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Environmental Science

March 2010



Departmental Postgraduate Braai

By: Rebecca Joubert

To “kick-start” the year on Sunday the 24th January, 2010, all Environmental Science and Geography postgraduate students were invited to a traditional “Bring ‘n Braai” at the Head of the Environmental Science Department, Prof. Fred Ellery’s house. This was an occasion for the new group

Matt and Sheona in the land of ‘Gators- representing the DES at the University of Florida, USA

Sheona Shackleton and PhD student Matt McConnachie have been spending time in the southern US at the University of Florida (UF), Gainesville. They were both kindly hosted by past visiting DES scholars: Claudia Romero and Jack Putz. Let’s catch-up on what they got up to.

Within a tightly packed ten day visit, as an invited speaker, Sheona gave an excellent presentation at the UF hosted Tropical Conservation and Development (TCD) conference. Her talk examined the potential consequences of livelihood and ecosystem vulnerability for conservation and development within a southern African context. The purpose of the TCD conference was to bring together conservation and development experiences from Africa and Latin America to discuss and compare emerging trends, and stories of success and failure. The conference was broken into three sessions: changing contexts, changing strategies and training and capacity. Keep a look out for a special issue in Ecology and Society devoted to presentations from the conference (For more information see: <http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/tcd/>)

Matt also attended the conference and gave a poster presentation on work related to his thesis. His poster examined a method he used in Working for Water on how to better integrate management and scientific knowledge. He is spending the spring semester at the university, grate-

of Honours students – comprising 15 enthusiastic students from a variety of science and social science backgrounds – to be able to connect with each other and existing postgraduate students, as well as with Fred and his family, over a few drinks and a good plate of braai vleis and prepared salads. Many stories and laughs were shared around the braai, bringing the sense of a year of fun and friendship amongst achieving research goals within the Environmental Science Department for the year 2010.

fully made possible by funding from his supervisors Richard Cowling and Charlie Shackleton. Whilst there he is trying to beef up his empirical skills by sitting in on an ecological statistics course. The course is taught by Claudia’s past PhD supervisor Benjamin Bolker, a world leader in ecological modeling.

In amongst the hectic work schedule Sheona spent a weekend at Claudia’s beautiful house at Flagler Beach on the Atlantic coast. Matt was lucky enough to tag along with a group of zoology students on a field trip to capture a bug on the Florida Keys and Everglades. They had no success finding the elusive bug. But apparently they had lots of fun singing along to Beach Boys hits like “Kokomo” whilst drinking cocktails on the Florida Keys.



The scenic Florida Keys a favourite holiday destination for many in the US and abroad (above and below)



Right: Peering through the trees in the West Lake area of the Everglades



Masters Student Profile Catherine Ward

BSc Environmental Science and Anthropology (Rhodes)

BSc (Hons) Environmental Science (Rhodes)

MSc by Thesis in Environmental Science

Supervisor: Charlie Shackleton

I was born and raised in Namibia by parents who have a passion for the outdoors and so I have loved nature for as long as I can remember. I have always harboured an interest in the environment and am fascinated with the relationship between people and their natural surroundings, be it in a wild or urban jungle. Whilst my former years were spent chasing snakes and lizards in the Namib Desert, I attended high school in Stellenbosch (South Africa) before completing my undergrad and honours at Rhodes University. Last year (2009) I took a break to enjoy the different cultures of Europe and Great Britain, picking up somewhat different skills from



pouring pints to learning how to say 'thank you' in 12 different European, Turkish and Egyptian languages. The Northern Hemisphere has amazing treasures to offer – from the ancient Pyramids of Giza, Queen Cleopatra's castle in Alanya (south Turkey), the historical war mongering Ottoman and Roman empires; through to dynamic Istanbul where the East meets the West, cultured Western Europe and quirky Britain. I am now back at Rhodes University starting my first year of masters, looking at the use of natural resources along an urbanising gradient.



