

Rene D. Francolini

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EDUCATION:

Ph.D., Marine Biology 2020-2025

University of Maine, Darling Marine Center, Walpole, ME

Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences, Boothbay, ME

Thesis: *Genetic Insights on Kelp Forests and Climate Change in the Gulf of Maine*

Advisors: Dr. Doug Rasher & Dr. Damian Brady

M.S., Computational Biology 2015-2016

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA

Thesis: *Analysis of ChIP-Seq Data to Determine Functional Uses of Primary and Secondary Tbrain Motifs*

Advisor: Dr. Veronica Hinman

B.S., Biological Sciences 2011-2015

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA

RESEARCH INTERESTS:

Marine Ecosystem Biology; Bioinformatics; Science Communication; Molecular Ecology; Applied Coastal Research; Environmental Impacts; Climate Change Response; Conservation Policy; Marine Sciences; Population Genomics

RESEARCH:

Graduate Research Assistant July 2020 – December 2025

Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences

Conducted high-resolution population genomics studies along the outer coast of Maine on foundational kelp species that are vital to ecosystem management and aquaculture industry. Quantified presence and forecasted future concentrations of invasive organisms using integrative approaches of environmental DNA, ecological modeling, and climate forecasting.

Advisors: Dr. Doug Rasher & Dr. Damian Brady

Research Assistant III: Govindarajan Laboratory December 2018 – June 2020

Research Assistant II: Govindarajan Laboratory June 2018 – December 2018

Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

Developed protocols to use environmental DNA to identify and build a library of eukaryotic animals inhabiting the mesopelagic zone of the ocean. Participated in research expeditions to collect and process eDNA and zooplankton samples. Collaborated with engineers to design large scale *in situ* eDNA sampling instrument.

Advisor: Dr. Annette Govindarajan

Research Assistant III: Stegeman Laboratory December 2018 – November 2019

Research Assistant II: Stegeman Laboratory February 2017 – December 2018

Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

Studied the effects of environmental toxicants using zebrafish and killifish as model organisms. Generated, genotyped, and maintained multiple wildtype and CRISPR zebrafish lines. Analyzed the effects of pharmaceuticals and sewage on oysters.

Advisor: Dr. Jed Goldstone

Master's Thesis Research January 2015 – May 2016

Carnegie Mellon University

Utilized computational methods to analyze raw ChIP-Seq data and identify binding locations of transcription factor Tbrain in *P. miniata* and *S. purpuratus* to determine evolutionary significance of presence of secondary binding site in orthologous genes.

Advisor: Dr. Veronica Hinman

Undergraduate Research Intern

Summer 2014

Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology, University of Hawaii - Manoa

Investigated the relationship of *Montipora* coral and algae metabolomics in abnormal temperature zones through NMR analysis of metabolite extractions. Examined spawning patterns and growth of *Montipora* coral in varying carbon dioxide conditions.

Advisor: Dr. Ruth Gates

Andes to Amazon Study Abroad

Summer 2013

Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation

Conducted field work in El Pahuma cloud forest, Tiputini Biodiversity Station, and Lalo Loor Dry Forest Ecological Station in Ecuador, focusing on zoology and botany of wet and dry forest ecosystems.

Advisor: Dr. Joe Meisel

Phage Genomics Research

2011-2012

Carnegie Mellon University

Isolated, characterized, and analyzed unique bacteriophages using molecular and computational techniques including an Ion Torrent Personal Genome Machine.

Advisors: Dr. Maggie Braun & Dr. John Jarvik

Summer Research Intern

2007-2012

Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Massachusetts Audubon Society

Conducted juvenile horseshoe crab surveys, maintained diamondback terrapin nest protection enclosures, and aided in oyster reef spawning and restoration projects.

Advisor: Mark Faherty

**TEACHING
EXPERIENCE:****Instructor: Girls Who Code – Boothbay Region**

January 2022 – June 2025

Girls Who Code – Boothbay Harbor Memorial Library

Weekly club focused on teaching girls from 5th-8th grade how to code using online block programming languages through creating animations and interactive games.

