

E. LUCY BRAUN AWARD

E. Lucy Braun was an eminent plant ecologist and the first woman president of the Ecological Society of America. Besides describing and mapping the deciduous forest regions of eastern North America, she served as a dedicated teacher and role model to her students. To honor her, this award is presented to a student for the outstanding poster presentation at the Society's Annual Meeting.

The 2012 winner of the Braun Award is Ernane H. M. Vieira Neto, for his poster entitled "How proximity to roads influences the



local spatial dynamics and population growth rates of a Neotropical herbivore." This work was based on Ernane's research with Heraldo L. Vasconcelos, Alan N. Costa, and Fabiane M. Mundim at the University of Florida under the supervision of Emilio Bruna.

Ernane investigated the possible positive impacts that roads in the Neotropics may have on the leaf-cutter ant *Atta laevigata*. For four years, Ernane and his colleagues marked, mapped, and followed ant colonies in a 19-ha Cerrado site in Brazil that was surrounded by dirt roads. They found that colonies were significantly closer to the roads than would be expected by chance and that populations near roads grew 65% faster than those distant from roads. These findings suggest that *A. laevigata* populations may be expanding with the improvement of road networks in the Cerrado.

Judges found that Ernane was extremely knowledgeable about the study system, the impacts of his research, and the literature about his question. Others remarked on Ernane's great enthusiasm about his research and his careful consideration of alternative hypotheses explaining his data. The judges felt that his work brought important attention to the positive effects that roads may have on some species in the Cerrado system.