Left: In the background is a Mahogany Hammock surrounded by swampy sawgrass in the Everglades National Park

Right: An enormous everglade gator stalking the complacent Matt



Profile of the Honours Class of 2010

| Name | Project Title/summary | Country of Origin | Academic interests | Interests and hobbies |
|------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--|--|
| Andrew Steven Blair | To determine the area of green space in each town and whether or not differences are reflected in the accessibility and perceptions of local residents | Zimbabwe | | Being outdoors- fishing, golf, rugby and tennis |
| Caroline Ann Evans | Assessing the rate of deforestation and degradation through goat and sheep farming in the Eastern Cape's subtropical thicket biome | South Africa | Subtropical thicket restoration, Water resource management, and just generally developing an understanding of as many ecological systems as possible! Wildlife in all shapes and sizes | Travelling, diving, fishing and many other outdoor activities. |
| Caryn Clarke | Perceptions of Climate Variability and Change and Adaptation Strategies amongst Communal and Commercial Farmers in the Makana District, Eastern Cape. | South Africa | Climate Change and Natural Resources | Spending time along the Wild Coast, diving, snorkelling and painting |
| Chiyedza Kuruneri-Chitepo | Project title not finalized- interest in street trees in the context of urban greening | Zimbabwe | | Violin, running, swimming, participating in Underwater Club activities as well as the African Drum Society and working with the local community through volunteer work |
| Emily Yonge Mundy | Assessing perceptions, practices and barriers towards inter/transdisciplinarity in environmental teaching and research within Eastern Cape universities | Zimbabwe | climate change adaptation and environmental education | Horse riding, scuba diving and travelling. |
| Eva masebola | Hydrological study of the Ngciyo Wetland, | Kenton | Wildlife management/conservation and water management | Music, art, poi and philosophy (new ways of thinking...) |
| Josefina Ndape-woshali Shapi | Investigating the role of nurse plants on establishment of Aloe ferox | Namibia | Ecology, natural resource management | |
| Khumbelo Makhuvha | Perceptions of climate change and associated risks and vulnerabilities amongst poor rural communities in two sites in the Eastern Cape | South Africa, Limpopo | | Reading and learning new things about the diversity of cultures that shape our country and others. |
| Steven Berriman | Quantifying the effect of herbivory on survivorship and growth rate following restoration plantings for subtropical thicket species. | South Africa, Eastern Cape | | Anything outdoors from hiking, hunting, fishing to outdoor photography |

| Name | Project Title/summary | Country of Origin | Academic interests | Interests and hobbies |
|------------------|--|-------------------|---|--|
| Steven Johnstone | Assessing Acacia longifolia growth rates and carbon stocks | South Africa | | All forms of fishing, on line poker, riding motorbikes, playing golf and travelling. |
| Tarcille Mballa | Perceptions of climate change and associated risks and vulnerabilities amongst poor rural communities in two sites in the Eastern Cape | Cameroon | Climate change adaptation, urban ecology, environmental economics, EIA and Green Markets and Green Investment trends worldwide. | Basketball and Squash (coaching and playing),travelling, reading and a wide range of music genres. |

DES Alumni Profile Mercedes Stickler

After returning to the US following two years of working and learning in South Africa, Mercedes has just finished her first year contributing to land rights and land governance research at the World Bank. Based in the Agriculture and Rural Development Department, she has spent most of her time managing a global research study on agricultural 'land grabs' by private investors in rural areas of Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America. In addition to collaborating with researchers across the World Bank and throughout the 20 case study countries, Mercedes also recently had an opportunity to represent the World Bank at a meeting of international land experts, surveyors, and landless peoples activists dedicated to expanding pro-poor land rights hosted by the UN-HABITAT in Nairobi.

Mercedes' work investigating the social and environmental impacts of different agricultural production systems for the World Bank builds logically



on her masters thesis at Rhodes, which estimated the value of direct and indirect income streams derived from natural resources on the Bathurst commonage and neighboring Waters Meeting Nature Reserve in order to propose a more sustainable exploitation of these resources by different land users. She is actively involved in the global community of pro-poor land experts and is considering pursuing a PhD following the end of her 2-year term as a Junior Professional Associate at the World Bank. In the meantime, after nearly a year of working full-time while writing her thesis, Mercedes finally has some space to explore the people, places, and politics of DC.

The Honours Field Trip 2010- Part One: Getting down and dirty

By: Caroline Evans and Eva Masemola

On Monday the 25th of January the Environmental Science Honours class as well as the Environmental Water Management Honours (joint Environmental Science and Geography) students embarked on a learning adventure to the Baviaanskloof in the West of the Eastern Cape. The students were led by Professors Fred Ellery (Environmental Science) and Kate Rowntree (Geography), PhD student Rebecca Joubert and masters student Kerry Bobbins. The field trip gave the students the opportunity to get to know each other and to put theory into practice through first-hand experience.