Instructor: 2021 Maine-eDNA Metabarcoding Workshop

December 2021

University of Maine – Maine EPSCoR

Taught how to process and visualize metabarcoding sequencing data, from raw sequences to amplicon sequence variants, using a dada2 and phyloseq pipeline.

Instructor: 2021 Bigelow Data Carpentry Workshop

April 2021

Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences

Topics taught include best data management practices, introduction to R, manipulating data in R, plotting in R, and visualizing ocean data

Teaching Assistant:**Experimental Biochemistry**

Spring 2015

Experimental Techniques in Molecular Biology and Genetics

Fall 2014

Carnegie Mellon University

Led review and extension sessions for students to ensure understanding of difficult material and graded problem sets, quizzes, and tests for the class.

Advisor: Dr. Carrie Doonan

Teacher: Research Experience in Marine Sciences

Summer 2014

Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology

Taught 20 high school students marine science, experimental design, how to write lab reports, and presentation skills. Guided student group projects on topics including jellyfish zooxanthellae and snapping shrimp regeneration.

Advisor: Dr. Malia Rivera

Day Camp Instructor: Natural History Day Camp

2011-2013

Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Massachusetts Audubon Society

Arranged and taught lessons on migration, natural habitats, salt marshes, native organisms, and coastal waterways for students age 4-15 years old. Led and managed educational tours for families focused on the environment & conservation of Cape Cod.

PUBLICATIONS:

R.D. Francolini, R.S. Sleith, K.M. Cammen, D. Brady, D.B. Rasher. (in prep) *Population Genomics of Laminaria digitata along the Coast of Maine Uncovers Presence of Hedophyllum nigripes*.

R.D. Francolini, R.S. Sleith, K.M. Cammen, D. Brady, D.B. Rasher. (in prep) *Assessing Genetic Diversity and Population Structure of Saccharina latissima along the Coast of Maine*.

R.D. Francolini, S.P. Farrell, Y.M. Shah Esmaeili, D.S. Yiu, D. Brady, D.B. Rasher. (in prep) *Detecting and projecting the presence of Membranipora membranacea (lacy bryozoan) in the Gulf of Maine using eDNA*.

Y.M. Shah Esmaeili, S.P. Farrell, **R.D. Francolini**, D.S. Yiu, D.B. Rasher. (in prep) *eDNA and visual surveys provide complementary assessments of kelp forest biodiversity*.

A. Bucklin, P.G. Batta-Lona, J.M. Questel, H. McMonagle, M. Wojcicki, J.K. Llopiz, S. Glancy, P.E. Caiger, **R.D. Francolini**, A. Govindarajan, S.R. Thorrold, M. Jech, P.H. Wiebe. (2024) *Metabarcoding and morphological analysis of diets of mesopelagic fishes in the NW Atlantic Slope Water*. Frontiers in Marine Science. Volume 11, doi: 10.3389/fmars.2024.1411996. [full text](#).

E. Schutt, **R.D. Francolini**, N. Price, Z. Olson, C.J. Byron. (2023) *Supporting ecosystem services of habitat and biodiversity in temperate seaweed (Saccharina spp.) farms*. Marine Environmental Research. Volume 191, doi: 10.1016/j.marenvres.2023.106162. [full text](#).

A.F. Govindarajan, L. McCartin, A. Adams, E. Allan, A. Belani, **R.D. Francolini**, J. Fujii, D. Gomez-Ibanez, A. Kukulya, F. Marin, K. Tradd, D.R. Yoerger, J.M. McDermott, S. Herrera. (2022) *Improved biodiversity detection using a large-volume environmental DNA sampler with in situ filtration and implications for marine eDNA sampling strategies*. Deep Sea Research Part I: Oceanographic Research Papers. Volume 189, doi: 10.1016/j.dsr.2022.103871. [full text](#).

