



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
Where leaders learn

# The Spekboom



## 2nd year student awarded the RUESSPA bursary

Nwabisa Mjoli is a second year who has recently been awarded the Rhodes University Environmental Science Staff & Postgrad Alumni bursary. This project is the brain-child of Charlie Shackleton who called on all staff and postgrads to forego the cost of one or more pizzas per month and donate to this worthy cause. An overwhelming amount of R14,000 was raised to contribute to Nwabisa's 2nd year University costs. Megan Kelly interviewed her:

Nwabisa grew up in Alice and attended school there from Grade 1 to Grade 9 after which she moved to St Matthews to complete her high school career in Keiskammahoek. She lives with her aunt whom she regards as her "rock" after losing her mother before her first birthday. She says she has always been interested in the natural environment, pointing out that when she was younger, she remembers when there would be no water and she had thought about how she could provide clean water for everyone.

At school, Nwabisa applied herself to her school work as a driven and determined pupil and won several awards at St Matthews for her hard work and academic achievements. She loved being part of the St

Matthew's Science club and stood as the president for two years running. The club often took part



in the University of Fort Hare's annual science competition which involved nearby high schools presenting posters and debates on topics that often involved environmental issues. She also organized her school science club's first visit to SciFest Africa. Nwabisa chose Rhodes because she knew she would get a good tertiary education here in addition to having the opportunity to be closer to her Dad and two younger brothers. She joined the Foundation Programme at Rhodes in 2010 and absolutely loves University life. She currently lives in Allan Grey House and is very appreciative to have received this bursary. Her future plans remain positive to stay in the environmental science discipline and hopes to do Honours at Rhodes once she has finished her undergrad degree. Well done Nwabisa, we wish you all the best for the future.

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## The adventures of Catherine Ward



*View of Manhattan, New York.*



*Niagra Falls, Canada*

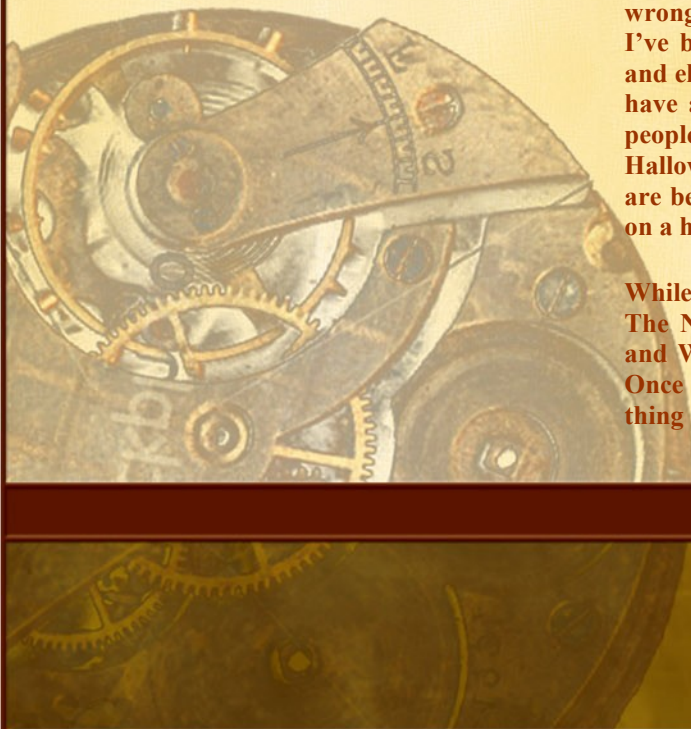
So to say these last few months have been a blur, would be an understatement. After leaving Grahamstown this year and catching up with various family members from South Africa to Mauritius – we set sail across the Atlantic and settled in a small town somewhere between a corn field and the Lincoln Memorial.

