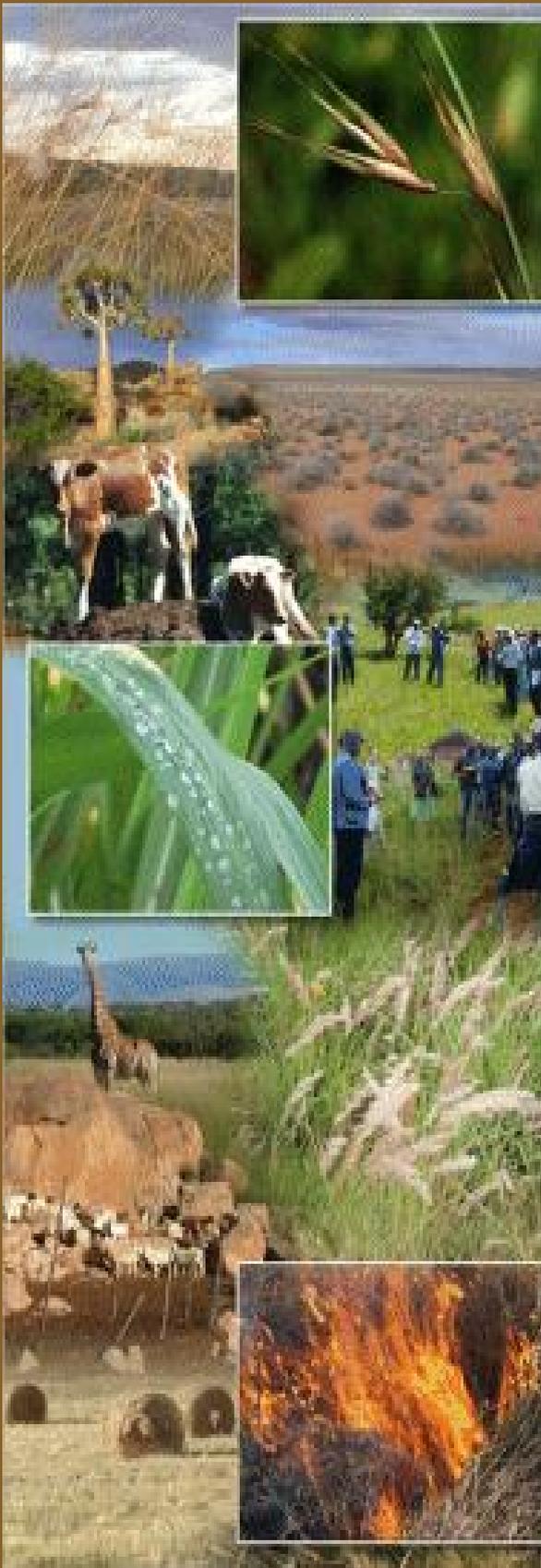


GRASSLAND SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA ANNUAL REPORT

2007/08



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As reported by the President, the Grassland Society of Southern Africa experienced growth and change on many fronts during the period of August 2007 to July 2008.

The Society has a proud history, since 1966 when the inaugural meeting was held at the then University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. With a wide multi-disciplinary base stretching from cultivated pastures to rangeland ecology and beyond, the Society provides a home for scientists, practitioners and students from institutions such as government, tertiary education and private sector.

During March, the council and several Society veterans held a two day workshop to do strategic planning. It became clear that the GSSA has evolved over the past four decades and issues such as biodiversity, carbon sequestration and climate change have become prominent in addition to the more traditional agriculture related issues.

The vision and mission of the Society were scrutinised and adapted, while core values and special attributes such as collegiality, diversity and the encouragement of young scientists were identified. There is a strong belief in the Society in cooperation, rather than competition between individuals and institutions, while broad minded belief systems allow for diverse opinions. The significance of successful congresses, quality publications, a vibrant Professional Affairs Committee, enhancement of the planted pastures component and human capacity building were identified for future growth of the Society.

With an attendance of more than 300 delegates, the Annual Congress, hosted at Badplaas in Mpumalanga, was a great success. The relevance of linkages between planted pastures and natural rangeland were highlighted by Dr Richard Stirzacker, Dr Amie Aucamp and Dr Norman Rethman in the opening addresses. Paper and poster presentations focussing on issues ranging from rangeland fodder production and ecology, rangeland assessment and monitoring, biodiversity, remote sensing to integrated land and water management as an imperative were made.