A.F. Govindarajan, **R.D. Francolini**, J.M. Jech, A.C. Lavery, J.K. Llopez, P.H. Wiebe, W.G. Zhang. (2021) *Exploring the Use of Environmental DNA (eDNA) to Detect Animal Taxa in the Mesopelagic Zone*. Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution. Vol. 9, doi: 10.3389/fevo.2021.574877. [full text](#).

M. C. Salanga, N. R. Brun, **R.D. Francolini**, J. J. Stegeman, J. V. Goldstone. (2020) *CRISPR-Cas9 Mutated Pregnane X Receptor (pxr) Retains Pregnenolone-induced Expression of cyp3a65 in Zebrafish (Danio rerio) Larvae*. Toxicological Sciences, Vol. 174, Issue 1, pgs 51-62, doi: 10.1093/toxsci/kfz246. [full text](#).

G.A. Cary, A.M. Cheatle Jarvela, **R.D. Francolini**, V. F. Hinman. (2017) *Genome-wide use of high- and low- affinity Tbrain transcription factor binding sites during echinoderm development*. Proc Natl Acad Sci USA. Vol. 114 no. 23. 5854-5861, doi: 10.1073/pnas.1610611114. [full text](#).

Pope WH, Bowman CA, et al. (2015) *Whole genome comparison of a large collection of mycobacteriophages reveals a continuum of phage genetic diversity*. Kolter R, ed. eLife. 2015; 4:e06416. doi:10.7554/eLife.06416. **(contributing author)**. [full text](#).

INVITED

PRESENTATIONS:

Kelp the Planet: Seaweed's Impact on Climate and Changing Coasts. April 26, 2025. Maine Seaweed Week. Gulf of Maine Research Institute. Portland, ME. Panelist.

Population Genomics of *Saccharina latissima* Along the Coast of Maine. December 19, 2024. Department of Marine Resources. Augusta, ME. Invited Talk.

Population Genomics of *Saccharina latissima* Along the Coast of Maine. April 1, 2024. Alaska Seaweed Genetics Workshop. Juneau, AK. Invited Talk.

On Podcasting & Communicating Science. March 4, 2020. Sea Education Association. Woods Hole, MA. Invited Talk.

PRESENTATIONS:

Population Genomics of Kelps along the Coast of Maine. May 9, 2025. International Seaweed Symposium. Victoria, BC. British Columbia. Talk.

Population Genomics of *Saccharina latissima* along the Coast of Maine. November 8, 2024. Western Society of Naturalists Annual Meeting. Portland, OR. Talk.

Exploring Kelp Forest Ecology Along the Coast of Maine: Insights from eDNA. October 15, 2024. National EPSCoR Meeting. Omaha, NE. Poster.

Distribution, Seasonality, and Drivers of Lacy Bryozoan Along the Coast of Maine. June 20, 2024. Maine EPSCoR All-Hands Meeting. Portland, ME. Poster.

Population Genomics of the Gulf of Maine Kelp Forests. May 8, 2023. School of Marine Sciences Graduate Student Symposium. Walpole, ME. Talk.

Gulf of Maine Kelp Forests: Population Genomics and Responses to Climate-Driven Stressors. December 12, 2022. PhD Proposal Defense. Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences. Boothbay, ME. Talk.

Detecting the Presence of Lacy Bryozoan in Kelp Forests using eDNA. December 1, 2022. Maine EPSCoR Maine-eDNA All-Hands Meeting. Orono, ME. Graphical Abstract.

Rapid Change in Maine's Kelp Forests During the Hottest Year on Record. May 9, 2022. School of Marine Sciences Graduate Student Symposium. Walpole, ME. Poster.

Using Population Genetics to Characterize the Gulf of Maine Kelp Forests. May 11, 2021. School of Marine Sciences Graduate Student Symposium. Maine. Virtual Talk.

