



The Spekboom

New Head of Department: Prof Sheona Shackleton



DES welcomes its first female and fourth HOD since its inception as a full Department in 2002. Prof Sheona Shackleton follows on from Prof Christo Fabricius, Prof Charlie Shackleton and Prof Fred Ellery.

We asked her some questions about her hopes and visions for her term as incoming HOD.

Kathy: What changes do you hope to facilitate in the Department in the next few years?

Sheona: The Department has functioned well under the previous leadership and so I envisage no major changes – indeed I see us as an active, enthusiastic, productive and collegiate, albeit small, Department, so why change what works.

However, I do believe it is time to revisit our mission statement and objectives, as this has not been done for a several years. We need to make sure these guiding

statements and principles of ‘who we are’ still fit with where we see our strengths, our current research interests and where we believe we need to be going as a

Department in the next 5 years.

Going back to the question of my hopes, if there is anything I would like to see, it is more collaborative, interdisciplinary projects amongst staff within the Department and with external partners both within and outside of the University. For me these bigger, often more generously funded, projects are really exciting; they provide an amazing learning environment for students that goes way beyond the individual thesis, they build the capacity of staff, and provide an excellent opportunity to produce research that can really contribute to policy and practice.

Kathy: Does the Department need to grow?

Sheona: Yes, the University is pushing us to grow postgrad numbers, and I think we are doing this well. With 17 Honours students this year we are close to the tar-

get we set ourselves of 20 students, and we all carry an above average senior postgrad load. The SARChI chair, filled by Charlie Shackleton, will also help us increase our Masters and PhD numbers. In terms of staff we are hoping the Kresge Development position occupied by Gladman Thondhlana will become a full-time post. We also need to be thinking about the new 4-year curriculum the Department of Education is implementing.

Kathy: What do you see as the challenges you might face as HOD.

Sheona: I am new in the job and still learning the ropes, but one may be funding. It is becoming increasingly clear to me that the University budgets have little leeway. It is therefore really important we continue to bring in our own research funding, but we also need to be thinking about funding for activities such as community engagement and student learning. We often draw on our own funding resources to help cover student field trip costs, socials, etc. which are all an important part of what we do. So we do need the income that activities such as short courses bring.

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Special points of interest:

- April 22nd: Earth Day
- 11-12 May: World Migratory Bird Day
- 22 May: International Biological Diversity Day
- 3-9 June: National Environment Week
- 5 June: World Environment Day
- 8 June: World Ocean Day

Alumni profile—Zoe Palmer

Name: Zoë Palmer

Educational qualifications: BSc, BSc Hons (Environmental Science)

Current Job: Environmental Scientist

Place of Employment: Aurecon (Cape Town Office)

How did you get your current job? Not knowing anyone in the company prior, I applied half way through second year to get some vac work. Once I had completed my degree and was looking for a permanent position, I got in touch with the manager I had worked under. She indicated a position was opening in the beginning of the year and I applied, following which I had an interview and then got the job a week later.

Best parts of the job? The company revolves around engineering consultants so most of the developments we do EIAs for are construction/rehabilitation based. (I've always liked

this). Each project that you work on, you get from the application phase and then see it through until the development takes place. It's satisfying seeing your work and effort go through all the stages and come out complete in the end.

Challenges you have faced in this position? Nothing more than a brand new graduate would face – just settling into the working world.

Tips and advice for present students on the job search process: Everyone will always say it, but it's true: you need to network. Internships and vac work go a long way, especially if you can work with the same people later. You also need something on your CV that is going to make you look different from the other recently graduated student. I got told that I got my vac work because I slept in a car for just less than a month on my gap year.

How has your career progressed in



the last few years? Only started working in February

Highlights of your career? Nothing yet – it's all new and exciting

Alumni profile—Amanda Gosling

Name: Amanda Gosling

Educational qualifications: MSc Environmental Science

Current Job: Environmental Consultant

Place of Employment: Golder Associates- Johannesburg

How did you get your current job? Hard work, persistence and good connections.

Best parts of the job? The job is diverse and challenging, keeps me on my toes and mentally stimulated. The best part is probably travelling to obscure locations throughout the African continent.

Challenges you have faced in this position? Limited background in mining types and processes.

Tips and advice for present students on the job search process:

Firstly figure out what you are passionate about and then identify jobs and companies that appeal to you and then “never, never, never give up” (Winston Churchill) - until you get

the position you want. If you enjoy what you do, you will do it well and will become a valuable asset to the company.

Also, don't be afraid to use contacts, most people understand that the job market is tough and will be willing to help you out.

How has your career progressed in the last few years?

Internship to permanent employment. Data capture to coordinating my own projects.

Highlights of your career?

Assisting the aquatic ecologists with electro-fishing in the DRC. (Using electricity to stun fish so that they can be caught with a net and identified).



Ground-truthing the length of a proposed power-line for a copper mine in the DRC.