The key learning areas included topics such as the effects of humans on the land and the consequences of these changes. Dynamic and complex



Tarcille Mballa measuring an aspect of water quality

interaction between social system and the environment. Through discussions with the locals and PRESENCE (NPO from the Netherlands) the students were introduced to the complexities involved in changing mindsets and introducing new ways of environmental management. This included gaining a basic understanding of fluvial systems and how humans modify these. The students also gained insight into the area, its systems and the unique aspects which make the Baviaanskloof so remarkable through talks from local farmers and Presence. This taught students to have compassion for and acknowledge different points of view and to respect local

knowledge of the land on which they do their research.

Students were taught about trade-offs that have to be considered before landscape changes and management methods take place. Of immediate interest was the rehabilitation of the wetland that was once in the area. Soil erosion and common misconceptions concerning the causes of erosion were also key topics. Often short cuts may be taken where, instead of undertaking proper investigation into the drivers of change, human activity is instantly put on the chopping board. The students were also given the opportunity to gain valuable skills in terms of various field assessing



Chiyedza Kuruneri-Chitepo, Emily Mundy and Caryn Clarke assessing ground cover in a thicket restoration site



Above: Professor Fred Ellery demonstrating how to survey at a site with a high level of land degradation.

Below: Students presenting their findings to the rest of the class on the final night of the field trip



techniques: such as water quality testing, surveying, assessments of land degradation, alluvial fans and floodplain changes and rehabilitation of land through reforestation of natural thicket. At the end of the field trip the students divided themselves into groups and choose a learning area to analyse. They then presented their findings to their colleagues at an informal presentation session. While the field trip was an excellent learning experience it was also an important social 'bonding' event for the class. Apart from evening braais, the students went on hikes to interesting landmarks such as caves and beautiful gorges to explore the magnificent natural surroundings. Overall the field trip was a great success and an experience enjoyed by all involved!



The students and lecturers hiking into a slot canyon in the Baviaanskloof mountains

The Honours Field Trip 2010- Part Two

Making our PRESENCE Felt

By: Andrew Blair

On the morning of 26 January 2010, Dieter van den Broek gave an introduction to the work that, 'Living Lands and PRESENCE (Participatory Restoration of Ecosystem Services & Natural Capital, Eastern Cape)' had set out to do in the Baviaanskloof. This work initially consisted of developing learning networks on the land to keep people on the land. Living Lands is a non-profit organisation which focuses on the restoration of natural landscapes. The role of Living Lands is to 1. Coordinate the PRESENCE learning network; 2. Manage the Elemental Equity natural capital fund; and 3. Facilitate training and education related to community-based natural resource management (yourgoodnature).

"Living Lands is a South African foundation setup by EarthCollective to act as secretariat to the PRESENCE Learning Network. PRESENCE aims to guide and mainstream the restoration of 'living landscapes'" (earthcollective). In the Baviaanskloof, PRESENCE and Living Lands partners aimed at restoring and rehabilitating sub-tropical thicket to not only gain valuable research but also to implement valuable learning outcomes. The focus of their work is to re-plant 28 hectares of sub-tropical thicket in the form of Spekboom (*Portulacaria afra*). This initiative means 56 000 Spekboom trees will be planted and will potentially store 6000 tonnes of CO₂ over the next 30 years. The restoration activities provide jobs and skills training for 48 persons previously unemployed. This restoration develops healthy ecological systems, aesthetic value as well as economic value through the carbon market.

As a water catchment, the Baviaanskloof also plays a critical role in supporting rural livelihoods, the regional agricultural sector and meeting growing urban water demand downstream. However, through the research of Living Lands and PRESENCE, they have found that the catchment areas in the Baviaanskloof Reserve are highly fragile and over-utilization of land and water resources has left a lack of water in the reserve. Research was then directed towards the catchment areas, alluvial fans and

Spekboom restoration. Through this research, Living Lands and PRESENCE developed opportunities to offer the local farmers. The important points that were taken out of their research were to 1. Decrease erosion; 2. Increase base water flow and 3. Increase water retention in the land. Voluntary participation and incentives are used to help achieve these goals. The incentives include financial incentives for social development, livelihood security and environmental sustainability. Piet Kruger, a local farmer who voluntarily acts as a champion for the work of Living Lands and PRESENCE illustrates the importance of restoration in the catchment areas and sets an example to other farmers in the area.