Since finishing up my Masters with DES, I started a full-time internship with the Worldwatch Institute in Washington D.C. as a Food and Agriculture Research Intern for their Nourishing the Planet program. I'm responsible for researching and writing articles for the program's website, which has a readership of 20 000 visitors per month. The work environment is dynamic and fast pace – with topics ranging from indigenous vegetables to current issues around the U.S. drought, biofuels ethics and agricultural workers. The workload is not all popular writing and includes researching organic agriculture topics for Worldwatch's annual publication called *Vital Signs*. I'm also working on an e-book on underutilized fruits and vegetables from around the world, which will be released next year through the Worldwatch Institute.

Whilst internships are not necessarily a requirement in South Africa, they are a good way to get some 'real world' experience and Nourishing the Planet has allowed me to integrate into the American work culture. In between the internship, I've taken up French lessons and managed to squeeze in a few trips to great places like New York City and Toronto, Canada.

The United States is an interesting place to say the least – I never fully appreciated how diverse and huge this country is. Having lived in the U.K. before, I assumed that it would be a similar experience. I was wrong. Firstly, the weather is phenomenal. In the short six months that I've been here, there have been tornado warnings, floods, heat waves and electric storms. Americans literally speak a different language (they have a bit of a southern drawl here) – they are incredibly welcoming people and know how to celebrate everything from the Fourth of July to Halloween. The surrounding national parks in the State of Maryland are beautiful and already accidentally stumbled into our first Black Bear on a hike through the woods.

While the States is no South Africa, it is a fantastic learning experience. The NGO world is completely different to the academic environment and Washington D.C. is truly the heart of environmental think tanks. Once my internship finishes up in November, I'm hoping to find something a little more permanent before moving on to the next adventure.





## Alumni Profile: Rob Jones

Rob Jones moved to Grahamstown in 2003 from the U.S with his wife and son. Both Rob and his wife chose to attend Rhodes University to get their PhDs, his in environmental science and hers in education. They made the decision to come to Rhodes due to its good global reputation and Grahamstown was a small town that was convenient for him and the family and a lovely place to live. They moved back to the U.S in 2006 and Rob has since then been involved in areas of environmental concern. Rob has had experience in engineering and environmental project management and environmental and economic assessment for the last 25 years both in the U.S and internationally.

He has also presented papers at international conferences in Johannesburg, South Africa, Tokyo, Japan, Rome, Italy and in the U.S. He is a Registered Environmental Manager (REM) with the U.S. National Registry of Environmental Professionals (NREP) and a member of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) in the U.S. Since leaving South Africa Rob has been back to work with CSS and CES in Grahamstown and has recently worked in Angola.

Since 2010 Rob has been the Assistant Professor of Environmental Science at Southwest Community College Appalachian Mountains of southwest Virginia in addition to owning a private environmental and economic consulting company, Sustainable Development Consulting International (SCDI). At the moment he teaches first and second year students environmental science and sustainable development programs and also assists with the Outdoor Adventure Club, National Science Foundation, Adventure Tourism and Renewable Energy programs.



*Rob Jones*



*Asbestos survey in South Africa*





## Relay Race funds awarded to WESSA Ght

The departments annual relay race to Port Alfred was held in September this year and raised R1551.00 from participants and sponsors. This year the funds were donated to the Grahamstown branch of WESSA (the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa). WESSA has decided to use the money to buy a second trophy for their Science Expo. This will be used in conjunction with the existing floating trophy that is awarded to the winning school on the basis of an individual or group project, which relates to the mission and aims of WESSA. The competition is judged each year at the annual Grahams-town Regional Expo. The second trophy will be used for disadvantaged schools in the Grahamstown area, as suggested by judges of this years' expo event. The aims of the award are to :

- Stimulate environmental awareness amongst school pupils
- Promote the conservation ethic and make a contribution to the maintenance or improvement of the environment
- Encourage school pupils to observe their world scientifically
- Encourage originality and ingenuity in solving problems
- Encourage clear, logical written and oral presentation



*Prof Ellery handing over the funds to Margaret Crompton, of WESSA (Ght)*

## Prof Ellery wins Wetland award



On 25 October, the South African Wetland Society presented the 2012 Mondi National Wetland Awards at the annual Wetland Indaba held in Limpopo Province. Prof Fred Ellery was recognized by receiving the award in the category of "Science and Research". The other categories are "Education and skills development" and "Stewardship". Nancy Job, a Masters scholar in the dept, received the award on behalf of Fred, who was unable to attend the Indaba this year.

