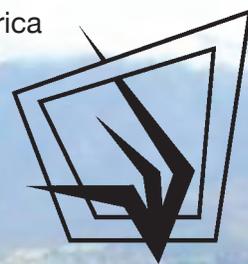


GRASSROOTS

Newsletter of the GRASSLAND SOCIETY of SOUTHERN AFRICA

Incorporating the Bulletin of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa

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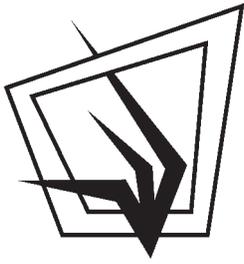
**Undergrazing
causes
overshadowing
of pastures**

**Managing our
shrinking heritage:
Workshop in Midrand**

**Mike Peel takes
GSSA into 2010**

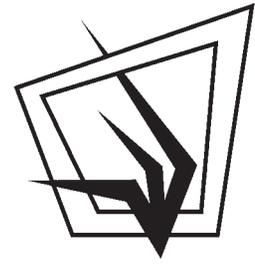
**Environmental
goods and services**

Advancing rangeland ecology and pasture management in Africa



GRASSROOTS

Editor **JULIUS TJELELE**



Dear Readers

This is my first issue as the editor of Grassroots (Newsletter of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa). Alan Short has been the editor for the past five years. I would like to thank him for the trust he has in me and the support he is giving me. I am looking forward to the challenge and I will do my best to further build Grassroots from where Alan Short left off.

Most people do not know me. I am working for the Agricultural Research Council (Animal Production Institute) in Irene Pretoria. As a Researcher, I am working on management of bush encroachment and currently registered with the University of KwaZulu-Natal under the supervision of Professor David Ward.

I've always had a problem with young researchers, technicians or students who are afraid to grab opportunities to learn from the best or make mistakes. All the Professors, Doctors and Specialist Researchers in the Grassland Society started somewhere. To all the young researchers, technicians and students; grab this opportunity and share your results, problems from your projects and the future of your research with us.

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The Grassland Society of Southern Africa is dedicated to the advancement of the science and practice of range ecology and pasture management.

We welcome any contributions to the Grassroots, in the form of news, informative articles, reports, short research notes, scientific papers and letters to the Editor.

Email jtjelele@arc.agric.za or admin@grassland.org.za or fax +27 (0)86 622 75 76

On the cover: Undergrazing causes overshadowing of pastures, Photo: Philip Botha

Biodiversity plan launched at Namakwa Expo

The first Namakwa Biodiversity Expo funded and hosted by Department of Environment and Nature Conservation (DENC) was held on the 10 and 11 July 2009 at the Goegap Nature Reserve just outside Springbok.

Among other dignitaries at the event were the Northern Cape Premier Hazel Jenkins, Director of Conservation for DENC Albert Mabunda, MEC of DENC Sylvia Lucas, MEC for Roads and Public Works David Rooi, HOD Patience Mokali and the Executive Mayor of the Namakwa District Hendrik Visser.

The Expo was held to launch the Critical Biodiversity Area (CBA) maps and Biodiversity profiles for the Namakwa District. The biodiversity products are the first steps towards the full implementation of the Namakwa Bioregional Plan (NAMBAF). The forum is in place to support the implementation of the Namakwa Bioregional plan and to guide environmental policy and legislation.

The expo was a collaborative event made possible by a range of conservation partners including Conservation International, South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and DENC.

The succulent karoo ecosystem program (SKEP), Programme Developer, Lububalo Ntsholo reported that event was a culmination of the work that SKEP has done over the past five years. He also said that “the launch of CBA maps together with the NAMBAF will go a long way in ensuring that the products that have been developed are put into practice”

For more information contact Lububalo Ntsholo at ntsholo@sanbi.org - SKEP newsletter 

Sustainable Utilisation and Protection of Agricultural Resources Bill

The Department of Agriculture (DoA) started drafting the Sustainable Utilisation Resource Bill in 2002, now referred to as the Sustainable Utilisation and Protection of Agricultural Resources (SUPAR) Bill.

The draft Bill seeks to optimise productivity and sustainable utilisation of natural agricultural resources, provide for the control of weeds or invader plants and the subdivision and change of utilisation of agricultural land. The Bill will replace the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act, No. 43 of 1993 and the subdivision of Agricultural Land Act, No. 70 of 1970.

