

Science **STORIES!**



W.K. Kellogg
Biological Station
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

kbs.msu.edu

ROBIN WATERMAN

Ph.D. candidate

*W.K. Kellogg Biological Station
Michigan State University*

SO, WHAT DO YOU DO?

I am an evolutionary ecologist, so I study both how organisms currently interact with their environments and how they evolve to become better suited to their environments over time. My study organisms are weedy plants found locally in Michigan—you've probably seen them on a roadside, sidewalk edge, or garden, even if you didn't know it!



HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR WAY TO THIS CAREER PATH?

When I was a kid, I loved exploring the natural world at local and national parks, especially when I could use my observations to solve puzzles and meet challenges presented by activity books like those of the Junior Ranger program. My interest in evolution was sparked by seeing dramatic examples of evolutionary histories in the fossil record at natural history museums. I knew I wanted to learn more, so I studied biology during my undergraduate degree and joined a research lab examining how plants respond to shade within and across generations. I wanted to keep doing research, so I started a Ph.D. in Plant Biology and Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior at Michigan State. Here I study how agricultural weeds rapidly adapt to crop fields.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?

My typical day changes every year and season. During the warm growing season last year, I spent most of my time visiting local field sites to make observations and collect seeds from my study species. This summer, I've spent most of my time maintaining and measuring my research plants in the greenhouse. Next growing season, I will be planting thousands of weeds in outdoor plots and hoping at least some of them survive the danger of harsh weather and herbivores. In the cool off-season, I usually analyze data, prepare funding applications, and write about my research. Outside of research tasks, I also work on outreach and education programming to share my science with the public and improve my communication skills.

It's research like mine that helps us understand how plants adapt to new environments.

CONNECT

Email: watrm29@msu.edu

WITH ROBIN:

Twitter: [@RobinWEcoEvo](https://twitter.com/RobinWEcoEvo)