



The Spekboom

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2010



Reflections on 2010 as HOD



By Fred Ellery

2010 will be remembered as the year that South Africa (and Africa) hosted the World Cup. I could not help but being enthused by the event and saw a

few matches in the Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium. It was testimony to what South Africa and its people can achieve when they single-mindedly devote their imagination and energy to a cause – in this case to showcase the best of South Africa's ability, energy, diversity and hospitality. I have little doubt that those foreigners who visited this country were blown away.

I am consistently struck by the imagination and symbolism of the trophy that is awarded to the winning team. The competition has run since 1930, but according to the rules, a nation winning the competition for the third time is awarded the trophy in perpetuity. Brazil achieved this in the 1970 World Cup, and a new trophy needed to be made. The trophy was thus commissioned by FIFA to present at the 1974 World Cup, at which time the "Jules Rimet Trophy" was replaced by the current "FIFA World Cup Trophy". Branding and commercialization was becoming part and parcel of humanity's greatest sporting tradition.

The artist was Silvio Gazzaniga. The statue is 36.5 cm tall and made of 5kg of 18 carat gold. It depicts 2 human figures holding up the Earth. Gazzaniga described the trophy thus:

"The lines spring out from the base, rising in spirals, stretching out to receive the world. From the remarkable dynamic tensions of the compact body of the sculpture rise the figures of two ath-

letes at the stirring moment of victory" (<http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/marketing/marketing/fifaassets/trophy.html>). Stirring stuff – the image in the eye of the artist when he produced the trophy was brilliant!

Luckily, art is there to be interpreted by the beholder of the work. While the FIFA World Cup Trophy is a stunning image that has been deftly crafted as a work of art, the picture of human beings holding the world aloft as though it can be owned, and the manner in which it is held aloft as though we recognize it as our most valuable "possession", can be looked at differently. Does the way that we treat planet Earth reflect it as something that we value highly? Would you treat your most valuable "possession" in the way that we treat ours – polluting it with waste in ways that is damaging, and abusing those goods and services that are provided by Earth and sustain us. The carbon footprint of the event must have been stupendous and there was likely little thought about this amongst players and spectators alike!

So, 2010 was a memorable year. With respect to life in the Department, staff have, without exception, devoted enormous time and energy to making the Department a better space for all. But it was a tough year, with student contact time shortened by something like 2 weeks, and with Charlie on sabbatical for the first half of the year. The burden on remaining staff of not having someone like Charlie on board was telling. Despite our best efforts many were short-changed. As HoD I am looking forward to a break with my family this summer.

Apart from the normal things that

we do, a great achievement for us this year was the establishment of the Green Fund and the work that has gone into getting this fund growing. There was a Green Fund Run that people seemed to enjoy, and as a Department we are challenging all University constituents to make a small contribution to offsetting their carbon emissions by contributing to the Green Fund. We have set an amount of R 10 for every hour (or part thereof) in an aeroplane, and R 5 per 100 km travelled by vehicular transport. These are token gestures towards offsetting our carbon footprints, and will contribute in the long term to building a campus that **IS** more sustainable. Funds will go towards increasing rainwater harvesting, using alternative and more energy efficient technologies in new developments, and getting a better handle on how energy and water consumption vary across campus in order to target those energy and water intensive-use areas and reduce consumption. I will contribute from research grants where I travel for research purposes, and personally where I travel for purposes other than work. This is the right thing to do right now. Rhodes is trying to make a difference through the Green Fund – may I encourage you to rise to this challenge. Zelda has the account details for funds.

May I take this opportunity to wish all alumni, staff and current postgraduates a very happy and safe festive season.

Fred

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Q & A with Mike Powell



There is no doubt that environmental conservation runs deep within Mike Powell's veins. A Research Associate at the DES, Powell was recently honoured by the Rhodes University Environmental Committee at the annual awards ceremony for his tireless work in the fields of land restoration, conservation and environmental sustainability.