The SUPAR Bill was stayed until the Constitutional Court ruled on the appeal case relating to the Subdivision of Agricultural Land Act, No 70 of 1970.

In September 2007 two farmers took the Registrar of deeds to Court arguing that they have the right to subdivide agricultural land to sell parts thereof as regulated under the Subdivision of Agricultural Land Act. The Supreme Court ruled in favour of the Minister to exercise power to demarcate certain land as agricultural land.

Latest Developments:

The Bill is under discussion within the Department. The State Law Advisors recommended further review of the Bill. The Bill's content remains unchanged.

For more information contact Mr Matai at 012 319 7394. (Participation junction newsletter) 

Lowveld Co-ordinated Research Forum

NICOLA STEVENS

South African Environmental Observation Network

Lowveld Coordinated Research Forum

Dr Mike Peel of the Agricultural Research Council's Animal Production Institute and the South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON Ndlovu Node) have successfully organised the latest annual Lowveld Coordinated Research Forum (LOCORES).

LOCORES was held early this year at a bush camp within the Thornybush game reserve. Presentations revolved around the themes of conservation, management and research, with the aim of keeping people informed of new developments in research and management philosophies, as well as important conservation initiatives in the area.

LOCORES has been running since 1991. It was started by Dr Mike Peel as a means of promoting interaction between applied ecologists and natural resource managers. The LOCORES Forum has aided in facilitating a close link between management and research in the Lowveld's private protected areas, and hence was one of the factors behind the region being chosen for SAEON's first long-term environmental observation node – the SAEON Ndlovu Node.

Shortly after its establishment SAEON Ndlovu Node became actively involved with this successful forum to maximise its contact with the Lowveld research and conservation community. This year's Forum was attended by 60 people, comprised of land-owners, conservationists, interested members of the public and conservation managers.

Presentations were given by scientists, managers and conservationists all addressing ecological and practical issues that face the members of this forum in the lowveld.

Management

Robert Buitenwerf of SAEON discussed his findings from a long-term data set collected by Dr Peel and

his team, looking at how grass species composition and productivity has changed over time in the private reserves in the area. He explained how these changes are related to management actions and the local environment.

Dr Peel explained and discussed the philosophy of holistic land management, which had been the subject of a large workshop in the Kruger National Park a few weeks prior to the LOCORES meeting.

Research

SAEON presented some of its research and monitoring initiatives in the area. SAEON registered student, Edward Kohi gave a presentation on the research he is conducting in the private reserves. He showed that elephant browsing causes a positive response in browsed trees. In the time following the browsing event, the browsed areas put out more leaves which stay greener for longer. However, these effects vary depending on which geology type the trees occur on.

Dr Wayne Twine of Wits Rural Facility updated the audience about the resource utilisation and HIV impact research being undertaken in the communal rangelands in the Acornhoek region. The research revealed how households impacted by AIDS-related and non-AIDS-related deaths utilise the natural resources in the area differently.