This move however is facilitated by Dutch Funding as it is part of a broader initiative of Living Lands. Living Lands is part of the Dutch Government's Water for Food and Ecosystems Programme and the South African Government's Working for Water and Subtropical Thicket Restoration Programmes.

However, the work of Living Lands and PRESENCE has not come without any challengers. Communication is a big challenge in the Mega-Reserve of the Baviaanskloof. There is a lack of communication between upstream and downstream users and demands. This is due to a lack of mobile network coverage in the area and landline telephones. Perception is another huge challenge as many people that live on the land see land as a source of income so they choose to exploit the land rather than to conserve the land. Cultural differences also play a key challenge to Living Lands and PRESENCE as they determine practices that are often inherited from previous generations.

Right: Spekboom restoration in the Baviaanskloof (Pic. courtesy of earthcollective).



A Passage (or two) from India...

Those of us in the Department that have had the privilege of receiving regular deliveries of letters from India look forward to news of Professor Charlie Shackleton's adventures. Charlie is currently on sabbatical and, with his permission; we have included one of his letters here. E.M Forster make way!

14 February 2010

Dear all

As I sit here, it looks as though India have come though on top after the first day of the second cricket test. That will make for some happy faces around here, but a long way still to go. In terms of the thrashing that South Africa handed to India in the first test there is a bit of joke going on here. It concerns the fact Hasim Amla played a major role with his 253 not out (although to my mind a little slow), and so the Indian team were well beaten by Amla. However, amla is also the vernacular name for the fruit from *Phyllanthus emblica*, also known as the Indian gooseberry. In other words, the Indian test team, the World's number one (probably not any more), were beaten by a gooseberry.

Another big item in the local, and national news concerns the release of a new Bollywood movie. It goes by the label of "My name is Khan", and is supposedly about an autistic Indian in America after the 9/11 attacks. Being foreign looking he gets picked up by the American security, but being autistic is not able to explain himself. What happens thereafter I don't know, but all the trailers show him going on a long journey hitching rides as he goes (with some stunning scenery in the background). Okay, so why should it be in the news media? Well, the lead actor (S.J. Khan) is a Bollywood star, and somewhat unusually for someone in that famed position, he is also a Muslim. So what, I hear you ask. However, he recently made two public statements that have raised the ire of an rightwing ethnic based political party, called the Shiv Sena. Their mantra is in support of local ethnic groups in each State of India, and anti other groups and larger nationalism or statehood that weakens local identities – sounds familiar to we South Africans! The actor's first statement was that he considers himself an Indian first and foremost, rather than a Maharashtri, which is the Indian state in which Mumbai and Bollywood are located. His second statement was to query why no cricket players from Pakistan had been included in the recent IPL auction. This saga blew up just

a couple of days after I arrived. In summary, no cricket Pakistani players were included. Precisely why is unclear, with the various parties all blaming the one another; the Pakistani cricket board, the India government, the IPL sponsors, etc. Whoever is to blame is immaterial to this story. Our famed actor made a public statement that it was inappropriate that Pakistani cricketers had been left out and their omission should be addressed. To my mind, hardly something to get worked up about or high treason.