Powell has been involved in a variety of spheres with an interesting array of academic and management posts. Amongst these is a National Diploma in Conservation from Pretoria Technikon, a Bachelor of Science degree and a Master of Science obtained from Rhodes University. Powell's 16 years of professional experience have seen him involved as an ecologist, restoration planner, project manager and scientific advisor in organisations such as the Restoration Research

Group, the Gamtoos Irrigation Board and the Living Lands Group. Other institutions that have benefitted from Powell's expertise have previously included Conservation Support Services (C.S.S) in Grahamstown, Water's Meeting Reserve in Bathurst and Albany Working for Water.

I wandered into Mike's office on a hot Friday after tea ask him a few questions...

Zuki: Your love for the Eastern Cape is evident- what do you appreciate most about the Eastern Cape?

Mike: **The large, open spaces with untransformed habitat and botanical diversity**

Z: In the years since you began working in the field of restoration, what would you say have been milestones?

M : **More students have become aware of and involved in doing research in the area. It's important to create awareness through encouraging research by young people who are motivated and dedicated. We have also been able to establish the first carbon offset farm consisting of 2000 hectares of land that was previously overgrazed and not sustainable. Our inten-**

tion is to allow the land to rest for 30 years.

Z: You are also a Research Associate in the Department- how has your role in the department changed?

M: **it hasn't changed radically but I have a greater focus on elevating the Department's social responsibility profile with, for example assisting emerging black farmers with acquiring carbon credits and working with organisations like the Green Scorpions and the Centre for Social Justice in Cape Town.**

Z: If your life was a movie who would compose the soundtrack?

M: Xavier Rudd

Z: What ruffles your feathers?

M: **Bullies. Psychological bullies, economic bullies, political bullies...**

Z: What makes you want to frolic amongst the daisies?

M: **Seeing dewdrops on a green leaf in the early morning**

South East African Climate Consortium Student Forum



By Emily Mundy

SEACC SF, the South East African Climate Consortium Student Forum, is a student-led branch of the South East African Climate Consortium. It began in early 2010 as a movement led by two Rhodes students but will be established as a society at Rhodes as of 2011. The society aims to establish a student driven crusade focused on tackling issues of sustainability and climate change in the face of the ecological crisis our world is facing. A network will be developed that will connect and unify student environmentalists and environmental organisations across South East Africa. There are already sister branches set up at NMMU, Walter Sisulu and Fort Hare.

The movement calls on every department, every sector, and every person in each of the universities to go green. It is both a commitment on behalf of the participants as well as a challenge to others. Increasing numbers of students are urging their universities to commit to using more sustainable practices and asking the broader community to follow suit. The students involved have questioned the lack of changes towards sustainable running of the campuses. Suggested changes are, for example, not leaving departments lit up overnight and at weekends, simple electricity reduction processes, effective recycling systems, reduced water usage, internet-conferencing as opposed to endless travel, reduc-

Students participating in the Conference at Rhodes

ing meat consumption which weighs so heavily on the environment, and green technologies, such as the micro-wind turbines.

In its first year **SEACC SF** has already taken part in tree planting ceremonies, and global movements such as Earth Day and the 10:10 Global Working Party Initiative. The committee has also organised demonstrations to show the student body's support for decisive action to mitigate climate change and become sustainable. An online, interactive and educational course has also been set up as a knowledge commons dedicated to climate change and sustainability concerns. Anyone can upload or download information on the course at <http://ruconnected.ru.ac.za/course/view.php?id=2031>. **SEACC SF** recognises the incredible potential and responsibility of students to become involved in concerns that they will ultimately be faced with, and so aims to harness this potential and ensure the future leaders and key players in society are sustainability oriented. The society has many plans for the future including involvement in



the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change's 17th Conference of Parties which will be held in Cape Town in 2011, outreach programmes to improve the social, economic and environmental integrity of local areas, as well as the green campus initiatives. **SEACC SF** is a very promising society that is rapidly growing in popularity and strength and will no doubt have very beneficial implications for the universities, students and local communities in Southern Africa, and is definitely a society to look out for in the coming years.