A number of special sessions and workshops contributed to a most interesting and well balanced programme extending over four days. A special workshop on farmer development, attended by approximately 30 farmers, was held and confirmed the Society's commitment to primary industry. Another workshop that needs mentioning was looking at the lack of capacity, in conjunction with the shortcomings of the present curricula taught at tertiary institutes, to address the needs of pasture science and rangeland management in South Africa.

The official journal of the Society, African Journal of Range and Forage Science (AJRFS), is regarded as the foremost African Rangeland Journal. During the strategic planning workshop and subsequent deliberations, strategies were developed to ensure that the journal continues to play its vital role in the Society. Key issues needing attention were addressed and a strategy to increase the rate and quality of submissions for continuous improvement was developed.

During the reporting year the journal achieved an ISI rating which will contribute to the improvement of the national and international profile of the journal.

The Grassroots, the official newsletter of the Society, continued to grow with the range of contributions expanding both in terms of field of practice of the authors and in terms of geographical spread. Four issues appeared during the year and articles are now available on the official website of the Society.

The official website of the GSSA is an active interface for Society members as well as for the general public. This is the first year that the new website has operated and it has been favourably received by the membership.

The public relations component ensured that the public, with a focus on the youth, are made aware of the activities of the Society.

Awards are given to promising students at school and tertiary level to encourage further studies in the field of Rangeland Management and Pasture Science. Linkages are formed with institutions and organisations in similar fields, while banners, flyers and posters containing information about the Society have been distributed.

The financial position of the Society is stable and satisfactory, even though the income from the Badplaas Congress was significantly lower than projected. The GSSA trust is a legal body managed by a board of trustees. A number of disbursements were approved by the Joined Allocation Committee of the GSSA, which, inter alia, enabled three Society members to attend the Combined International Grassland and Rangeland Congress in Hohot, China in June 2008.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It was a great honour and privilege to serve as President of the GSSA, one of the most integrated of the societies representing natural sciences and resource management in southern Africa. Very few societies are privileged to embody such a wide range of theoretical and practical interests including scientists and managers from ecological and production sciences.

Communication and participation are the pillars on which the Society rests as highlighted at the five yearly strategic planning meeting held in April 2008. Hence the main objectives of the Society are to improve the impact and quality of the journal, promote good science, maintain the social capital of the society and to strengthen our collegiality. The social capital and collegiality is especially developed at our annual congresses with members forming a part of a unique community of practice where theory and implementation meet. Because there is such a wide diversity in employment agencies, congress is the place to forget about administrative and budget concerns and concentrate on exciting discussions about new developments and approaches in the various fields of interest. Many of the older, experienced members started their careers with support from colleagues they met at these congresses, and are still attending, some for as long as 20 years. They are attracted by the opportunity to meet up with old student friends and colleagues, and to get to know the new generation of scientists. For new members this is an opportunity to meet the old gurus, and once again revitalise their careers with support from our senior members. This interaction gives the Society a social vibe that makes each congress an unforgettable experience, a sentiment which should be carefully guarded and nurtured in future.

Communicating and the subsequent implementation of scientific knowledge is essential to the Society and should stay a high priority. Emphasis has been placed on staying current with the societal demands for information and guidance in rangeland ecology, pasture and wildlife sciences but new insights are required to address the consequences of predicted climate change. Scientific publication is very important and we are very grateful to our Scientific Editor and publishing company, NISC, who have managed to get our journal ISI rated. We hope that this will not only increase submissions but also the quality of the articles published. The new mentorship program that will be funded by the Society will further help train young scientists in scientific publication, using the older members as mentors, thus contributing their valuable new insights to the journal. Grassroots, our newsletter aimed at practitioners, as well the website, are also valuable tools that can be further developed to update members with new developments and information.

Finally the future of the Society depends on its members not only participating actively in the running of the Society but also for ensuring that research and implementation stay vibrant and relevant in a changing society and environment. To achieve these goals, one of the biggest challenges will be to stimulate interest in rangeland ecology, pasture science and related fields and to ensure the building of sufficient capacity in these fields to guarantee the future production of high quality science and the future of our discipline.

Rina Grant
GSSA President (2007/08)

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The GSSA is involved and concerned with the science and practice of range and pasture management. This broad field involves primarily the use and conservation of natural resources. It encompasses applied fields such as livestock production, wildlife management, nature conservation, water catchment management and range and mine-dump rehabilitation. The disciplines include amongst others, ecology, botany zoology, range and pasture science, animal science, soil science and genetics.

The GSSA has a multi-disciplinary base and promotes interaction between environmental practitioners, scientists and students who are employed by a wide range of institutions including government, universities, development, agricultural, wildlife and related agencies.

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

During the full Strategic Review conducted in 2008 the Vision and Mission statements was revisited (see section on Strategic Plan).