But who am I to make such a judgment, I am totally in the dark when it comes to politics in India. Seemingly the Shiv Sena are absolutely outraged. Firstly, they insist that a Bollywood actor is in no position to make such statements, he needs to stick to acting. Secondly, he is a Muslim and therefore such statements should be viewed with extreme suspicion. Lastly, the state of Maharashtra is what gives him a home and livelihood so how dare he say it comes second after India. They proclaimed a boycott of the movie. At one scale it seems totally laughable, but these guys are actually the leading party in the Mumbai city council and so do have a following and do wield some power. What's more, in the past they have allegedly supported their campaigns with violence. The opening day of the movie was on Friday. There have been many statements back and forth over the days leading up to the opening, with not too thinly veiled threats from the Shiv Sena about not being able to guarantee the safety of people who go and watch it, or the movie theatres that decide to screen it. In response the police rounded up and detained 2,000 Shiv Sena activists in and around Mumbai. But come Friday morning nearly all Mumbai cinemas were closed. However, by lunchtime a handful opened and screened the movie. By early evening all movie houses were screening it, and people were queuing to get tickets. The whole issue is captivating newscasts and newspapers. Most are claiming victory for free speech and tolerance, but many are warning of a potential Shiv Sena backlash in the near future because they have been embarrassed by the failure of their call to boycott the movie. Supposedly the actor has issued a statement expressing his gratitude to and faith in the general public to view what they wish, but his whereabouts are unknown, or being kept a tight secret. (An aside to all this is that I find it most intriguing that the surname of the leader of Shiv Sena party is Thackeray!).

The reason the whole story caught my attention was twofold, well threefold if you include the fact it is dominating the news and so one cannot get away from it. First, is the interesting parallel to South Africa's apartheid policies of geographically defined ethnic areas. Secondly, it provided me with insights into the issue

of ethnic tensions in India. Just before I arrived in India I read a book by a Times newspaper reporter who had lived in India for decades (Edward Luce: *Despite the Gods ...*). In the last chapter of the book he identified four issues that India will need to grapple with in the next decade or two so to take what he calls, its rightful place as a superpower in the world. One of those four was what he called strengthening of democracy and democratic institutions. Haven't we heard that as a similar challenge in South Africa? But I thought it was strange, as India has a long history of democracy and tolerance. But what he went on to explain was the appearance in the last couple of decades of political grouping such as Siva Sena and the overriding of democratic principles and rights by increasingly ethnic focussed movements and political parties. They advocate for local, ethnically based rights within each state, and all other groups should be restricted in some way. Indeed, there was another case in the news last week or so, in which the same State, Maharashtra, has proposed that in order to obtain a licence to drive an auto (the little three wheeler taxis) in Mumbai, one would have to have been born there, or at lived there for at least ten years.

Interestingly, the other three issues in the last chapter of Edward Luce's book were poverty, HIV/AIDS and environment. Once again, it sounds as though he could have been writing about South Africa.

On to something a little bit more light-hearted. I was walking back from the office mid last week, and passed a small car parked on the side of the road. As I did so I noticed a crow sitting on the wing mirror of a car. Every 30 seconds or so it lent down and looked at its reflection in the mirror and gave a raucous caw. I watched for several minutes and then moved on. I don't know whether it was chatting itself up, or picking a fight with itself, but either way, it was obviously going to be there for a while. That same evening, when I got home to the block o flats within which I reside, there was a bunch of blokes measuring up the road outside. I wonder if they are going to tar it?

The next day I went out to dinner with Uma Shaanker and a couple of researchers from Zurich. One of them was born in Zurich but was of India origins. His father, who has lived in Zurich for twenty-five years, was with him and came along for the dinner too. Although living in Zurich he visits India once or twice a year. I sat opposite him. An interesting man, and quite striking in appearance. Café latte skin, made all the more striking by a close-cropped white beard, all offset by a shiny yellow once-piece number embodied with white patterns. Although

I say interesting, he was somewhat overbearing as he always turned the subject of conversation, whatever it was, around to himself and how he had outdone someone or persuaded someone to change their position on the topic by his force of argument. But a highly educated guy, and speaks several languages. I did however, have a little chuckle at his expense early on. Here was a dude, born and bred in India, visits once or twice a year, who speaks several Indian languages, dresses almost overboard in an Indian fashion, but couldn't handle the hot food. Whilst we were waiting for our meal, we were served a number of nibbles; small bites of chicken tikki, spring rolls, and spicy pappadams with finely chopped onions, tomatoes and chillies on the top. He took a bite of the last and warned me to watch out because they were very hot. Duly warned I took a dainty bite (you never thought I could be dainty did you); ummmm, no effect. Next bite was a normal sized-one, and still no problem with the degree of heat; nice and spicy, tasty and just right. Meanwhile, he was fanning his moth and exclaiming how he did not want to have food so hot that he would be remembering the cook for three days afterwards.