“The movement calls on every department, every sector, and every person in each university to go green”

Musings of a doctoral student:

Sam Shranski



Sam with one of his research respondents in the Eastern Cape

“Many of the questionnaires attempted to gauge household assets, from radios to stoves and spears. These can serve as indicators of vulnerability if properly accounted for”.

Sitting at my desk across the pond in anticipation of another winter (must I endure cold weather again so soon?), I have to wonder: “Did I really just complete my preliminary PhD research three months ago?” Inevitably I find the answer is “yes.” Caught up in a flurry of pre-World Cup enthusiasm, actual World Cup delirium, and post-World Cup stupor, it’s a wonder that I got any work done at all. And it wasn’t simply that I took the opportunity to attend a couple of soccer matches that leads me to this conclusion: two plus months of field work on water access and governance, much of it done in the IDRC field sites, left me feeling that the socio-ecological issues I once thought were complex were, well, tortuously complex.

Like all good scientific exploits, and especially ones that engage people with real world concerns, the process of discovery is humbling. In each household I visited, and each field of mealies I inelegantly stomped through, I began to recognize that the research questions and methods I had developed in the abstract at this very desk, in the very un-South African

climes of Florida, were pretty pathetic. It was really only with the help of my amaXhosa friends and colleagues at Rhodes that I began to realize that the course I had staked out would lead me nowhere. Indeed, I might still have been asking questions as rhetorical as “why does amasi taste sour?” or “is it possible that you’re spreading dung on your floor?” had it not been for this support network. (I’ll have you know I committed neither faux pas.)

A final reflection on my experience in the Eastern Cape relates to uncertainty, both of the type I was attempting to explore in my research in the Eastern Cape, and of the type that affected me directly. Many of my household questionnaires attempted to gauge household assets, from radios to stoves to spears. These can serve as indicators of vulnerability if properly accounted for. While most respondents in the communities we worked in were often timid in relat-

ing what they did and didn’t have, it is no small bit of irony that when my own valuable asset, a laptop, was stolen in Grahamstown, I began to express to virtually everyone I met how a bit of myself was taken along with it. How silly that seems in hindsight, especially when the health and wellbeing of our fellow humans and their natural environments are based on assets that are far more fundamental. And, no, I’m not referring to vuvuzelas.

Sam spent time in the Department of Environmental Science from June-August 2010 while carrying out preliminary work for his doctorate research in Interdisciplinary Ecology. He is a student at the University of Florida.



Honors Community Engagement Report



A report on the Khanya Maths & Science club activities.

The day began with everyone meeting at the Albany Museum at 9am. An introduction was made and there followed an ice-breaker discussion on why the environment is important, humans and the environment and the

inter-relationships between humans and the environment. After this brief introduction, there was an interactive session where students asked the school children questions about their own knowledge of and experiences with environmental issues.

After the session, everyone

walked down to the Dept where a discussion was held on the value, use and importance of Spekboom. The learning objective for this section was for the children to be able to answer the following questions: - what is Spekboom; where is it found; why is it so important and how can you plant and grow

your own Spekboom tree?

After the informative discussion, the school children got to mix the soil that was to be used as potting soil for the Spekboom cutting. They cut their own stem of Spekboom from the main truncheon provided and then planted it into little bags that they filled with soil.

Once the Spekboom section was completed, everyone went back to the Albany Museum to undertake various classroom activities. An "Environmental Activities Booklet" was made for each child containing word searches, crosswords, quizzes and various other activities. The booklet activities served as a fun tool for testing and increasing the children's general knowledge and raising awareness about pre-

sent global environmental issues.

We received a lot of positive feedback from the children themselves, their co-ordinator and other students who volunteer with the club on a regular basis. The children were very excited about the 'hands on' approach to the Spekboom session and this translated into high levels of interaction and participation throughout the day. The one on one attention given to the students was also commended by their co-ordinator and the other volunteers. One volunteer commented that she had never seen the children become so alive and interactive.