What are our objectives?

- Promote and advance the science and technology of rangeland and pasture production.
- Create awareness and opportunities in southern Africa for range and pasture scientists, technologists and farmers to confer and exchange ideas.

- Collect and disseminate knowledge and information in the field of rangeland science through congresses and publications
- Encourage liaison with other societies having similar or common interests both nationally and internationally.
- Promote the equitable, efficient and sustainable use of natural resources.

HISTORY OF THE GSSA

The Society held its Inaugural Meeting and Congress in 1966 at the then University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. There were 96 delegates, which included Professor Scott, Neil Tainton, Peter Edwards, Pete Booysen, Pierre Theron, Rob Drewes, Derek Scotney, Winston Trollope and Aubrey Venter. The Congress has been held each year since 1966 in either January or July, sometimes in collaboration with other societies and organisations, including the International Rangeland Congress in 2003, the South African Society of Animal Scientists, the South African Weed Science Society and the Thicket Forum.

Until 1983, a full proceedings of each Congress was published. Thereafter saw the birth of the Journal of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa which was published quarterly until 1993 when it was reduced to three issues per year. The Journal is currently published under the name of the African Journal of Range and Forage Science. Since its inception publication of work from the Proceedings onwards has been peer-reviewed.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Over the last few years the GSSA had made major efforts to become more professional in its approach to managing and growing the Society. In the modern world, the Society is competing for members' time and resources with a great many other priorities. Like any business, the GSSA needs to be guided by a clear vision and measurable goals. In order for the GSSA to remain relevant to its members and true to its core values, the Society embarked on a strategic planning process ten years ago. At the end of March 2008, the Council and several Society veterans met to revisit the strategic objectives of the Society and measure the achievement, or relevance, of those objectives decided four years ago.

The workshop was facilitated by Harry Biggs of SANParks, himself a Society veteran and a veteran of many high-powered strategic planning exercises in various organizations. His experience and humor kept the workshop focused over two exhausting but rewarding days of intense discussion and debate.

Previous strategic objectives

Justin du Toit presented the results of a preparatory survey that had been conducted among Council members and several experienced Society members, on the achievement of the original strategic objectives decided four years ago. The 14 strategic objectives could be broadly divided into three categories according to how well they had been accomplished over the past few years. The objectives that had been accomplished well related to the Congress, which has attracted enthusiastic

participation for several years from a wide range of organizations, the administration of the Society (more about that later), and some technical and legal issues dealing with the publisher of the Journal and the Constitution. Importantly, the strategic plan developed in 2004 had been used to guide the Society's activities and was extremely effective in focusing the resources and efforts of Council. Several strategic objectives fell into the "mediocre" accomplishment category, according to members. Although some key role players had been informed about the GSSA, many more institutions and senior managers had yet to be exposed to the Society. ISI rating has still not been achieved for the Journal, despite constant communication between the Society and the journal's publisher, NISC (who have the responsibility of seeking ISI rating). An advertising strategy for *Grassroots* and the website has been developed, but until recently very little actual advertising space was sold. Finally, the portfolios of some additional members on Council still needed to be clarified.

Four strategic objectives were considered to have been poorly addressed. With a few exceptions, the Society had not really achieved its aim of translating scientific information into layman's terms in popular media. The Society had generally failed to expose itself in the media, particularly radio and TV, again with one or two exceptions. The role and functioning of the Professional Affairs Committee was still uncertain. Finally, the GSSA had made little progress in developing strong partnerships with other organizations.

The members debated the relevance of many of the previous strategic objectives, and several people were concerned that the strategic objectives did not really address the core function of the Society.

However, it was also pointed out that at the time of the original strategic planning workshop, the Society was in dire financial straits, and the reason many of the objectives did not seem so important now was because the Society had grown over the past few years, and had moved beyond the original objectives. The original objectives needed redefining, as did the vision and mission of the GSSA.

The original vision and mission generated some heated debate about the role of the Society in society. The membership of the GSSA covers a broad range of disciplines, and the vision and mission of the Society need to be broad enough to reflect this diversity. The GSSA is primarily a forum for exchange of ideas in the broad disciplines of rangeland and pasture science, but also plays an active role in the disciplines associated with grassland science.

The GSSA was founded 40 years ago with a very strong agricultural focus and strong government representation. Over the past four decades, society has changed and the GSSA has changed too: now the Society reflects a much broader range of interests such as biodiversity, carbon sequestration and climate change, in addition to the traditional agricultural sectors.

