



The Spekboom



RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

Issue 18

October 2013

Environmental Calendar

- World Planting Day 22 Oct 2013
- International Day of Climate Action Oct 24 2013
- International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War & Armed Conflict 6 Nov 2013
- World Soil Day 5 Dec 2013

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Gladman attends the BIARI Conference in Rhode Island



Bicycle ride, Central Park

Gladman attended a **Brown International Advanced Research Institutes (BIARI)** workshop on "Connections and Flows: Water, Energy and Digital Information in the Global South at Brown University, USA". BIARI is a faculty development initiative that brings promising young scholars from around the globe together with leading researchers in their fields for two-week intensive institutes at Brown University each summer. The workshop was centred on questions related to certain technologies that are central to the challenges and opportunities facing societies in the Global South in the 21st century. Some of the key questions that the workshop considered are:

How might engineering design and development around water and energy move beyond 20th century concepts such as appropriate technology, or the high tech-low tech dichotomy?

How might engineering design and development in the Global South take advantage of an embeddedness in local cultures, societies, and intellectual traditions, but also increasing connectedness to globally-circulating technologies and engineering knowledge?

What would make for more "socially-robust" engineering design and development in the Global South?

Gladman gave a presentation entitled "**Land acquisitions for biofuel production in Chisumbanje communal lands of Zimbabwe: Conflict between national and local interests**". The presentation discussed the importance of a better understanding of the process and local level livelihood impacts of land acquisitions for biofuel de-

velopment in informing future biofuel technological/engineering design. In addition to the workshop initiative, BIARI has a 'seed grant' initiative designed to maintain longer-term collaborations through strengthening professional networks and assisting in converting conversations that devel-



Ground Zero, New York

oped during the workshop into viable research, pedagogical or public outreach projects. The seed funds are intended to advance networking, research, or proof of concept work in preparation for a larger project or grant application involving multiple BIARI alumni.



Times Square



Giselle is a PhD student who is being co-supervised by Charlie and who is visiting from Benin for a few months. This is what she had to say about life in Benin:

I grew up at the Northern part of Benin with my parents; I made my primary school at Ina and begun my secondary school (the first form) at N'dali. I then completed my second form and obtained my Engineer degree at Parakou. My father was an engineer in Agromonic Sciences and he worked as researcher (till his death in December

Visiting PhD student: Gisele Sinasson

2002) at the National Institute of Agronomic Researches of Benin (named INRAB in French). Furthermore until I have finished my secondary school, I had regularly gone to the field (during holidays) with my mother and my brothers and sisters. We had sown cotton, maize, beans, groundnut etc. All these, made me interested in vegetation in general; I wanted to know the processes around growth, reproduction, etc of plants and this is why I choose Agronomy as formation at the University. Once at the University (precisely from my third year), I helped two PhD students in Environmental Science in the field works and this, completed with courses I received in this area, have influenced my choice to study Environmental Science. It is only after completed my Engineer degree that I moved

to the southern part of Benin (precisely Cotonou) where I completed my Master of Science and begun my PhD study. I can say that like in all countries, life is difficult for some people and easier for others. When you complete your undergraduate degree you then have to be responsible of yourself for everything. But this depend in some instances on the economic status of parents (when your parents are riches, they will provide you all you need till you get married but when you have poor parents before getting to the University, you already started taking care of yourself). In the later case, it is very difficult because finding a job is extremely hard. Currently, it is difficult also in Benin for young people to find a job.



Tracey Potts is a Masters student in the dept who is being supervised by James

Sampai Tracey Potts

(who, by the way has also recently taken up the sport of Karate). Tracey recently took part in the 40th Annual US Open World ISKA Sports Martial Arts Championships under the name Sampai Tracey Potts. This competition was held on the 6th and 7th July this year at the ESPN Sports Convention Centre in Orlando, Florida. Sixty-one countries took part and Tracey was part of the South African President's team in the

Under Black Belt Intermediate Advanced Division. Tracey was placed third in clash sparring and points fighting and fourth in traditional Kata, unison forms and finalist points fighting. The department congratulates Tracey on her achievements and I'm sure nobody will mess with her from now on!