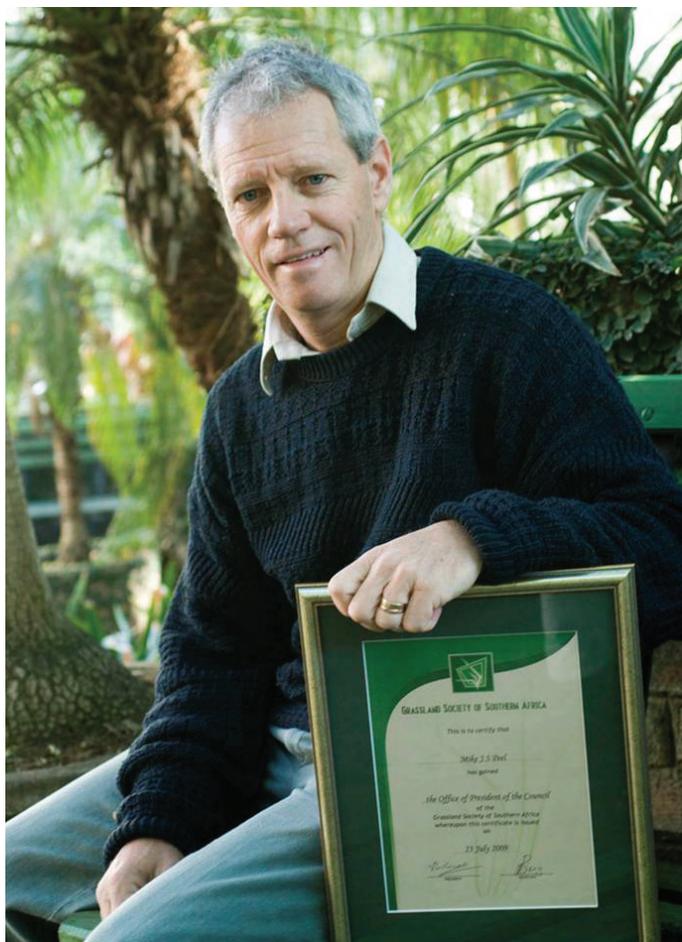
Conservation

Debbie Thompson, one of the founding members of the Kruger to Canyons Biosphere region (under which the most of the Hoedspruit and Phalaborwa regions fall), gave a talk on recent developments in the biosphere region and revealed some exciting sustainability and conservation initiatives currently in progress. One such project aims to provide incentives for fruit farmers in the region to convert to organic farming methods by setting up a contract with a German organic juice manufacturer.

Dr. Mike looks forward to the challenge of taking GSSA into 2010

Cailey Owen and Monika Ogden of Leopard Ecological Assessment presented the beginnings of a national leopard conservation initiative which promises to reveal considerable information about the status of the leopard in South Africa.

Dr Mike Peel, Professor Charlie Shackleton, Mr Kevan Zuncker and the late Dr. Joe Venter are the founders of LOCORES. 



Dr. Mike Peel, ARC-Animal Production Institute (Rangeland Ecology) was elected as President of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa at the 44th Congress of the society held at the UNISA campus in Johannesburg in July 2009.

He looks forward to the challenge of taking this vibrant and diverse society which comprises both rangeland and pasture scientists into 2010.

Important topics discussed at Congress 44 included: the impact of climate change on the natural resources of southern Africa and the need for a complete re-analysis of the agricultural sector; concerns around the shortage of plant breeders in South Africa; the issue of future payment for ecosystem-services; food security; rangelands and mining; the use of pastures in animal production; the burgeoning wildlife industry; and the importance of the emerging farmer sector.

Dr. Peel believes that the interconnectedness of ecosystems and the fact that there is often a shortage of personnel in institutions necessitates a networking approach to rangeland and pasture research. He states that the Society is in a strong position to grow and in this regard the mentorship programme of the society should encourage working partnerships between young and established to ensure the future of the discipline in southern Africa.

Dr. Peel who is based in Nelspruit is programme manager of the Rangeland Ecology Programme and also heads up the Savanna Ecosystem Project which he initiated in 1989. The latter forms one of the longest running formal ecological monitoring programmes in southern Africa. (ARC intranet) 

Marianhill Landfill Conservancy

The department of Water and Environmental Affairs estimates that S.A generates approximately 40 million tons of solid waste a year – 15 million tons of domestic waste and 25 million tons of industrial waste. Ninety five percent of waste is disposed in open trenches or sanitary landfills, of which there are about 1200 in South Africa.

The people and industry must begin to reduce wastes they send to landfills by re-using products or packaging that can have a secondary purpose. Marianhill Landfill Conservancy won an Impumelelo platinum Award in 2007.