The traditional sources of research funding and the direction of research conducted by members has changed, with government research institutions such as departments of agriculture playing a smaller role in grassland science research than previously. Socio-economic issues have become increasingly prominent in membersqwork. The membership profile of the Society has changed dramatically, in terms of age, gender and race, over the past two decades.

Vision

Advancing rangeland ecology and pasture management in Africa.

Mission

We provide a dynamic and inclusive forum and publish quality research.

Through embracing diversity and change, we seek to promote:

- " Science into practice
- " Human capacity development
- " Trans-disciplinary views

and support the understanding of ecosystem services to achieve production, conservation and biodiversity goals.

Core values

The GSSA embraces a number of unwritten core values, which have guided its philosophy for decades. Collegiality is extremely important . members are part of a broader, likeminded and open social network. The GSSA is primarily a forum for promoting and disseminating original scientific research, with a strong focus on resource conservation.

The Society promotes diversity and recognizes and encourages young scientists. The broad membership of the GSSA can mean conflicting values placed on resources (for example, planted pastures *versus* biodiversity conservation); the Society must be broad-minded enough to recognize and embrace diverse opinions. The GSSA places a high value on applied science with strong links to land users and practitioners, and leading practitioners are recognized and rewarded. There is a strong belief in cooperation rather than competition between institutions and individuals.

Unique and special attributes

The following were mentioned as unique and special attributes of the GSSA:

- The membership profile is very diverse. The membership is youthful, but the
- Society has also lost a lot of experience;
- The GSSA is very transdisciplinary;
- Both agriculture and biodiversity conservation are strongly represented;
- There is healthy interaction between scientists, practitioners, policy makers and stakeholders;
- The Society boasts a strong knowledge base in many disciplines;
- The GSSA runs very successful Congresses which are social and congenial;
- The GSSA has excellent administrative support with good communication systems which have allowed the Society to grow;
- There is a high level of trust within Council (social capital);
- Lots of members who are enthusiastic, willing and loyal;
- Long-term and continuous collegiality;
- The GSSA publications.

All of the above attributes support the vision and mission. Although several soft-attributes were identified (such as collegiality), they contribute to the success of the Society.

Determinants and constraints

The workshop spent some time identifying the determinants of the above special attributes, as well as constraints and threats. Running successful Congresses and symposia is largely due to the enthusiasm of members, who have been encouraged to run their own sessions (rather than relying on the congress organi-

zing committee to decide the entire program).

Excellent keynote speakers, both local and international, have contributed to events. Congresses are professionally run, with good venues and excellent post-congress tours and side events involving the broader community outside the GSSA. Importantly, the Society has good financial back-up from GSSA Trust. Threats to Congress include the perception that Congress is too general, and there is a perception that Congress is too expensive, particularly for practitioners in the private sector. Freyni du Toit, the administrator, was mentioned by name as making a huge contribution to the success of the Society through her professional, business-minded administration of the GSSA. The back-office functions of the Society have been significantly improved and streamlined through her technological aptitude, particularly the development of the Society's database (which handles everything from Congress fees to requesting contributions for *Grassroots*), and the new Society website. The Society is sufficiently financially viable to pay for professional administration services. A potential threat is complacency on the part of Council. loss of key people could have a severe impact on the administration of the Society.

Other determinants of the success of the Society included the congenial atmosphere of Society events, the relatively small discipline and, interestingly, the fact that there is not a lot of money in the discipline. the Society is not run by fat cats. Members are loyal to the Society, which contributes to the sharing of experience between old and new members. The GSSA is a nursery for new scientists, and young scientists are welcomed and included in GSSA events, rather than patronized.

Some threats to these attributes include, again, complacency: the Society cannot afford to take these special attributes for granted lest they slowly become corrupted. The diversity of the Society also holds the potential for ideological rifts within the Society . a lesson learned from bitter experience in the mid-1990s, when a clash between some members nearly caused the GSSA to split.

Future directions

The next phase of the workshop focused on identifying the key areas for action, and strategies to guide the direction of the Society for the next few years. The most important activities of the Society were identified as:

- Running successful meetings, especially Congresses;
- Publishing good quality research in the African Journal of Range and Forage Science;
- Revitalizing the planted pastures component of the GSSA;
- Clarifying the role of the Professional Affairs Committee (PAC);
- Increasing capacity development, particularly the development of young scientists;
- Maintaining the important soft stuff+ . the social attributes mentioned above as key to the Society's institutional culture;
- Growing the *Grassroots*;
- Maintaining professional administration.