Ruth goes to Istanbul

Ruth Kruger, an Honours student in the dept, visited Turkey for two weeks in June. Her main incentive for being there was to attend a week-long meeting on the Global Power Shift from 24th – 30th June. Ruth was a South African representative for the Global Power Shift Group. The group encourages civil society to act against climate change and hope to influence energy policies in South Africa.

She was also fortunate enough to get a week to travel. The meeting involved a coming together of civil society groups from around the globe where movements could be planned and capacity could be built. Being at a meeting like this was encouraging in the sense that there are so many groups from all over the world that want to act against climate change. The smaller groups are work at a local level, however, the global network connects them all.

During the meeting Ruth

attended many interesting talks, which she described as being a “blur of interesting”. The workshops that Ruth attended on non-violent direct action stood out most for her in addition to some talks about the “movement of movements” that are currently spreading across the world from Egypt to Brazil.

Ruth feels that she felt positive that change could happen when she was in a room with 500 passionate, predominantly young environmental activists that all shared a common goal.

Walking through Istanbul allows one to get a clear view of the old and new city, bringing together the historical and the modern day structures.



Kilitbahir Castle on the Gallipoli Peninsula



The Blue Mosque in all its glory



A plenary presentation on the movement of movements been seen all over the world. The photograph on screen is a famous image from the Turkish uprisings



The vegan contingent of the Clean Energy Protest on the final day of the Global Power Shift meeting



The Bosphorus at sunset

Thicket Forum 2013



Fieldtrip to the Great Fish Nature Reserve

We firmly believed in the need for more discussion and debate and less pure “downloading”

Environmental Science bids farewell to the Thicket Forum.....well to the organising thereof at least. The last three years has seen our department co-chair this amazing gathering of kindred spirits with the lads and laddesses from Living Lands (www.livinglands.co.za) group.

The Albany Thickets are an enigma. They are rich in diversity, seriously understudied, highly charismatic and yet under constant threat from unsustainable land-use and habitat transformation. Thicket Forum is the platform where scientists meet farmers, reserve managers meet students, and interns meet practitioners. It is also the portal for new knowledge, brave young research and reflection or introspection. Key issues are presented, hot topics debated and knowledge gained, with many a new connection made. We firmly believed in the need for more discussion and debate and less pure “downloading”.

The list above was our self-imposed mandate and in many ways we did succeed

this year. The keynote addresses do lend some support. The informal vibe also allowed fresh upstarts to “grill” Dr. Bob Scholes in one session, while farmers, conservationists and scientists grappled with predator-livestock issues in another session. This is healthy. Long live Thicket Forum. This year’s presentations can be downloaded from www.data.saeon.ac.za/documents/presence-network/thicket-forum-presentations-2013

Thicket Forum 2014 will be held in conjunction with the **Arid Zone Ecology Forum** in Oudtshoorn in October. These two forums have much in common and the idea is to bring together the collective wisdom, share knowledge, swop ideas and build resilient networks. Dr. Ayanda Sigwela (nyathi@ecol.co.za) and Cosman Bolus (cosmanbolus@hotmail.com) will be coordinating the Thicket Forum side.

We’d like to thank all those who kindly volunteered their time and helped with the organising of Thicket Forums 2011, 12 and 13. A special word of thanks to the CEPF Grant Fund from Conservation International whose generous sponsorship enabled so many students and interns to attend for free. The Melon Foundation provided funding for Pro-

fessor Marja Spierenberg from Vrij University to attend and present her keynote address. The Department of Environmental Science and Charlie Shackleton’s NRF’s SARCHI Chair kindly provided funding as well. Thanks Charlie and Fred for your faith and support.

A special word of thanks to Rhodes University for the many in-kind sponsorships – all which helped to make TF 2013 a success. (Jaine Roberts, Mark Hazel, Karin Cockburn, Tracy van Aarde, Wade Mayes, Juanita Fourie, Craig Langson and Verna Connan all deserve a mighty thanks). The RRRG slaves (Kyra Lunderstedt and Craig Sholto-Douglas) did me proud, as did the Living Lands interns - cheers guys. Lastly, a HUGE thanks to Dieter van den Broeck for the enthusiasm, patience and commitment over the last three years. We owe you buddy.
Mike Powell
Rhodes Restoration Research Group, October 2013

Volleyball Day

The volleyball competition, with a creatively constructed volleyball court, saw eight teams battle against each other on the Environmental Science lawns. The teams were namely, Complexity, Modelling, Wetland rehabilitation, Participatory, Resilience, Regime shift, Monitoring and Planetary boundaries. Team Complexity, Participatory, Resilience and Monitoring made it to the next round of semi-finals after winning against team Modelling, Wetland rehabilitation, Regime shift and Planetary boundaries respectively. In the finals, team Participatory went up against team Resilience after beating team Complexity and team Monitoring respectively, in

the semi-finals. Team Resilience then went on to win the Volleyball Champions title of the day and received beautiful key holders as their trophies. Everyone then celebrated the games with some drinks and a braai—all in all it was a welcome relief from end of year stress.

