

# SPEAKER BIOS

**Dr. Mas Dojiri** is currently the Assistant General Manager at LA Sanitation & Environment (LASAN). He is the Executive in charge of the Biodiversity, Healthy Soils, Environmental Justice, Clean Up Green Up, Risk Management, and the Los Angeles River Watershed Monitoring Programs. Mas serves as a member of the Board of Governors of the Southern California Coastal Ocean Observing System, the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission's Technical Advisory Committee, the USC Sea Grant Advisory Council, and serves on the Board of Commissioners for the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project.



**Michelle Barton** is an Environmental Specialist at LA Sanitation & Environment (LASAN). She serves as the technical lead for LASAN's Biodiversity Program and is currently working to perform the baseline measurement of the brand new LA Biodiversity Index. She is also involved with Departmental efforts on healthy soils, environmental justice, and urban forestry. Michelle earned her B.S. in Biology from UCLA in 2010 and her M.S. in Biology from CSULB in 2016.



**Isaac Brown** is a Senior Scientist at Stillwater Sciences. He is nationally recognized for his work as a landscape ecologist, planner, and designer, specializing in urban biodiversity and ecosystem management solutions for projects ranging in scale from individual parcels to metropolitan regions. Isaac has applied these concepts for the City of LA, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, the Singapore Urban Redevelopment Authority, Arizona State Lands, and a variety of other public and private sector clients worldwide. Isaac holds BSc in Resource Ecology & Management and Master of Landscape Architecture degrees from the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment. He holds a Doctorate of Environmental Science and Engineering from the UCLA Institute of Environment and Sustainability.



**Lila Higgins** grew up on a farm in the U.K., where she had lots of time for unsupervised play. This is how she learned to love nature. After moving to the U.S. she pursued degrees in Entomology and Environmental Education. Her work focuses on connecting people to nature, particularly in urban settings. She currently oversees the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County's community science program and is the co-founder of the City Nature Challenge.



**Dr. Eric Wood** is an Assistant Professor in the Biology Department at California State University Los Angeles and the principal investigator of the Avian Ecology and Conservation Lab. He earned a BSc from Cal Poly San Luis Obispo (Biology), an MSc from Humboldt State University (Wildlife), and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin (Wildlife). Before joining Cal State LA, he was a postdoctoral researcher with the Forest Service and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.



**Kat Superfisky** is a designer, educator, and ecologist who devotes her days, nights and dreams to transforming urban areas into more “symbiotic cities”. After obtaining a MS in Ecology and Master of Landscape Architecture from the University of Michigan, Kat moved to Los Angeles for the L.A. River. Kat is the City of L.A.’s Urban Ecologist, a Professor at California State Polytechnic University Pomona, and serves on the Board of Directors for California ReLeaf.



**Carol Bornstein** is former Director of Living Collections at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, where she oversaw development and care of the museum’s 3.5-acre Nature Gardens. For nearly 30 years, she was horticulturist at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. Carol is co-author of the award-winning California Native Plants for the Garden and Reimagining the California Lawn. She has selected and introduced several popular cultivars for California gardens, including Verbena lilacina ‘De La Mina’ and Corethrogyne filaginifolia ‘Silver Carpet’ and she continues to share her knowledge of plants native to California and other Mediterranean climate regions through her teaching, writing, and design work.



**Prof. Natale Zappia** has directed, created, and participated in multiple projects related to food systems, urban farming, environmental sustainability, and food justice for two decades. As Director for the Institute for Sustainability at CSUN, Dr. Zappia is involved in numerous campus-wide, regional, and national sustainability projects, including overseeing climate and CO2 reduction initiatives. At Whittier College, he co-directed the Sustainable Urban Farm Lab (SURF), where he coordinated programming related to permaculture, environmental history and studies, and the humanities.



**Don Larson** describes himself as an entrepreneurial-spirited CSUN alumni with a background in community leadership, business advocacy and volunteerism. He is especially proud of his work on homelessness and the environment. He is forging a brand new, dynamic Sustainability Pollinator Project with CSUN, Council District 12, and the North Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce. Eventually, every CD12 city planter and unused vacant lot will be dedicated to attracting bees, butterflies, and birds.



**Dr. Brad Shaffer** is an evolutionary and conservation biologist who combines genomics and field ecology to manage and restore biodiversity. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees at UC Berkeley and the University of Chicago, and has been a faculty member at the University of California Los Angeles for 35 years. He is Director of the UCLA/La Kretz Center for California Conservation Science, the Stunt Ranch Reserve, and the California Conservation Genomics Project. He studies reptiles and amphibians.



**Dr. Joscha Beninde** uses landscape genetics to understand how species survive and thrive in urban environments, with the goal of increasing the biodiversity of native species. At UCLA, he is working on a comparative landscape genomics project to map the genetic diversity of 20 species of plants, invertebrates and vertebrates inhabiting the LA Basin. Joscha's research builds on his Ph.D. work in Germany, where he studied how urban infrastructure affects gene flow within a lizard species.



**Dr. Erin Toffelmier** is a conservation biologist who uses genomic and spatial modeling approaches to study species distributions and conservation. She is particularly focused on amphibian and reptile species native to California. She received her undergraduate and graduate degrees from UCLA. She is a Postdoctoral Scholar and the Associate Director for the California Conservation Genomics Project at UCLA.



**Dr. Eric Strauss** is President's Professor of Biology at Loyola Marymount University and Executive Director of the LMU Center for Urban Resilience ([lmu.edu/cures](http://lmu.edu/cures)). His research includes wildlife ecology, urban ecosystems, and science education. Dr. Strauss has previously taught at Tufts University, The University of Massachusetts Boston and Boston College. Moving from Cape Cod to Los Angeles provides Eric the opportunity to see hummingbirds throughout the year, although he does miss the constant chatter of chickadees in the scrub woodlands.