The desert to the meal was something interesting. Grated beetroot mixed with sugar and sliced almonds. I can recommend it. It went very well with ice-cream. The above mentioned gentleman caused a small stir because he insisted on having vanilla ice-cream with it. What was on offer was strawberry ice-cream. But he was not having it, and made repeated requests to a couple of waiters, and then the maitre de, and after some time was duly presented with two scoops of vanilla ice-cream, as well as one scoop for everyone else at the table.

Whilst on food, another thing in the news here is that India has just agreed to delay accreditation of genetically modified food crops. They are happy to do so for non-edible crops, but not for food crops. They say they want further tests done, but some commentators claim that the government is simply playing a stalling game and within a year or two will proclaim and outright ban. Certainly no parallels to South Africa there!

I finally did the tourist number around the sights of the city centre yesterday. My overall impression is that it quite nice. Whilst the roads are certainly teeming with traffic, the main arterials are wide and traffic does not get stopped for too long. Secondly, there are trees everywhere. It is definitely pretty green (although most of the trees are decidedly dusty). I am not referring to trees in parks, but also trees down the streets. I don't think there is anywhere that I stopped and couldn't

see trees all over. No wonder Bangalore is sometimes called the “Garden City” of India. But it seems to have many appellations, including “pensioners Paradise” as well as “Pub City” of India, along with the “IT centre of Asia”. It must be a joy to advertising companies to have so many different facets to sell. Although there are trees everywhere, supposedly there is some concern at the rate at which they are being removed. This seems to be the case as roads and infrastructure are created or widened. There have been some protests. I came across a journal paper last week that has just been published stating that the growth rate of Bangalore was 38 % between 1991 and 2001. No wonder they have to widen roadways, and no wonder out in the suburbs there is construction wherever one goes.

I suppose it will come as no surprise to you that I started my tourist jaunt to the Lal Bagh botanical garden. It is pretty old, set out in 1760, which means many of the large trees are well over two hundred years old. It is about 50 ha in extent. I enjoyed it. It was neat, well maintained, reasonably well signed posted and informative. In the centre is a glass house allegedly modelled on the Crystal Palace at Kew Gardens in the UK. There is also a band stand to one side, and the local police band plays there on Sunday mornings. A big lake at the top, with a good diversity of birds. Indeed, the garden as a whole had a pleasing range of birds to see, including parakeets which I wondered about in one of my earlier letters. There was also what looked like a miniature version of an American bald eagle – white head, russet back, yellow talons. Looks like I am going to have to get my hands on a book of Indian birds. At the top end of the garden, up near the lake, I observed a woman collecting fuelwood – that adds a new dimension to uses of botanical gardens. Another intriguing feature was spit bins at regular intervals. I have described previously how spitting is common, anywhere and everywhere. Well, it seems the botanical garden management have a dim view of the habit, and so have placed small, green-painted concrete bins around the place. I didn't see anyone using them, but nor did I see anyone spitting in the garden, so perhaps the bins are successful in an indirect fashion. I didn't dare look inside one though.

Next stop was a visit to what is called the “Bull Temple”. It is a Hindu temple, inside of which is a large statue of a bull. A bull is revered because the god Shiva rode on one, called Nandi. So there are many temples with Nandi as the central figure. The bull statue in this particular temple is supposedly the second largest in India, being about four metres tall. It is made of granite, but having been rubbed

with coconut oil for centuries is now black. The bull was completed in 1786, but still looks young – it's amazing what a daily rub of coconut oil can do for the skin!

After exiting the temple I was chatted up by an auto driver offering to take me to various other tourist sites. My plan had been to walk most places. But it was an unusually hot day, and his rates were very fair, so I said yes. I am quite glad I did. The day got hotter, and by the end my feet were tired from walking around each site, so not having to walk between them as well was a blessing. We also negotiated a fare all the way back to Jakkur where I stay. A slight disadvantage of travelling by auto is that they are fairly low on the ground, so when in the teeming traffic one is assailed by the noise of vehicles as well as constant heavy dosages of exhaust fumes – and I had thought it was the sun making me light-headed! That reminds me of the little electric car that goes by each morning where I wait for the shuttle to work. A tiny little black thing, not much bigger than a barrel, but across the back window it has a large yellow sticker announcing “emission impossible”.