Within each of these focus areas, specific ingredients for success were developed, which in turn were used to generate tasks for Council members to perform. A major area of concern which will require a lot of additional work is the state of Journal, particularly improving the number and quality of submissions. The Journal is

arguably the most important product of the Society, with a long and proud history of publishing excellent peer-reviewed research. Key to the Journal's success is marketing it, through the publishers, as a peer-reviewed journal catering to an important niche market relevant to Africa. A number of strategies and tasks to this end were identified, which will be pursued by the Journal Editor.

Conclusion

The most important feature of the workshop was its success in identifying the core values and functions of the GSSA, which in turn will focus the activities of Council in ensuring the continued relevance of the Society. The GSSA is an organization that has an important role to play in society, in nurturing young scientists and providing a platform for specialists to interact in many fields related to range and pasture science. While there is a great deal of overlap between the interests of the GSSA and many other organizations, no other single organization contains the diversity of disciplines that is embraced by the GSSA. This diversity is the GSSA's greatest strength, but also its greatest challenge. Council's challenge will be to ensure that the GSSA remains relevant and that the GSSA's core values continue to guide the Society.

ACTIVITIES 2007/08

The membership of the GSSA is growing, we are financially sound and well managed, we have a high quality scientific Journal and popular newsletter. A highlight for members is a well-organized and vibrant Annual Congress.

Congress 43 2008

Badplaas has a very scenic setting in the Highveld of Mpumalanga, overlooking a game reserve with a wide variety of animals such as white rhino, zebra and kudu. The natural hot water spring that flows into two large swimming pools, has long been known for its natural curing properties.

This presented a very soothing and relaxing atmosphere after the many interesting sessions and added vigour to the start of the day.

This congress specifically aimed at highlighting the important links between planted pastures and natural rangeland as there has been a concern that the planted pasture section of the GSSA has not received the attention it deserves.

The meeting was opened by Dr Hector Magome, the managing executive: conservation services of SANParks. The presence of the executive of SANParks at the congress emphasised the importance of science in conservation, as well as the need to share conservation issues with rangeland and pasture scientists. Dr. Magome emphasised the importance of allowing scientists to think freely about approaches to solving emerging problems when the system is under threat, rather than restricting the possible approaches.

The keynote address by Dr Richard Stirzacker from CSIRO in Australia discussed 'What can agriculture learn from the study of natural ecosystems?' He emphasised the role that planted pastures played in food provision and population growth and how improved technology made this possible to produce sufficient food in the limited area available for crop production between the extremes of hot

and cold zones, and extremely wet and dry zones.

However, there are now huge challenges to food production in the form of increased production costs and environmental changes and degradation. The richer insights rendered from knowledge of the functioning of ecological systems may help

to overcome some of these problems. An important point to consider is that even though optimal efficiency which was always strived for is still a worthy goal, it should not be the ultimate goal any more. The emphasis should now change towards encouraging diversity to enhance resilience or be prepared to pay the cost of not having a resilient system which might still be small at this stage, but will become huge as resilience of the system decreases in the face of increasing disastrous events.

The following plenary session aimed at linking planted pastures to natural rangelands with the emphasis on the knowledge gained over the past 25 years. The first talk by Amie Aucamp emphasised the role of planted pastures in livestock production and the risks of degradation due to overstocking. Norman Rethman followed on by discussing how planted pastures can be integrated into livestock production systems taking the conservation of natural resources into account, making sure that resources are used sustainably.

A special session also addressed the question of 'How our knowledge has grown since the Biome projects+ and the Responses of Savannas to Stress and Disturbance: a proposal for a collaborative programme of researchq The objective of this exercise was: 'To develop a predictive understanding of the ways in which savannas respond to natural and man-made stresses and disturbancesq The session concluded that while previously

investigated issues were largely still relevant additional factors such as the effects of climate change had emerged as major drivers. Methods of measurement were discussed and the importance of new technologies such as remote sensing as an adjunct to field monitoring was highlighted. The session hopefully contributed to the matrix of what is useful to measure and what new ideas need to be added in order to better understand and predict ecosystem function and trends.

The lack of capacity in grassland sciences is a huge concern that was discussed at both these sessions and a workshop held on teaching rangeland and pasture science will hopefully address some of these issues. A further workshop on Farmer Development: New Approaches to Rangeland and Pasture Management further addressed the lack of capacity at ground level.

These sessions set the scene for the rest of the congress. The savanna and rangeland theme was addressed by eighteen papers on the understanding of Savanna Ecology. These included papers on nutrient and energy flow, degradation and ecosystem resilience. The five papers in the Adaptive Management session focussed on discussing progress with the implementation of adaptive management in practise. A special session with four papers on Integrating Land and Water Systems as a Resource Management Imperative discussed how to link the river and terrestrial systems in the production landscape. A session on Rangeland Fodder Production and Quality addressed questions on how utilization affects forage quality and production and how forage quality in turn affects herbivory. How to monitor all these interactions has long been a contentious issue and was addressed by six papers in the session on Rangeland Assessment and Monitoring.

