

Letters

Dear Friends all,
NOW we're 'cooking with gas!'

Being a member of the Forestry Institute and EWT with wide personal and professional environmental interests, I'm delighted to read of your widening scope and look forward to seeing what develops. For too many years too many of us have tended to concentrate on our own 'little boxes', a lesson I learnt 35 years ago when moving from Zambia to [then] Rhodesia, where the 'little box' mentality was actively encouraged. With good reason in some cases, but to the detriment of the 'whole' in the broader sense.

Inclusion of the Ground Hornbill Group [to which I happen to be a recent field contributor] is an excellent start, and long may it continue, while not losing sight of the central strand of veld and range.

Having battled with ill-informed adverse criticism when introducing Goats to create a mixed Cattle-Goat system on our School farm some 11 years ago, I'm delighted

to read Winston's 'change the animals to suit the bush, rather than [struggle to] change the bush to suit the animals' talk at Döhne.

My ranch experience is about to close shortly as I find it impossible to manage a small livestock enterprise in the anarchy which pervades the 'Zimbabwe' of today. Ten years of careful closed Nguni breeding destroyed by fence cutting and stray scrub bullocks about which the 'authorities' do nothing; vandalism, snaring, theft, lack of vet requisites and supplements exacerbated by the economic collapse of the last couple of years, associated unemployment, drought and 'Party' politics all combine to an unrewarding occupation which I propose to terminate in the next few months. Leave me time for more beneficial enterprises such as my involvement with community forestry - and livestock - here and in Zambia, our rented smallholding [this year's trees all planted on time for once], railway research with our national museum team, collating

years of field notes, and learning how to use Punkin 'Puter to his full potential & not just for letters!

Bully for the DNA boffins and changing more names. I shall exercise my right of choice of classification, and shall retain *Acacia* with which I've been familiar for all these years. And not write any 'official papers' even if invited!

My very best wishes all round to all acquaintances & friends of years gone by [& shall commiserate with the Dredded Koos in the near future],

Love & Light from an ever Darkening Corner of our Spherical Globe,

geof

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*Letter (reluctantly)
shortened – Ed*

News

Ecosystem assessment wins top environment award

David Dickson

Source: SciDev.Net

More than 1,300 biodiversity experts from 95 nations have shared one of the world's top environmental prizes for carrying out the first international scientific assessment of the planet's ecological health.

The 2005 Zayed International Prize for the Environment, awarded for 'scientific and or technological

achievement in environment' went to the scientists for their work on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA), whose final report was completed earlier this year

The international jury that awarded the prizes described the MEA as a "landmark study on the condition of the world's ecosystem services from fisheries and freshwaters up to

the carbon capture of the world's forests".

The jury added that the assessment underlines the economic importance of the natural environment and demonstrates that the degradation of ecosystems is progressing "at an alarming and unsustainable rate".

<http://www.scidev.net>

EIA for Petronet's proposed new pipeline from Kendal (Mpumalanga) to Waltloo (Gauteng)

The Bohlweki-SiVEST Joint Venture held a number of public meetings in January to provide feedback on the findings of the environmental scoping study.

The draft Environmental Scoping Report will be available for review on the project website

(www.nmppela.co.za) from 30th January until 28th February. Written comments should be submitted by 28th February 2006.

Contact: Nicolene Venter or Gift Magangane of the Bohlweki-SiVEST Joint Venture, PO Box 11784, Vorna Valley, 1686
Tel: (011) 466-3841
Fax: (011) 466-3849
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k-w@nmppela.co.za

Route maps, registration form, comments form and other documentation also available from admin@gssa.co.za.

LETTERS (cont.)

In the past few months various people have asked about indigenous ornamental grasses for their gardens. I would like to know if anyone is aware of publications giving information on which of our indigenous grasses are suitable as ornamentals and how one could use them in the garden e.g. in full sun or semi-shade, around bird baths or simply for their beauty

Sigrun Ammann

Readers, write in - Ed

MSc and PhD bursaries available for students in rangeland, plant or animal ecology to work on NRF-funded research project:

The role of key resources in the Richtersveld National Park: Implications for livestock population dynamics and biodiversity conservation under current and climate change scenarios

The research is collaboration between co-investigators at Rhodes University (Dr Susi Vetter), the University of Cape Town (Prof. William Bond), Edinburgh University (Prof. Andrew Illius) and South African National Parks (Dr. Howard Hendricks). The project is based in the Richtersveld National Park (RNP).

The project aims to test recent theory on plant-herbivore dynamics in semi-arid systems. In particular, the aim is to test the predictions of modelling work by Illius and O'Connor (1999, 2000), which are:

1. Long-term mean herbivore abundance is very largely determined by the quantity of key resources, and scarcely at all by resources available in the wet season.
2. The potential for grazing-induced transformation of the vegetation comprising the wet-season resource increases as the ratio of key resource to wet

season resource increases.

This theory is becoming widely cited but has not so far been explicitly tested in the field. Possible research projects under this programme include:

- Quantifying the seasonal, inter-annual and spatial variation in forage production and quality in the RNP.
- Relating this variability to herbivore and herder movement as well as herbivore population dynamics.
- Exploring the impacts of herbivore movement and numbers on the plant communities of the Richtersveld National Park.
- Comparisons of livestock population dynamics in the RNP (where herders have access to the Orange River) and similar areas in Namaqualand (e.g. Paulshoek) which do not have such a key resource available to them.
- Predicting impacts of climate change on the plant-herbivore dynamics and herder livelihoods.