Fred's recognition in the field of wetland science stems from a longstanding interest in these ecosystems, both in respect of why they exist and how they work, and also in respect of the goods and services they provide to the benefit of humans. He has devoted a considerable amount of his time and effort to research in this field, with well over sixty refereed publications in both local and international journals. Furthermore, he has worked and continues to work with postgraduate students at Masters and Doctoral level, with almost 30 having graduated with higher degrees at this level of scholarship. Fred is internationally recognized, having been awarded Lifelong Membership of the International Mire Conservation Group and frequently acting as a reviewer. One of the most notable things about Fred is his open enthusiasm about his work in particular, and wetlands in general, and admits that "there is nothing that I'd rather do than be in a wetland

contemplating its existence, structure and function". As a department we congratulate Fred on this noteworthy achievement and pay tribute to his passion for getting his hands dirty and feet wet. His ability to grasp landscapes and understand the position and role of wetlands in them is quite remarkable.



*Nancy Job receiving the award on Fred's behalf*





View of Sugarloaf Mountain from Flamengo Park's beach.



The People's Summit in Flamengo Park.



Security check at the entrance to the conference



Demonstrations in the conference centre – each Post-It had a vision for the conference on it and people added to it every day.

# Shoe Sizes

## Experiences of a 3rd year at Rio+20

By Ruth Kruger

Somebody once told me that of all the Rhodes departments, the Environmental Science department is the one with the largest ecological footprint. Something to do with the amount of conferences flown to by its professors. Terribly ironic, don't you think? I did. I remember swearing to myself that I would never be guilty to such hypocrisy.

But then I boarded a plane to Rio de Janeiro in the June holiday this year to go to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20. Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

I must say though, that I did not feel as though I had fallen as I sat comfortably in my aeroplane seat, high above the Atlantic Ocean. And not just because I was sipping contentedly on a complimentary beer. No, I was intent on making this trip count. I didn't quite believe that I was going to save the world – but not far from it. I had been to COP 17, a very disillusioning experience, it is true, but one that made me all the more determined to find out what was wrong with multi-lateral process so that a new system could be created. One that actually worked. I felt, too, that the answer to the failure of the many UN conferences is not to abandon them entirely, as international environmental legislation is necessary. Rather, I felt that we as civil society should show governments our dependence on their actions by putting our faith in them and then holding them accountable should they fail.

With all of these thoughts swirling around under my green hat, I launched into Brazil and Rio+20. I must say that of all places to hold a conference on sustainable development, with a strong environmental focus, Rio de Janeiro is possibly the best that could have been chosen. It's a remarkable city, seemingly not quite separate from its natural world, with mountains and forests appearing at intervals between high-rise buildings. As I wandered its streets, exploring Copacabana or trying to find a train station with all Brazilian signs inexplicably in Portuguese, I thought to myself that this constant reminder of the connection between humanity and the environment must surely have an effect on conference delegates.

Unfortunately, however, that did not seem to be the case. I was participating in the conference as a member of the Major Group of Children and Youth, one of the nine Major Groups of civil society. The group was made up of young people from all over the world, from many different cultures and backgrounds, with a correspondingly broad spectrum of thoughts and opinions. But there was one thing that we were agreed on unanimously: the text that was ultimately signed by the governments of the world was unacceptably weak. Contd on next pg.....