How are Gulf of Maine Kelp Forests Responding to Climate Change? October 26, 2020. Maine EPSCoR Maine-eDNA All-Hands Meeting. Maine. Virtual Talk.

LabOratory Podcast: Documenting Personal Narratives of Scientific Significance. February 17, 2020. Ocean Sciences. San Diego, CA. eLightning Session.

GRANTS:

Graduate Student Government Individual Grant, <i>University of Maine</i>	October 2024
Maine Sea Grant Program Development, co-written with Dr. Doug Rasher	April 2021
Graduate Student Government Individual Grant, <i>University of Maine</i>	March 2021
Technical Staff Training & Development Opportunity, <i>WHOI</i>	July 2018

SPECIAL

COURSEWORK:

Structural Equation Modeling for Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, <i>PR Statistics</i>	March 2023
OceanHackWeek, <i>University of Washington/Bigelow Laboratory</i>	August 2020

Strategies & Techniques for Analyzing Microbial Populations & Structures,

Marine Biological Laboratory

August 2018

Oxford Nanopore Training, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

December 2017

AWARDS:

Western Society of Naturalists Rafe Sagarin Award:

Best Student Paper in Observational Ecology

November 2024

NSF-GRFP Honorable Mention

April 2020

Academic Achievement Scholarship

2015-2016

CMU Senior Leadership Recognition

May 2015

Biology Student Advisory Council Service Award

May 2015

Alpha Phi Omega Distinguished Service Key

May 2015

CMU Dean's List

May 2014

CMU Dean's List with Honors

December 2013

Tartans Abroad Scholarship

Summer 2013

MENTORING:

Jeremy Goldrick, Bigelow Sea Change Semester Student, 2024

Katie Pell, WHOI Undergraduate Guest Student, 2020

Sarah Stover, WHOI Undergraduate Guest Student, 2019

Nicole Suren, WHOI Summer Student Fellow, 2018

OUTREACH:

Bigelow Open House, Volunteer

July 2025

Maine Science Festival, Volunteer

March 2025

Bigelow Open House, Volunteer

July 2023

GreenME UP!, Volunteer

April 2023

Marine Science Club, Seattle Aquarium, Invited Speaker

January 2023

Bigelow Open House, Volunteer

July 2022

QueerSci Talks, RIT COSLISC, Invited Speaker

October 2022

Skype A Scientist LIVE!, Invited Speaker, Virtual YouTube Event

March 2022

Skype A Scientist: Gifted Education, Bedford County Schools

February 2022

Skype A Scientist: Girl Guides of Canada

April 2021

Skype A Scientist: Ellis Mendell Elementary School 3rd Grade

March 2021

Skype A Scientist: MSU Montclair Marine Biology Organization

March 2021

Skype A Scientist: Parkway South High School AP Bio

March 2021

Falmouth Academy Science Fair, Judge

February 2021

LabOratory Podcast, Host & Producer

January 2020 – April 2021

Kai Talks Science, Falmouth Community TV, Interviewee

February 2020

Woods Hole Science Stroll, Volunteer

August 2017 & 2018

East Falmouth Elementary School 3rd Grade Field Trip, Instructor

2018

Falmouth Academy Science Fair, Judge

February 2018

Falmouth Volunteers in Public Schools High School, Tutor

2017-2018

East Falmouth Elementary School 3rd Grade Field Trip, Instructor

June 2017

Leonard Gelfand Center Biological Sciences Outreach, Instructor

2012-2016

Pennsylvania Junior Academy of Science Workshops, Instructor

2011-2016

CRUISES:

R/V Armstrong, Woods Hole, March 10 – March 16, 2020

R/V Manta, Texas, September 21 – September 27, 2019

R/V Henry B. Bigelow, Rhode Island, July 24 – August 8, 2019

S.S.V. Corwith Cramer, Visiting Scientist, Bermuda to NYC, April 22 – May 2, 2019