Annual Research Forum

In early October the department hosted its annual research forum, which is the flagship event at which staff and postgraduates showcase and share their research ideas and findings. We were stimulated by presentations from two guest speakers. Dr Albrecht Goetz from the local SAEON office shared his insights on the problems associated with gathering long-term monitoring data, drawing from a range of examples from marine protected areas. He succinctly indicated the potential pitfalls with interpretations from short-term data sets, which is often the situation with data from post-graduate theses.

The following day Mr Lehman Lindeque (DAFF) spoke on land degradation in South Africa, describing research and inventory initiatives by the national government, as well as participatory techniques. Besides these two seminal contributions, the department hosted a full-house of internal presentations, with 24 verbal papers and two poster presentations.

The diversity of topics was quite staggering, representing an amazing testament to the breadth of activities in the department, drawing on techniques from household interviews and participatory rural appraisal groupwork, through to ecological sampling of key species in the field, to laboratory growth trials and radio-isotope marking. But depth within specific areas was also strongly evident, with an impressive clustering of papers around wetland issues, spekboom and thicket restoration research, backed up with a growing mass of work around adaptation to climate change, and project on the environmental dimensions of HIV/AIDS.

James Gambiza demonstrated that there is always a research angle to everything we do, through sharing recent results from his investigations into learning styles of Environmental Science 3 undergraduates. In closing, there were a couple of presentations around the need to improve throughput rates of Masters and PhDs, and the variety of

mechanisms under consideration to achieve this, followed by one on how to engender greater postgraduate participation in affairs of the department.

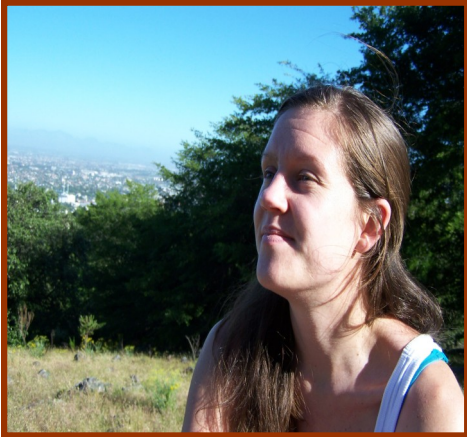
The forum ended off with congratulations to Chi Chitepo who won the prize for the best presentation during the one and a half days event. After all the talking, it was necessary to retire to the Rat & Parrot for a few hours to rehydrate and unwind.



James & Sheona demonstrating at a 2nd year prac

"Dr Albrecht Goetz succinctly indicated the potential pitfalls with interpretations from short-term data sets"

Alumni profile: Clare Martens



"I still miss Rhodes and long for the peacefulness of Grahamstown"



These two years since leaving the Department of Environmental Science have been casually liberating, but interspersed with a litany of nostalgic moments and a general longing for stress-free living. I hastily left Grahamstown in January 2009 for a job interview in Cape Town. It was my first interview and, lo and behold, I was accepted into the Environmental Resource Management Department's Internship Programme for 2009 at the City of Cape Town. It was a mad rush to get my Master's thesis in before graduation in April but, with Charlie's help, I graduated that year.

Through the internship programme I worked for a local government organisation called ICLEI – Local Government's for Sustainability. The programme proved to be a nurturing experience, with a strong emphasis on personal growth. Despite the headlong rush into city living and

the inconveniences of having a "real" job, I thoroughly enjoyed my internship year. My work involved lots of Climate Change research, but after a year at ICLEI, considering the vast amount of literature and general non-consensus of the climate change fraternity, I am still not even vaguely an expert on climate change matters.

After the internship programme I worked on a contractual basis for a Cape Town-based company called The Environmental Law Consultancy. Having studied law in my undergraduate days, environmental law is not a completely foreign field to me and I can appreciate the aim and ethic of the company. After my contract expired I worked briefly for the social commentary company, Laugh it off – you may have seen me selling t-shirts at the Grahamstown Festival. I am currently employed at the former company until December 2010.