The funds raised through donations came to R1000.00, of which the dept matched so the total amount was R2000.00 which was given to the Water for Dignity project who are doing amazing volunteer work around water services delivery and community mobilization.



Annual Schools Environmental Quiz

This year saw our Honours students put together the 7th successful Grahamstown schools environmental quiz. There were a total of eight local schools with 4 team members each from Grade 11, each battling it out for the grand first prize of R5000. This year saw Kingswood College come away with first prize for the 4th year running. Well done Kingswood. Second prize of R2000 went to Victoria Girls High, and third prize to St. Andrews. This year there was a consolation prize of R1000 which was won by Mary Waters High School. All prize money was sponsored by Coastal and Environmental Services in Grahamstown.

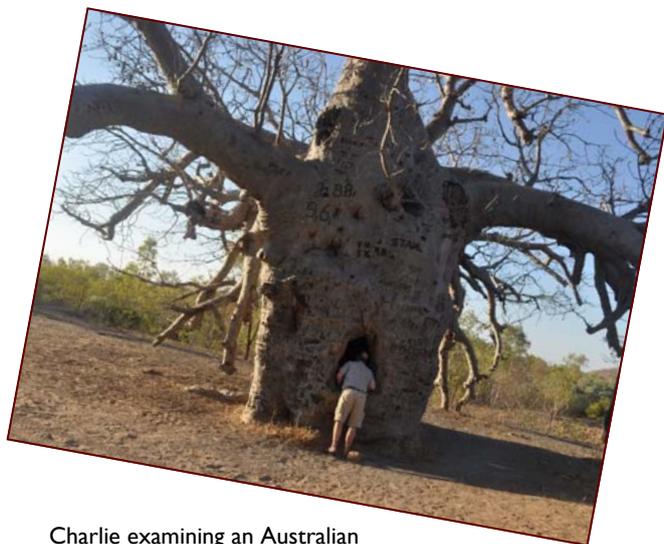
In addition one of the schools, Ntsika High was given a new board game that has just been released,



called EnviroWhizz (a kind of environmental Trivial Pursuit).



Are perceptions of weeds universal? Charlie's trip down-under



Charlie examining an Australian Baobab

Key methodological challenges relate to how to avoid leading respondents into western or researcher definitions or concepts of what is a weed.

This is the topic of a new international research project in which Charlie Shackleton is involved, led by Monash University in Australia. It includes collaborators and sites in Australia, India, Madagascar and South Africa. Specifically we will be adopting a comparative framework of analysis to investigate how indigenous and rural communities around the Indian Ocean perceive, classify, and use environmental weeds in their everyday livelihoods and cultural activities.

The project initiation meeting was recently held in Australia, affording Charlie some time to visit Melbourne, and then spend twelve days in the rural areas of the East Kimberleys, about 850 km south-west of Darwin. The latter half of the trip was spent discussing project implementation, refining methodologies and interacting with local NGOs and aboriginal communities to discuss and pilot some of the approaches. Key methodological challenges relate to how to avoid leading respondents into

western or researcher definitions or concepts of what is a weed. Indeed, we had many discussions whether or not we can even use the word weed in our interactions with local communities. But if we don't, what words or concepts do we use, and how can we strive for consistency across the four study countries?

A prevalent alien species in this part of the world is the cane toad, which various Australian states are trying to eradicate or prevent from spreading further. It was introduced from South America to combat beetle infestations in sugar cane plantations (which they failed to do!). It is now a problem because it has poison glands on its back and so native species (particularly several species of lizards and snakes) that eat it are on the decline. The public awareness campaigns via posters and billboards was very visible and thus were quite impressive.