From the Bull Temple I went to Sultan Tipu's summer palace. Tipu is a famous historical figure in this region. I remember visiting one of his outlying forts when I was here last January. He was a Muslim sultan who reigned in the mid 1700s. He was very progressive for that time, overhauling the taxation system, the accountability of sub-chiefs, transparency in land administration, and so on. He is also revered because of several, initially successful, campaigns against the British colonisers. Not a great deal of the summer palace remains. What does is a double story, symmetrical building made of wood. This is supposedly where he received petitions and held court. It dates to pretty much the same time as the Bull Temple, i.e. the 1780s.

From an old building of government to the current State parliament building (called the Vidhana Soudha). Very grandiose, but not overboard. There are two buildings, one built in the early 1950s, and a second opened only last year. Both are of a pale white/cream, I guess marble or granite. Long pillared wings on either side, with an arched and domed main entrance in the middle (also at the end of each wing); golden lions on the top of the main dome. In fact, it is one lion, but with four heads. I learnt that this was the emblem of King Ashoka who ruled the region about 400 BC. You will also remember that I am based at ATREE, the A of which stands for Ashoka. The two buildings are of different styles, but they don't clash. Tourists cannot go in, but can view them from a wide, tree-lined

avenue, in front. The gold lettered etching in the stone across the pillared steps of the main entrance proclaims "Government's work is God's work". An interesting one for a secular state.

After the Vidhana Soudha I headed for another park in the city centre, called Cubbon Park. It is also the location of a couple of museums and an art gallery, which seemed a good option to complete the day and get out of the sun. The park itself is 120 ha and divided in several sections by roads and traffic circles. Some sections are fairly unkempt, whereas others are manicured. It was busy; lots of families have birthday parties, picnics, having a family outing. A fair number of tourists too. Unfortunately the art gallery was closed, which was unexpected based on what my guide book said. I will have to leave that for another day.

Talking of which, it is probably time to sign off here, and leave whatever else for another day. Probably won't be writing next weekend because I am going into the field with Ramesh. Part of his PhD project requires of him to measure the impact of crafters' harvesting on the Lantana populations. We are going to one of reserves and there figure out a methodology for doing that, and then help him out with the initial plots.

I did finish this letter an hour or so ago. But because of a fire in a building right next door, the electricity to the entire block is off, so I cannot read or watch the TV. I had finished dinner and was washing the dishes, whilst listening to some AJ Cale from Mike's music collection. But there was a growing cacophony of noise outside that eventually penetrated my consciousness. I looked around and could see a huge orange glow flickering in the window. I went out onto the balcony and saw that one of the small cement block structures, about 60 metres away from my block of flats, was engulfed in flame along with the ground around it. I had noticed days before that most of the lot was taken up with plastic bags filled with something. The piles of bags were quite high, 1 - 2 metres. I had assumed that the occupants were collecting waste materials and then selling them for recycling. Whatever was in the bags made for a horrendous inferno. There were a couple of dozen people standing around watching. Within a matter of minutes the blaze was really going, licking up the walls of the neighbouring four story block of flats. I could see it tracing up electrical wires right up to the top. It then spread to the neighbouring concrete block structure, which went pretty quickly. By now there were hundreds of onlookers. Some people were throwing buckets of water filled from water tanks at the top of the neighbouring flats, but they were having little

effect. Closer to my building I could see a huddle of women, and piles of pots, water containers, and other belonging. I assume they were the occupants of the blazing houses, being comforted by their neighbours. The electricity was off now, so it was hard to see all the proceedings other than the immediate area being lit up by the fires. I could not tell whether the fire started in the first house, or it had started in the waste bags. Bizarrely some people started throwing bricks onto the roof of the second burning house, which made loud clangs on the corrugated asbestos. At first I thought it was mini explosions, perhaps aerosols bursting in the heat. After about twenty minutes a fire engine arrived, but the fire was already well past its prime. I have no idea from how far away it had to come. For some reason I cannot fathom, it was driving without any headlights on. It had a siren, but it was driving along in the dark. After a further 15 minutes another fire engine arrived, also with no headlights on. The fire officers had to use fire hoses to squirt the onlookers to make them move out of the way so the second engine could get close. As I type this there are still hundreds of people outside, shouting, talking, gesticulating, even though the fire has been extinguished.

Cheers, Charlie