Throughout this year I have been considering entering the world of scientific discussions and (my favourite) research papers, once again, and have recently been accepted to study an Honours degree in the Department of Social Development at the University of Cape Town. Social issues have always

been a passion of mine; hence, I am very excited about my new academic journey. Oh, and a book which I contributed to, will be published later this year.

It took quite a while, but I am finally settled into the fabric of Cape Town, nestled attractively beneath Table Mountain. My dog has taken me outdoors every weekend and summer hiking (while avoiding the muggers) is always so enjoyable. I attend a soup kitchen once a week, which is run by some friends, and I have been an avid ballroom dancer for the past two years. Next year I will be serving on the Committee for the UCT Ballroom and Latin Society. I have also been utilising my journalistic drive to write for various online blogs. I write about music, environmental issues and vegetarianism. As is the case of any town, it's the people that make it, and I am lucky to have a wonderful group of old and new friends.

I still miss Rhodes and long for the peacefulness of Grahamstown. I am a small-town girl at heart and will one day be back in the bush, working for our country and making a small but meaningful difference to this world.

Congratulations to Charlie!

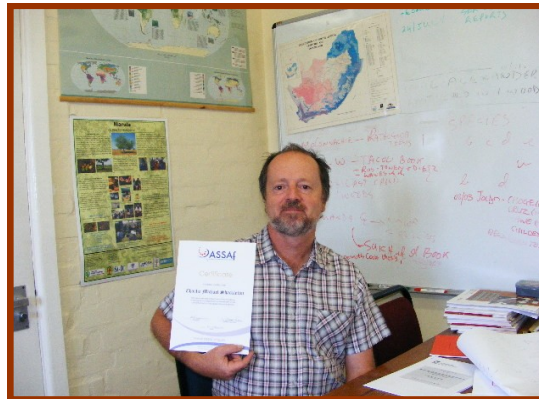


Charlie was recently elected as a fellow of the Academy of Science of South Africa. This is a premier scientific body in South Africa, made up of members who have made a significant contribution to the advancement or application of science. Fellows are identified and elected solely by nomination of existing members.

training in South Africa. The academy is currently dominated by natural and empirical scientist, but has actively been inviting

social scientists in the last few years to make it a truly multidisciplinary lobby group around scientific issues in the country.

Over the recent past the academy has produced some seminal reports on the state of science, publication trends, and science



“The academy has actively been inviting social scientists to make it a truly multi-disciplinary lobby group”

Land Degradation course launched



November 2010 saw the launch of our first Land Degradation short course which was held in the lovely venue in Bots gardens. The primary purpose of this short course is to develop human capacity and understanding in assessing and tackling land degradation as highlighted in the United Nations Convention to Combat Land Degradation (UNCCD). This course highlighted new theoretical understanding of land degradation and rehabilitating degraded land.

of the course, where Land Function Analysis (LFA) methods were used to assess the state of degradation of the commonage and the invasion by the shrub

Pteronia incana. Interviews were also held with local commonage users.

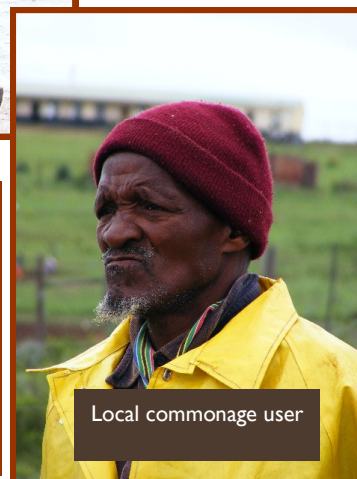


Course participants

Four intense days of coursework, led by Dr James Gambiza also included guest speakers such as Tony Palmer, Mike Powell, Roy Lubke and James Puttick. Lehman Lindeque from the dept of Agriculture in Pretoria attended to assess the course. A fieldtrip was held in Peddi on the 3rd day



“Bluebush”
Pteronia incana



Local commonage user

Honours Farewell Braai



Text by Zuki Kota & Emily Mundy
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