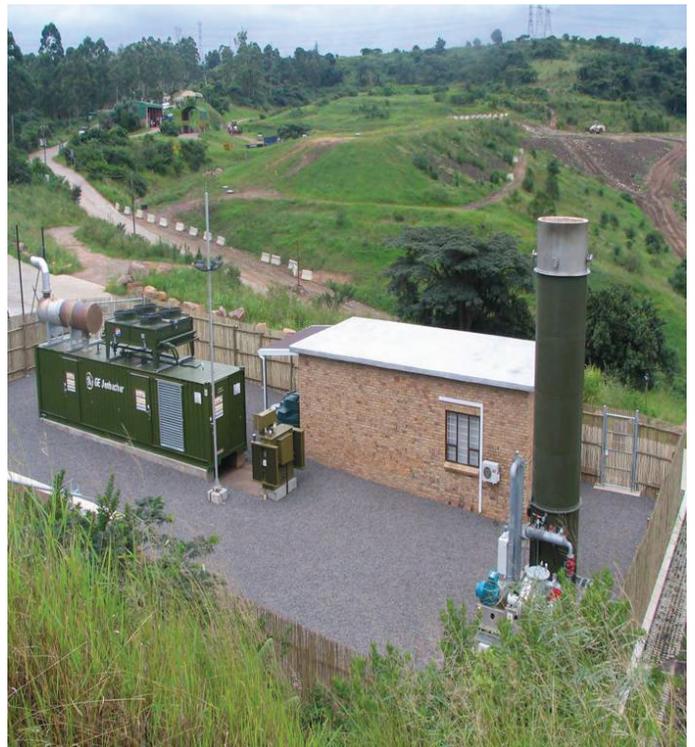
Throughout the world, the location of landfill sites has increasingly become the subject of considerable conflict and South Africa is no exception. Durban Solid Waste (DSW) was seeking for a new site for a landfill and proposed to locate it on a parcel of land from Marianhill Monastery. Marianhill currently receives 450 tonnes of municipal waste per day from Pinetown, Westville, Queensborough and Kloof areas. This represents about 15% of the municipality's total waste.

Wastes are stored in cells that are first prepared by removing the vegetation and soils from the area to be filled. The topsoil is kept on site and replaced after the cell is filled to capacity. Vegetation is placed in a large holding nursery called Plant Rescue Unit (PRUNIT).

This project has provided indigenous vegetation for rehabilitation of the peripheral buffer zone areas of Marianhill and an ongoing rehabilitation of Bisasar Road Landfill site.

Through consultation with the community, DSW applied for nature conservancy status from Ezemvelo-KZN Wildlife. To be recognised as a conservancy, a site must have a place in place a constitution, environmental management plan, site layout plan and environmental monitoring committee.

Marianhill was granted conservancy status in 2004. Today, a site is a home to 114 bird species and serves as a as an important natural corridor for species migration. It is also a rehabilitation area for the black-headed dwarf chameleon and University of Kwazulu Natal site for control of Alien species (Impumelelo case study). 🦋



Marianhill Landfill site

Environmental goods and services

Brian Read
Email: brianread@mweb.co.za

I recently had the privilege of attending the Buy Environmental Trade Show and Conference on behalf of Grassland Society of Southern Africa (GSSA). These brief notes are not an overview of the conference but rather a few key observations regarding those aspects of the conference which are likely to be of most interest to GSSA members.

Growth in green business

The conference emphasized the fact that there is now far greater awareness of the urgent need for business to deal effectively with environmental issues.

Internationally environmental goods and services are seen as being a very strong growth market even despite the current economic downturn. One speaker indicated an annual growth rate of between 20-30%.

The future of energy

A number of speakers addressed the subject of energy efficiency and alternative energy sources. The anticipated future growing need for biofuels was also emphasized.

Of particular interest to the agricultural industry was a comment by Dr Johan van Zyl (President and CEO of Toyota Motors SA) who mentioned that whereas strides are being made to improve efficiency with alternatives such as the hybrid car engines and alternative fuels we still need an alternative to diesel power in agriculture.

Mr. Andrew Guilder from Imbewu presented a talk dealing with carbon trading and offsets. I believe there could be opportunities for grassland solutions in this area. One of the speakers touched on the controversy which is rather topical namely the competition for the use of food crops as sources for the production of fuel.

I believe grassland scientists could be spearheading a search for alternative biological fuel sources and processes. We could be looking for perennial crops

with low production cost which could be produced in areas where conditions not suitable for the production of food crops. In this way we could possibly find an alternative which does not compete with food crops and which makes use of low productivity land which would otherwise only be used for grazing.

Sustainability

Stephan Jacobs from the Natural Step, mentioned the concept of the "Ecological Footprint" which is a measure of the land space we need to support our lifestyle. We are currently overutilizing the world's available resources by some 25%. We are living on capital. One of the other speakers mentioned that we would need four planet earths to support the world's population (doubling every 40 years) in 100 years time. I think that figure quadruples if we take it to 200 years. This begs the question as to whether the sustainable development philosophy can ever be the full long term answer. Is it really the way to get us to the twenty second century and beyond? I personally believe that a sustainable life style where we live off the land like subsistence farmers and die young would have more hope of success. But I certainly do not see any takers for that suggestion. However, I believe we need to rethink what we are doing rather than wishfully hope that sustainable development is going to get us to the future.