The recovery of degraded areas is another issue that has received a lot of attention in management and research. Approaches to rehabilitation of degraded areas as well as the control of invasive aliens and bush encroached areas was discussed in 23 papers.

One of the most difficult aspects in range and intensive livestock production systems is to ensure fodder flow. Approaches to this problem was addressed in 28 papers presented in various sessions and was aimed specifically to help the farming community. These papers covered topics such as the role of nitrogen fertilizer in the production of planted pastures, to different approaches in determining production.

Biodiversity has become a very important goal in most conservation areas, but has also gained importance in rangeland systems. A session with 9 papers discussed biodiversity initiatives in a wide range of fields from crane conservation to conservation of grasslands.

A new field in grassland science is remote sensing. This special session with six papers discussed how this tool could be used for monitoring the effect of factors such as fire, nutrient and soil distribution and rainfall on rangeland production.

Every day was concluded by a social get together around the warm fires, which were often concluded by a warm dip in the pools nearby. The social vibe of the society is still strong and many important insights and co-operations were gained in this less formal arena.

At the final dinner, several awards were handed out for excellence in science. Alan Manson, Debbie Jewitt and Alan Short received the award for best paper in the African Journal of Range and Forage Science for *Effects of season and frequen-*

cy of burning on soils and landscape functioning in a moist montane grassland. Vol. 24(1): 9-18.

Best Poster was won by Bethwell Moyo of University of Fort Hare for Moyo B, Dube S, Lesoli MS and Masika PJ:

Temporal and spatial variation in activity patterns of cattle grazing in the communal areas of the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

The best presentation by a young scientist was handed to Meghan Ellis, University of KwaZulu-Natal for Ellis M, Kirkman KP and Morris CD: *Seedling growth and competition in five South African grasses: the nitrogen effect.*

Finally, best presentation was handed to Jabulani Mashiya, Tshwane of University of Technology for *Additional skills and training for pasture scientists needs attention for the future survival of rangelands in South Africa.*

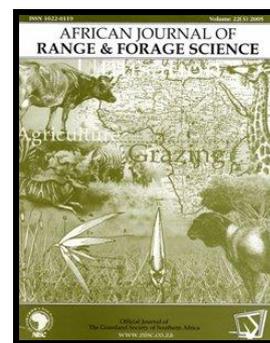
Each congress award is judged by a panel of four judges per session, according to a strict set of criteria, and the winners can be proud of being the top-scorers in their categories.

Publications

African Journal of Range and Forage Science (AJRFS)

The Society promotes scientific communication with its Journal, i.e. The *African Journal of Range and Forage Science (AJRFS)*. It is the foremost African rangeland Journal, devoted to understanding the processes affecting natural rangeland. It is dedicated to promoting the understanding of processes that affect forage production of rangelands and pastures in Africa.

Articles deal with plant and animal interactions (including both domestic and wild herbivores), rangeland condition assessment, forage production and human impacts on rangeland. The Journal includes peer-reviewed scientific papers, invited reviews, research notes and book reviews dealing with topics related to range and forage science which contribute to the promotion of the discipline in the African context.



2007/08 has been an eventful term for the African Journal of Range and Forage Science (AJRFS) with a change in editorship, a strategic planning meeting to chart the way forward for improving the journal and the long sought-after ISI rating finally being achieved.

At the GSSA strategic planning meeting in March 2008 it was acknowledged that the AJRFS was headed for a crisis, with declining submission rates and fewer and fewer GSSA members supporting the journal. A strategic planning meeting around the journal in July 2008 identified the following as key issues requiring action and resources: improving the national and international profile of the journal and achieving ISI rating, increasing the rate and quality of submissions from established and less experienced authors, developing a mentorship programme to encourage a broader cross-section of researchers (especially those working outside academia) to publish their research in the