An enjoyable part of the trip was that many of the discussions were held whilst driving to various aboriginal and scenic areas rather than sitting around a table at a single venue. The downside was that distances in Australia and long, very long. The whole continent is about 6.4 times larger than South Africa. Considered in more practical terms, the state capital to which government agencies and personnel

in the East Kimberleys report is Perth, which is only a mere 3,200 km away via road. Given these sorts of distances, one can see some merit in dividing the country into more than the six states currently delineated on mainland Australia. However, if one did so, many news states would have no, or very small, urban centres as their capital. Already 90 % of the population is urbanised, so there are not many new urban centres or secondary towns.

Being my first visit to Australia, I was obviously disorientated to view forests and wonderful parkland savannas dominated by species that we regard as alien, most notably Eucalypts and thornless Australian acacias – oh dear. At least they also have baobabs (albeit a different species, *Adansonia gregorii*), called boababs there, which helped provide a more African flavour. That aside, I found the landscapes of the dry Kimberleys captivating and ecologically interesting. For instance, the density and biomass of large herbivores in the savannas was extremely low, several orders of magnitude lower than what we find in African savannas. Therefore, what is consuming the bulk of the primary production (other than introduced cattle)? It is insects? Is it fire? Is it decomposers? I am sure a good text on Australian savanna ecology will provide an answer, but

Charlie's trip down-under contd...

seeing it for the first time was most intriguing. Similarly intriguing were the constant road markings warning drivers of flooding on what are more or less flat landscapes. They have meter rules every 30 km kilometres or so, showing the height so that drivers can assess the depth of the flood waters. This implies that the floods cover hundreds, if not thousands, of square kilometres at a time, from rainfall, not rivers bursting their banks. But the mean annual rainfall in that area is only about 850 mmm, which is not particularly heavy. The implications for a wide range of ecological processes are considerable.

We were based in an agricultural town called Kununurra which is the local service centre for the intensive irrigation agricultural enterprises reliant on Australia's largest dam, called Lake Argyle (built in the early 1970s). Key crops include sugar cane, melons and mangoes, and various vegetables. More recently they have planted sandalwood plantations, which are now the largest in the world, as well as some baobab plantations. The roots of baobabs are harvested from the young saplings and sold as vegetables for stir-fries – a new non-timber forest product? Our day trips took us to places like Wyndham on the Cambridge Gulf, Warmun aboriginal settlement, Lake Argyle, El Questro and Emma's Gorge.

I suppose everyone who visits Australia has to be impressed to some degree by the unusual wildlife, such as kangeroos, wallabies, wombats, koalas and the like, not to mentioning the large variety and stunning colouration of the birdlife. Some of the parrots and allied types such as lorikeets and cockatoos are absolutely stunning.



Charlie being ignored by a Kangaroo (not difficult!)



A collection point for live cane toads which are then "humanely euthanised".

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Visiting PhD student from Chile



Jaime Aburto spent the month of August in the department working with

Dr Georgina Cundill on a number of papers for his Phd research. Jaime has almost 20 years of experience in the small fisheries sector in Chile, and is currently registered for his Phd at Universidad Catolica Del Norte. Georgina sits on his Phd committee. Jaime is a biologist by training, but has become increasingly interested in linked social-ecological systems thinking, and particularly in governance is-

sues related to small scale fisheries. Jaime gave a talk in the department on a paper that was recently accepted for publication, in which he described the governance challenges posed by highly variable ecological systems. Ciao Jamie!

“The ECEN provided valuable insights and assisted in making the handbook more accessible”

AGM of the Eastern Cape Environmental Network (ECEN)

On Friday 6th September, the Department of Environmental Science hosted the Annual General meeting of the Eastern Cape Environmental Network (ECEN) here at Rhodes University. The ECEN is a network of civil society organizations that work with communities around the province on issues as varied as basic health care, HIV/AIDs and alternative eco-friendly energy sources. With funding obtained from the IDRC, DES was able to fund the travel and accommodation of this group of dedicated community workers. The first day was spent with the

IDRC project team looking at a Handbook that they are developing for NGO practitioners. The ECEN provided valuable insights to the team and assisted them in making the handbook more accessible for the intended audience. On the second day, the ECEN held their own meeting on campus and were able to plan ahead for another year of important work in their communities.



ECEN members discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the social-learning handbook during a break-out session on the lawns of Bangor House.