It did not represent the ambition that is needed in issues of sustainability. It did not include substantial new agreements. Governments basically re-affirmed what was agreed upon 20 years ago, and not even all of that. Conflict, for example, which is a huge threat to sustainability, something that is a particular problem in Africa, is barely glanced over in the text, and no commitment is made to engage with the issue beyond a vague acknowledgement of its existence.

This text was a bit of a slap in the face to civil society at large, and the Major Group of Children and Youth in particular. We had been invited to submit recommendations for months before the conference. We had gone through a rigorous process of voting on the recommendations that were finally submitted. We had made speeches outlining what we expected of an agreement on sustainable development. We even held protest actions in the conference venue during the conference. But very few of our recommendations were taken up in any form, leaving us with a text that did not give us what it claimed to, which was to ensure “The Future We Want”. This was the name what was given to the text, but in civil society circles it acquired several others, the politest of which were “The Future We Don’t Want” and “The Future We Bought”.

This was all rather disheartening. I started to wonder why I had come. But then, on the second-last day of the conference, something happened that helped me rediscover why I was there and what I was doing. A large unauthorised protest action was held outside the doors of the main plenary. We shouted, we sang, we even had a human mic going. Security got a bit upset. So we sat down and refused to move. Security gave up. And so we continued to discuss matters through the human mic, eventually coming to the conclusion that we should walk out, all 300 odd of us. The feeling was that there was no reason for us to be there. Our recommendations had not been taken up, and most of us couldn’t get into the plenary in any case. It seemed almost as though we were there to ensure that nobody could reproach the UN for excluding civil society, but then not actually allowed to contribute to the negotiations.



Major Group of Children and Youth opening speech given by Karuna Rana



Authorised action in conference centre calling for peace provisions.



Unauthorised action in conference centre on the second last day, protesting against “The Future We Don’t Want”.

And so, we walked out. Backwards, in fact, saying that, “These negotiations are taking us backwards.” We even handed in our accreditations at the door. These little cards were what got you into the conference. Around the UN, they’re probably worth their weight in pure, unrefined platinum. . But, you see, we weren’t able to contribute to the conference. Not really. So there was no reason for us to be there. No reason for us to have accreditation.

As you can see, the conference was rather a disappointment to me. I am glad, however, that I was able to be part of an action that will hopefully signify to government that we as civil society will not take any nonsense. I am glad, too, that I could be part of the post-Rio+20 meeting that was held at the People’s Summit in Flamengo Park, which had been running concurrently to the official conference. This meeting was mainly attended by those who had

walked out, but it was open to anyone. At this meeting, we formed the beginnings of an international network of people working on local level. We committed to uphold the principles of sustainable development in our various constituencies, and to hold one another accountable. I would argue that this local level work has the potential to make greater changes than what were made at Rio+20, and more quickly too.

And so, the conference ended. It was an interesting experience, and I certainly learnt a lot. By the end of the conference, however, I was unsure about whether the size of my ecological handprint really was all that impressive. Instead, I set out to once

again to get myself an ecological footprint of astronomical size. What I mean is, I boarded the plane back to South Africa. It was good to come home, back to Rhodes and the Environmental Science department. I feel comfortable here. You see, my abnormally large shoe size fits right in.



## Trees for Life Project



*Students at Ntsika Secondary School learning the value of planting trees*



As part of its Community Engagement activities, the Department of Environmental Science Tree For Life Project aims to promote awareness of the need to plant and maintain indigenous trees in and around Grahamstown area. Trees have a pivotal role in the health and well-being of local communities as they are sources of food, shade, medicines and scenic beauty among other benefits.

