", said Daniel. "The atmosphere of the room, knowing its history, and the mixture of people that were there – it was an impressive experience. When I got to attend the Nobel festivities that same week, I felt like I was put in a parallel world."

Looking back, Daniel is grateful for the impact winning the prize has had on his career.

"Getting a research essay published in *Science* magazine and receiving this award absolutely feeds in to a series of accomplishments that make you more visible internationally", he said.

After getting the prize, Daniel was awarded a Sir Henry Dale Fellowship from the Wellcome Trust and the Royal Society, who have funded his research ever since. He also received a National Geographic Emerging Explorer Prize and a Wellcome-Beit Prize.

"These awards demonstrate that you are operating towards the top of your field and doing work that is both intellectually interesting and potentially leading to societal importance. Combining this recognition with the actual research output can really move your career to the next level."



Photo: Jim Caryl

Dr. Daniel G Streicker is now a Sir Henry Dale Research Fellow at the Institute of Biodiversity, Animal Health and Comparative Medicine and the Medical Research Council Centre for Virus Research at the University of Glasgow, Scotland.

Today, Daniel Streicker runs a research group of seven people, as well as two field teams in Peru. The general theme of his research is applying ecological and evolutionary approaches to large datasets to understand, forecast and ultimately prevent disease transmission within and between species.

"My team's recent studies have shown that outbreaks of vampire bat rabies spread across the landscape in predictable wavefronts that are fueled by the dispersal of male bats. Using a genetic approach, we were able to forecast not only which areas had highest risk but also the routes that the virus might take to arrive. Now, we are using whole genome sequencing of rabies viruses collected before, during and after a culling campaign to understand how the social disturbance of bat culls might affect the spatial spread of rabies."

With partners in the US and Peru, Daniel has also initiated a project around the possibility of creating an oral rabies vaccine for wild bats. The gel vaccine would be applied topically to the back of one bat and then spread to other bats by grooming.

Science & SciLifeLab Prize for Young Scientists

An annual award instated by *Science* magazine/AAAS and SciLifeLab, a Swedish national center for molecular biosciences, in order to promote young scientists and recognize excellent PhD thesis work. The prize is enabled by the kind support of the Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation.

scienceprize.scilifelab.se