Conclusion

If we consider the path we need to be on in order to reach the twenty second century and beyond then the following is probably likely: The human diet will include less in the way of animal products. All available arable land will be used to produce food for human consumption. Low potential lands currently considered unsuitable for crop production will become increasingly used for food cropping. Animal feeds and biofuels will be based on grassland species and byproducts from other industries. No longer will we feed grain to cattle.

It is the above path which should probably inform our research and development programmes. 🌱

Knowledge fields development

The Knowledge Fields Development Directorate wishes to notify the research community of the following information with respect to development grant opportunities:

Part of the mandate of the Knowledge Fields Development Directorate (KFD) is to promote new knowledge and to push the boundaries of existing knowledge and associated research capacity by stimulating and developing the entire spectrum of knowledge fields.

In addition to the management of research programmes, KFD employs a range of tools to stimulate the development and advancement of knowledge fields.

These functions are driven by a dual approach, namely:

- A directed approach: development activities as identified and coordinated by the NRF;
- A non-directed, ad hoc approach: development activities as identified by the research community.

The KFD Directorate identifies a number of activities each year for implementation using both of these approaches.

Please be advised that the development grant strategy document, as well as the development grant application form for ad hoc grants may now be found on the NRF website (<http://www.nrf.ac.za>). These grants are awarded throughout the year and as such, are NOT subject to specific submission deadlines.

The grant applications are subject to internal selection processes, and budget availability throughout the year.

Should you have any queries concerning the information on the website, please contact Candice Steele (Candice@nrf.ac.za) or Renee le Roux (Renee@nrf.ac.za).

Call for SABI 2010 funding

The National Research Foundation (NRF) on behalf of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) is offering SABI (South African Biosystematics Initiative) Postdoctoral Fellowships, SABI International Travel Student Awards and SABI Workshop/Training Courses.

SABI was developed to significantly enhance South Africa's capacity to undertake research in biosystematics, thereby establishing a skills base and information platform at the foundation of all scientific endeavour in the life sciences, such that the full potential of South Africa's unique biological resources can be realised and safeguarded for the future benefit of all. SABI is funded by DST and managed by the NRF.

This call for applications pertains to the Education and Training Thrust of SABI and is a direct response to SABI's purpose and vision because it will contribute to produce high-quality human resources, the generation of high-quality knowledge, and the development and transfer of this knowledge to ensure tangible benefits to society. The closing date for all applications is 15 October 2009. Please visit the NRF web site at <http://www.nrf.ac.za> to download the application forms.

Applications should be submitted to Ms. Pinky Matjeka: knowledge fields development grants at pinky@nrf.ac.za or faxed to 0866 477 279. Only signed applications will be accepted.

For more information or enquiry, please contact Mr Frank Mazibuko at fmazibuko@nrf.ac.za or 012 481 4017

Knowledge fields development

CALL FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST (2009)

The South African Department of Science and Technology (DST), having recently initiated bilateral Science and Technology relations with Namibia, are currently in the process of defining an operational and funding strategy in relation to these two countries. In order to gauge the state of existing collaboration between South African researchers and their Namibian counterparts, as well as to determine the possible uptake of funding to be made available for future collaboration in this regard, the Department of Science and Technology has requested the National Research Foundation (NRF) to issue the current Call for Expressions of Interest in joint research between the South African researcher community and their colleagues in their respective countries. As a result, we hereby invite all interested and qualifying parties to complete the short form accompanying this call and to remit it to the NRF by the date indicated below, taking note of the following points:

This is a Call for Expressions of Interest and no funding will be provided in response to expressions received. However, four expressions of interest will be selected and applicants requested to submit full proposals.

Envisioned collaboration between the two countries is required for response to this call,

Working researchers residing in South Africa and affiliated with a recognised higher education or any recognised research institution such as a university, university of technology or science council may apply. Responses must indicate at least one potential future collaborator in the respective country who is known to the respondent and with whom at least some prior contact has been established, though no input from said collaborator is required for the completion of the form.