On 3rd September Environmental Staff and students and Ntsika Secondary school staff and pupils braved the chilly, rainy weather to plant indigenous trees at the school. Before the tree planting day, some postgrad students from the department had interactively presented posters to help students learn just how much we depend on trees. Seventeen trees were planted with the enthusiastic involvement of Ntsika Secondary school pupils. This is an ongoing project and the department has to date planted more than 60 trees. The grand idea is to encourage tree planting within Township areas of Grahamstown, consequently contributing to the Makana Municipality greening activities. The trees provide low-income families, school children and community residents with a source of free fruit to help alleviate hunger, improve nutrition and provide shade, beauty and cleaner air now, and for years to come.

Specifically, the aim is to:

- Promote a better understanding of trees, particularly indigenous trees;
- Highlight the important role trees play in sustainable development and the livelihoods of people and their environment;
- Encourage communities to participate in various greening activities within their own surroundings

This project has mainly been funded by the Department who purchased trees, watering cans and a hose pipe, but with tree donations from Rhodes University Grounds and Gardens and the Gamtoos Irrigation Board. Other organizations that have shown interest in the project include Makana Municipality, Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), Rhodes University Green Fund and Umthathi



# Adventures during my Honours project: Kyra Lunderstedt

My honours project description was defined as being “not for the faint-hearted”, which in itself pushes most (stubborn) people to rise to the challenge. In looking at differences between old lands and intact thicket on Fairy Glen Private Nature Reserve in Bathurst, my project was going relatively well. Data collection included taking stem diameters of woody and succulent trees and shrubs and percentage covers of specified plant types. There are two days that stand out as being my most memorable days battling the thicket:

In early August a Dutch student, Thijs, who had only landed for the first time in South Africa a few days earlier, came with me to walk the boundary of the farm and collect GPS points for each corner. We started at Waters Meeting Nature Reserve and walked their boundary until we reached the first corner post of Fairy Glen. From there on the vegetation became much thicker along the fence line and we often had to jump back and forth over the fence or crawl under the bushes to get through. Somewhere along the fence line we found an old gate with what looked like a path leading down to the river. Since we had already exceeded the time we thought it would take us to get to the next corner on the Kowie River, we decided to take the short cut. Eventually we reached the bottom of the valley where there was a tributary which we assumed would lead to the Kowie River. In that moment our many viewings of Discovery's Bare Grylls TV show told us that the easiest way to get to where we were going, would be to walk through the water. The bottom of the tributary was a thick slippery layer of clay and at times we were thigh deep in water. Reaching the Kowie River was unfortunately not the end. We still had to find the path that lead up to the main house. Cut a long story short we took the wrong path, had no food and no water left, we were wet from walking through the river and had no jacket for the cold front that had just hit.

My scariest day was when a fellow class mate; Sam Munro offered to assist me with my sampling in the intact thicket.



Although I usually preferred to take guys, I was running out of time and needed all the help I could get. Five minutes in I walked through the plot along the small path to start measuring a clump of multi-stemmed trees in the middle of the plot. I had measured at least 4 stems before I noticed a mass of well-defined, black, orange and white scales under the grass, camouflaged by the litter beside me. Screaming “Snake!” I jumped back and stood shaking while Sam tried to find where I had seen the snake. Sneaking a peak back to where it was, I saw that the snake was a large puff adder and it's head was just a few centimetres away from my hand at the base of the stems. I was grateful for the snake being so relaxed, likely too cold to move. It was a close call I would rather not experience again and often wonder how I managed to pick the 4 m<sup>2</sup> in 200 hectares that had the puff adder in it?

I have learnt not only about the plant species in the Kowie River thicket but also that taking on such a project requires some respect with regard to what you are dealing with. I have come to appreciate the beauty and uniqueness of the ecosystem at large and can understand why people get the “Thicket bug”. I know for next time that I will pack a large back pack of extra water, food, warm clothes and a map. And I will be more cautious and wear gum boots stuffed with newspaper to avoid deadly snake bites from unexpected puff adders. I have thoroughly enjoyed my project this year and have gained more than just the academics than I ever expected. I saw my first caracal (and puff adder) and I showed more courage to go back in the thicket than I knew I had.

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