- NRF funding is available for one MSc and one PhD student. Students will register at Rhodes University or at the University of Cape Town. At the PhD level, opportunities for study in Edinburgh may also exist for suitable candidates.

Applicants must have a strong background in ecology. Knowledge of plant-herbivore systems is a strong recommendation. A working knowledge of ecological modelling, remote sensing or animal nutrition would be an added advantage.

The NRF requires that preference be given to South African nationals.

Interested applicants should contact Susi Vetter at s.vetter@ru.ac.za.

DEADLINE for submissions: 15 March 2006

More information about the project can be found by going to www.ru.ac.za/botany and following the links.



Upcoming Events

From www.gssa.co.za

Population and habitat viability assessment for the Bearded Vulture

Date: 6 - 10 March 2006

Venue: Sterkfontein Dam

Contact: Brenda Daly by 10 February 2006

011 4861102, brendad@ewt.org.za

Training Workshops on Building Capacity to Set Priorities for Agricultural Biotechnology in West and Central Africa

Deadline for Registrations: 15 February 2006

Date: 13 - 17 March 2006 (2nd follow-up workshop: 1-5 May 2006)

Venue: Dakar, Senegal

Contact: marcel.nwalozie@coraf.org

1st COSTECH Scientific and Technological Conference: Science and Technology for Growth and Poverty Reduction in Tanzania

Deadline for Registrations: 15 March 2006

Date: 17 - 19 May 2006

Venue: Tanzania

Contact: costech@costech.or.tz

SEAON Summit and Student poster competition

Date: 26-28 March

Venue: Gauteng

Website: www.saeon.ac.za/students/

Contact: Marina Joubert

marina@southernscience.co.za

First International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists (IAARD) African Chapter Conference

Early Registration Deadline: 21 April 2006

Date: 21 - 26 May 2006

Venue: Hotel Intercontinental Nairobi, Kenya

Contact: Dr. Joseph Kiplang

jkngetich@yahoo.co.uk

Grassland Society 41st Annual Congress

Date: 17-21 July 2006

Venue: ATKV Klein Kariba, Bela Bela

Deadline for early bird registration: 31 May 2006

Contact: Freyni du Toit

admin@gssa.co.za

Website: www.gssa.co.za/congress2006

South African Weed Science Society Congress

Date: 15-18 July 2006

Venue: ATKV Klein Kariba, Bela Bela

Contact:

Suzette Bezuidenhout

Suzette.Bezuidenhout@dae.kzntl.gov.za

Global Spatial Data Infrastructure-9 Conference: Spatial Data - Tool for Reducing Poverty

Date: 6 - 10 November 2006

Venue: Santiago, Chile

Contact:

Harlan Onsrud onsrud@godi.org

International Conference on the Future of Transhumance Pastoralism in West and Central Africa

Date: 20 - 24 November 2006

Venue: Abuja, Nigeria

Deadline for Submission of Abstracts: 20 March 2006

Contact: Professor Jerome Gefu

jgefu@yahoo.com

21st Annual Conference of the Society for Conservation Biology

Date: 1 – 5 July 2007

Venue: Port Elizabeth

Details to be announced

Council news

The GSSA Council met on 19 January 2006 at ARC in Irene.

The Council discussed expanding the marketing of GSSA to include more ecologists. Rangeland ecology has been a strong feature of the Society since its founding, but many ecologists still don't consider the GSSA as a possible outlet for their work.

The possibility of a new award for "Most Improved Farmer or Community" was discussed, as there was a feeling that we should do more to encourage wise use of resources by recognising those who have demonstrated a concerted effort to improve their veld and pasture management systems.

The possibility exists through Prof. Winston Trollope to get an exciting and dynamic keynote speaker from the USA for Congress 41 to talk on managing for heterogeneity. Funding for this is being sought. This is a good opportunity to expose SA scientists to global thinking and exposure for the GSSA in the USA.

The Council is still in discussion with NISC about the costs of producing the journal and the online access through Ingenta. Although NISC is doing an excellent job of producing the journal, the online accessibility leaves much to be desired, as it is a complex and not very intuitive process.

The acting Treasurer, Justin du Toit, gave a good summary of the financial dilemma of the GSSA. This highlighted the need for the GSSA to actively seek new sources of funding, since there are very few opportunities for cost-cutting.

Luthando Dziba, the acting PRO, has offered to publicize the GSSA to university students throughout the country as he will have the opportunity to travel with the ARC staff to the various universities. A new banner and poster are being designed; the new flier is already available.

2006 has been declared the International Year of Deserts and Desertification by the UN. See this issue of *Grassroots* for more.

Congress 42 will be held in the Eastern Cape in 2007. Susi Vetter, of Rhodes, has agreed to drive the organising of the Congress, and has already proposed a number of symposia for the event.

To pay your subscriptions or Congress fees online, follow these steps:

- 1. Go to www.gssa.co.za, and click "Subscriptions".**
- 2. Choose Subscriptions or Congress 41 on the left. Click the category (e.g. "Ordinary") for which you wish to pay (click "View all" at the top of the page to see all available categories).**
- 3. Type the quantity that you wish to pay for.**
- 4. Confirm that you have made the correct choices, and click "Checkout".**
- 5. Create a new account if you have not used the facility before.**
- 6. Supply your credit card details. The site is a secure online shopping facility.**
- 8. Follow the instructions and voilà – you've paid your fees!**