New aims and scope of the AJRFS

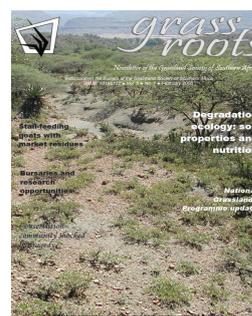
The African Journal of Range & Forage Science is the leading rangeland and pastoral journal in Africa. The Journal is dedicated to publishing quality original material that advances rangeland ecology and pasture management in Africa. Contributions reporting on research not done in Africa, which is applicable in Africa, are welcome. The Journal promotes both science and its application and authors are encouraged to explicitly identify the practical implications of their work. Peer-reviewed research papers and research notes deal primarily with all aspects of rangeland and pasture ecology and management, including the ecophysiology and biogeochemistry of rangelands and pastures, terrestrial plant-herbivore interactions (both domestic and wild), rangeland assessment and monitoring, effects of climate change on rangelands, rangeland and pasture management, rangeland rehabilitation, ecosystem services in support of production, conservation and biodiversity goals and the identification and development of intensive and semi-intensive pasture and forage resources to meet livestock production needs in Africa. Articles highlighting transdisciplinary linkages among biophysical and social sciences that support management, policy and societal values are particularly encouraged. The Journal includes relevant book reviews and invited perspectives that contribute to the development of range and forage science in Africa. Letters to the editor that debate issues raised in the Journal are acceptable. The African Journal of Range & Forage Science is the official journal of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa.

From 2009, Susi Vetter is taking over as scientific editor, with the added brief of achieving the key objectives identified at the strategic planning meeting. The journal administration is now handled by Freyni du Toit, who works closely with the scientific editor.

The Journal full text is published on www.ajol.info

Grassroots

Grassroots, the newsletter of the Society, is the mouthpiece of the Society and contains information regarding important upcoming events, news, and scientific articles.



The Grassroots continues to grow and develop, with a new-look cover and stimulating articles. A special issue of the Grassroots in June 2007 covered the proceedings of a National Rangeland Monitoring Workshop hosted by the Agricultural Research Council and attended by rangeland specialists from across the country.

The range of contributions to the Grassroots has broadened, both in terms of fields of practice of the authors, and in terms of geographic spread. A number of authors who presented papers and posters at the annual congress were approached to

submit their work to the *Grassroots*, which resulted in a large number of excellent articles being submitted for publication by the end of 2007/08.

Four issues of the *Grassroots* were produced. Individual articles are available on the GSSA website and can be found by using ordinary internet search engines or Google Scholar.

Website

The official website of the GSSA (www.grassland.org.za) is an active interface for Society members as well as for the general public both nationally and internationally. This is the first year that the new website operated, and it has been favourably received by the membership.

Apart from providing lists of job and funding opportunities, the website also features a regularly updated upcoming events list detailing everything applicable to the wide range of disciplines encompassed by the membership. During this year, opportunities available for post-graduate study were separated from the main funding page to allow a focused area for prospective Masters and Doctoral students. Other new additions to the website include a section for important links which provides a list of member institutes and other affiliated organisations and a section for listing publications (journal articles, books, reports, etc.) produced by GSSA members.

The newsletter of the GSSA, the *Grassroots*, is now available for downloading from the website, and each new issue is loaded upon completion. Alan Short, the editor of the *Grassroots*, has uploaded all of the historical issues of the newsletter as well as issues of the *Bulletin* going back to 1991, which precedes the *Grassroots*.

The *African Journal of Range and Forage Science*, the journal of the GSSA, is also a major feature of the new website. Upon the completion of each issue, the table of contents with links to each abstract are included on the website, thus making it more accessible to the membership and the general public. Instructions about how to access the online issues of the journal, which are now available to the first proceedings published in 1966, are available on the GSSA website.

The functionality of the website with regard to event management is excellent, and two events (the 43rd Annual Congress and a Prestige Symposium on Rehabilitating Rangelands) were advertised with online registration during 2007/2008. This proved a successful method of registering participants, and, in conjunction with the database, updating participants was a simple and easy procedure.

Table 1 summarises some key statistics regarding visitors to the website. The statistics only begin on 1 January 2008 as the website was not functional for the total quarter from 1 October 2007 to 31 December 2007.

Public Relations

Because of the emphasis that the Society places on the development of young scientists in the field of range and forage management, this is a very important activity. This is done by rewarding outstanding academic achievements by students in the field of range and pasture science on an annual basis.

Mr Theo Scholtz received the GSSA award for the best MSc student in Range and Forage Science for 2007/8 at the North-West University. The title for his masters study was:

Table 1 GSSA website statistics for the 2007/08 period.