Electro-fishing in the DRC

Dept donates to the Green Fun Run

The Green Fun Run was held on Sunday 16th March. This yearly event is aimed at promoting environmental sustainability in town and on campus. The intention is to raise environmental awareness and encourage Grahamstown residents, scholars, students and business, to adopt more sustainable lifestyles and practices. The fun run comprises a 2.3km and 6.4km walk.

The Dept pledged to donate R1 for every person that participated and this year there were a total of 845 runners.

This year the organisers decided to move the route in a more easterly direction which had the advantage of participants no longer having to repeat the same circuit in different directions as had been the case in the past. The event was held from 4.30pm which worked well as traffic volumes were much lower at that time of the day.

Certificates and indigenous trees, planted in honour of DD Siwisa Primary School, were awarded to the first three runners who crossed the finish line. Prizes for the winners of the best outfit, the biggest Rhodes residence team, the biggest school team and best business, were also awarded.



All photo credits: Odi Lehatsa



A Scandinavian sabbatical in 2013 by Sheona Shackleton



Like the anticipation of a weekend, every academic eagerly awaits their sabbatical leave (counting down the months) and like a weekend it unfortunately all goes by way too fast. Mine sadly is up, but it was a fulfilling and in many ways exciting year and I had the chance to make new connections, visit new places, attend several conferences and do a bit of writing on the side (not to mention a huge proposal for 13 million dollars that made it down the line to the finals but sadly we did not win the bid)! But as par for the course (others tell me), one never quite manages to achieve all those ambitious goals laid out at the start.

It takes 5 years of work to get one hard earned year of sabbatical, and contrary to the common perception it is not a holiday, but it does bring a welcome break from undergraduates, admin, faculty and senate meetings, etc. What a luxury!

Due to the freedom sabbatical brings most academics try and use some or all of the time to work with colleagues elsewhere in the world. For my sabbatical, I had decided that I did not want to spend too much time on my own and, when I did, I wanted to be somewhere with pavement cafes, safe streets, good food and efficient public transport. So I decided to head to Europe and more specifically Denmark, with shorter trips to Sweden and Norway.

I have a colleague at the University of

Copenhagen and he suggested I apply for a SUTROFOR scholarship to assist with some of my costs. So I got Euros 8000 and found a comfortable and pleasant attic flat, with a touch of Danish design, in Fredricksburg next to the University (see photo). In return for this, I had to teach on a PhD course in Political Ecology (and what a privilege to interact and share this with some of the big names in natural resource governance like Arun Agrawal and Jesse

Ribot); the rest of the time was basically my own during which I attended a conference (Nordic Environmental Social Sciences Conference in Copenhagen and hosted by the university – very interesting in that many of the problems, especially governance related, were not so different to ours), various talks and student presentations and met up with postgrads. Of course I also kept plugging away at papers.



Rather than provide details on my academic activities, I thought I would share some reflections on my time in Copenhagen and the things that stood out for me in all the Nordic cities. These included:

1) Fast moving bicycles of all shapes and sizes that pulled and pushed many a fancy contraption filled with dogs, children and other stuff. It really was impressive, but Denmark is also really flat. I went for a bike ride in the countryside with friend and colleague Bruce Campbell, but I have to admit town scared me a little as there is zero

tolerance for slow moving bikes or confused LH drive cyclists. In fact as a pedestrian, I nearly got wiped out a couple of times by speedsters as I tended to forget to do my 'look left and right' for them as well as cars.

2) Almost no malls and no big grocery stores. I bought all my food in little corner stores and old fashioned fruit and vegetable shops run by immigrants. Italian delis with great cheese and pasta were also on every corner. The best bit was all the fruit, flowers and plants displayed on the sidewalks. The result of this was a sense of a less consumer driven society and the importance of the streets and pavements as part of the urban aesthetic landscape.

3) Resident's obsession with and dedication to making the most of every bit of sunshine, which by the time I left lasted until about 11:00 pm (didn't go down at all in Oslo which is further north). Little portable pot belly barbecues in the park were the big thing and sunbathing on the balcony with minimal attire. But people really did

There were fast moving bicycles of all shapes and sizes that pulled and pushed many a fancy contraption filled with dogs, children and other stuff"

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transport, and by the time I reached Oslo nothing phased me and I found my way around a strange city with ease.

6) The evidence of alternative energy sources everywhere. My trip to Stockholm involved a day's train ride which included crossing a long bridge connecting Denmark and Sweden from which it is possible to see whole forests of wind turbines sticking out of the water. Southern Spain was also really amazing with wind and solar farms spread across the landscape.

7) Fewer cars and smaller cars.

So all in all a very different feeling to our South African cities, and definitely a sense of more sustainable living.

What about the other cities?

Stockholm is a beautiful city and I think my favourite. Lots of water everywhere. While there, I visited the Stockholm Resilience Centre, presented a talk and attended several post-grad defences and presentations. It's a place that is abuzz with energy and activity. I also managed to visit a weekend home on one of the many islands that make up the archipelago that forms part of greater Stockholm (and went herring fishing with just a line and hooks – see photo). I stayed in a SRC flat next to the Nobel Centre (see photo) and in Oslo I also visited the Centre where the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded (see photo).