GOOGLE WEBSITE STATISTICS	Jan '08 to Mar '08	Apr '08 to Jun '08
Total recorded visits	2782	3180
Total page views	10929	10505
Average time on site	3 min 29 sec	3 min 23 sec
Percentage of new visits	72.21 %	71.19%
Direct traffic (straight to our website)	32.93 %	29.25%
Search engine traffic	58.91 %	63.05%
Referred traffic	8.16 %	7.67%
Top five countries		RSA (81.7%), USA (8.7%), UK (2.88%), Australia (1.69%), India (1.44%)
Top five popular pages	Job opportunities, 2008 Annual Congress, Upcoming events, Publications, Funding opportunities	Job opportunities, 2008 Annual Congress, Upcoming events

The evaluation of the establishment and growth of indigenous trees to restore deforested riparian areas in the Mapungubwe National Park, South Africa.

To encourage students to take up rangeland courses at tertiary institutions, awards are also given at the Eskom Expo for Young Scientists. The Society presents a GSSA Expo award to the candidate who excels in the field of range and forage science. This year the National Finals was won by Henrico Gouws and Michelle Olivier from Joubertina with their project: *Wat gemaak met wattles? (What to do with wattles?)*.

The GSSA has been linked with various other organizations, institutions and interested parties.

Banners, fliers and posters, containing information about the Society, have been distributed at various occasions.

Professional Affairs

The Professional Register currently has a total of 51 members. 10 Professional members either resigned from the Register, from the Society or were suspended. The Professional Affairs Committee has spent much of the year in negotiations with the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions regarding their criteria for acceptance of members with little headway being made.

FINANCIAL REPORT

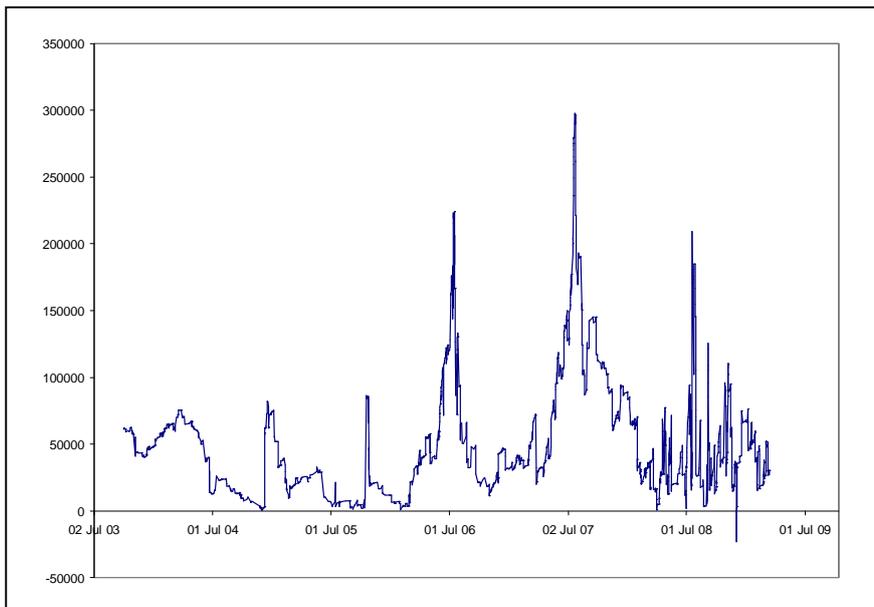
Status

The GSSA remains in a good financial position, but the income during the 2007/08 financial year was lower than expected, and hence its running capital is lower (Figure 1).

Congres 43 – Badplaas

The nett income from the Badplaas Congress of R 50 362, was lower than predicted, and below the minimum income stipulated by the GSSA. This has not affected the liquidity of the society, because of the retained income from the previous year. There main reason for the reduced income was that the cost of the venue was higher than anticipated.

The financial position of the GSSA is stable and satisfactory, but expenses at congresses must be carefully monitored to ensure that they donq exceed budgeted values.



TRUST

The GSSA Trust is a legal body that is managed by a Board of Trustees of 5 members as appointed by the Master of the High Court for a period of at least 5 years. The current trustees are Prof Klaus Kellner (chairman), Prof Chris Dannhauser, Prof Winston Trollope, Mr Alan Short and Mr John Clayton (treasurer). The president of the GSSA also attends Trust meetings as an ex-officio member and administrative tasks are organised by the administrator, Mrs Freyni du Toit.

A certain amount of money that was saved over the years from the existence of the GSSA, is kept as separate accounts at financial institutions in South Africa. Ewing Trust Company are the financial consultants and administrators of the GSSA Trust funds and are responsible to advise Trust regarding investments, accounting and the auditing. The Council of the GSSA, as well as paid up GSSA members can apply for funding from the

Trust for attending national and international congresses, or for other GSSA matters. Applications must be made through the application proforma of the GSSA and must include activities that will promote the Society. Trust will make disbursements to applicants after approval by the Joint Allocations Committee (JAC) of the GSSA.