I ended my trip in Oslo where I attended a fascinating conference on "Transformation in a changing Climate" which was widely attended and where I bumped into several colleagues. The thinking was a little too alternative for me at times (talks on love and climate change!), but overall a lot of effort was made to really highlight the positives related to what we can do/transform rather than dwelling on the doom and gloom. I also managed to hit the summer sales.... great labels at 50 – 70% discount!

From there I went to Spain to wait for Charlie and Claire. Charlie and I had an amazing 10 days eating, drinking and site seeing in Southern Spain

(Andalusia) where the Moorish influence continues to be seen in the architecture and food. The old cities of Grenada and Cordoba are truly amazing. We also spent some time in one of the largest parks in Europe (more like a biosphere reserve) in the Sierra Nevada.



2014 Honors fieldtrip to the Wild Coast

This year the honours students went to the Wild Coast to work in the Gatyana area of the former homeland of the Transkei. This area is the research site for a 4 year project led by our Department and the Department of Environmental Economics and Rural Sociology from the University of Alberta. The focus of the project is on vulnerability and adaptation to multiple livelihood stressors. It has produced 10 students (from PhD to Honours level) and we are busy working on a large set of publications.

The aim of the field trip was for students to collect data for areas/questions we had identified as interesting, but in need of further information. In particular, students collected data related to home gardens. These are often quite large plots or fields attached to the homestead. Using various methods and approaches, they explored issues such as the extent of use of garden plots and changes in use over time, the sizes of these plots and how they are used, tree crops on these plots, types of annual crops grown and where, constraints to cultivating these plots, who does the cropping, why some households continue to cultivate while others don't, and the contribution of these gardens to household food consumption and security.

I learned that home gardening within this community is an important livelihood strategy and that it brings joy to many of these people's lives. -Megan Howe



I enjoyed getting to know everyone in the honours class on the field trip as well as their serious and sometimes-aggressive card playing. -Juliette Lagesse



The field trip was a great experience. It was fascinating to interact with, and learn from, the locals at Willowvale. It was also fun to experience time away as a class, with a highlight definitely being dinner at the Kob Inn! -Olivia Higgins



I enjoyed getting to know my classmates and rely on their cooking, which takes a lot of guts. I saw first hand how a huge number of people in this country live. I am excited to return. -Calvin Le Mottee



I learnt that the field of environmental science always requires someone who can work well with other people who have different backgrounds and every perspective is valuable -Mel Chipfa-

kacha

RUESPPA Bursary recipient reaches Honours



By Mwazvita Sachikonye

A bright eyed second year student was visited in a class by a clueless (then, and only in this instance on how he was about to completely change a life) Professor Shackleton in 2012 offering her and others like herself an oppor-

tunity to receive the RUESPPA bursary. This bursary is awarded to young and promising Environmental science students from the Eastern Cape that present a financial need.

Nwabisa is a true celebration of what it means to be a young, confident, and empowered black South African woman. Her radiance as she speaks and goes about brings inspiration to many others like herself, born in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Nwabisa first came to want to study at Rhodes when she attended the annual Scifest event hosted by Grahamstown during her high school years. Having lost her mother before she was one, she was raised by her aunt, whom she calls 'mama', as her own. This meant that finances were stretched, and this bursary couldn't have come at a

better time, having accumulated a debt with the university within the first couple of years of having studied at the institution.

As a proud and grateful recipient of the RUESPPA bursary, Nwabisa believes that the bursary has opened a world of other opportunities for her, such as the NRF bursary that she was awarded for her current honours studies in Environmental Science at Rhodes University for 2014. When asked what makes her stand out, Nwabisa gives a sincere and humble "hard work" as her response. Her advice to others needing funding opportunities or otherwise is to be proactive in asking around and not be afraid of a 'no'.

Peter & Nana off to Sweden!

By Nanamhla Gwedla

Earlier this year my supervisor, Professor Charlie Shackleton submitted my abstract to be considered for a presentation at the Urban Tree Diversity Conference in Sweden from 16-18 June 2014. The abstract was accepted and I was subsequently invited as a speaker at the conference to present my Honours research entitled: *"MUNICIPAL PARKS MANAGERS' DEVELOPMENT VISIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS URBAN FORESTRY IN SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNS"*.

The conference will have speakers' sessions and I have been scheduled to present on the 17th of June at 12h50 at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Alnarp. As part of the conference, I will also be going on an excursion to the Greater Copenhagen. I

chose this excursion because I will get to see urban trees in Copenhagen (which will enhance my knowledge and understanding of my field of studies), Vestmager nature area, and the new greening in the Örestad city district.

I am grateful to Professor Charlie Shackleton who has been my supervisor since 2013. Not only has he helped me to be considered for such a prestigious role to present the results of my study and to grow as a researcher, he has also funded my participation in the conference by paying all the expenses associated with the travelling, accommodation, and meals.



Design & Layout: Kathy Cassidy

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