The identified priority areas are:

- Biotechnology including Food Security
- Environmental & Climate Change with focus on trans-boundary resources (water and biodiversity) and invasive species
- Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS)

Should your project be selected for full proposal submission, please note the following:

- The project will be funded for two years:
- The funding will not exceed R200 000 per year per project; and
- An amount of R100 000 will be contributed by South Africa and R100 000 by Namibia per year per project.

Responses from SA researchers should be submitted electronically to Ms Lee-Anne Seymour of the NRF International Research Grants section at the following e-mail address: seymour@nrf.ac.za and for Namibian researchers to Mr John Sifani of the Ministry of Education in Namibia at the following e-mail address: jsifani@mec.gov.na

Responses should be submitted by 31 October 2009. For further information, please contact:

In South Africa:

National Research Foundation

Ms. Lee-Anne Seymour

Tel: 012 481 4121 Fax: 0866 399 571

Email: Seymour@nrf.ac.za

NRF Website: www.nrf.ac.za

In Namibia:

Ministry of Education (Namibia)

Directorate Research Science & Technology

Private bag 13186

Windhoek

Namibia

Mr. John M Sifani

Email: jsifani@mec.gov.na

Tel: +264 61 270 6144 Fax: +264 61 270 6143

Upcoming events

Greengold Symposium

Date: 14 - 16 September 2009
Venue: Cape Town, South Africa
Contact: Jeannie nab Biljon
Tel: 014 536 3150
E mail: jeannievB@arc.agric.za

Cultivated Pasture Course

Date: 19 September 2009 (Afrikaans) 26 September 2009 (English)
Venue: Towoomba Research Station, Bela Bela (Warmbaths)
Contact: Frits van Oudtshoorn
Tel: 078 228 0008
E mail: frits@bushveldeco.co.za

Developing Animal Agriculture Interest group Symposium

Date: 28 September - 02 October 2009
Venue: Gauteng, South Africa
Contact: Heleen Els
Tel: 083 478 1940
E mail: heleen.Els@up.ac.za

African Crop Science Society Conference

Date: 28 September – 10 October 2009
Venue: Cape Town
Contact: Jeannie nab Biljon
Tel: 014 536 3150
Email: JeannieB@arc.agric.za

Grassland, Timber and Fire: A Symposium

Date: 14 - 15 October 2009
Venue: Bishopstowe, Pietermaritzburg
Contact: Freyni du Toit
Tel: 033 390 3113
Cell: +27 (0)83 256 7202
Fax: +27 (0)86 622 7576

International Development Conference

Date: 17 - 19 October 2009
Venue: UNISA, Florida Campus
Contact: M.S Robbertse
Tel: 011 471 2818
E mail: robbems@unisa.ac.za

4th International conference of SCU and ESES: Impact of climate change on natural resources

Date: 10 - 11 November 2009
 Venue: Suez Canal University, Ismailia, Egypt
 Contact: Hassan Mansour
 E mail: hmansour@uga.edu
 Website: www.eses.catrina.com

1st American Conference on “Precision dairy Management”

Date: 02 - 05 March 2010
 Venue: Toronto (Canada)
 E mail: info@precisiondairy2010.com

8th Annual Savanna Science Networking Meeting

Date: 7 - 12 March 2010
 Deadline for abstract submissions: 6 November 2009
 Venue: Skukuza
 Contact: Jackey Daecon
 Cell. 082 447 1570
 E mail: dot@mpu.co.za

New and resigned members

New members

Adriaan Jonker: University of Pretoria
 Bernice Nel: University of Pretoria
 Leana Nel: University of Pretoria
 Ignatious Matimati: SANBI
 Collen Rabothata: Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture
 Oupa Keromecwe: Mpumalanga Department of Agriculture
 Luvuyo Khanyi: BKB
 Pieter Swanepoel: Western Cape department of Agriculture
 Nnzimeni Ndou: Limpopo Department of Agriculture
 Valentin Kindomihou: Abomey Calavi University
 Vanessa Weyer: SRK Consulting

Resigned members

Anthony Sharp
 Carol Green
 Nick Zambatis

Council News

The council met on 20 July 2009 prior to the start of Congress 44 at University of South Africa Florida campus, Gauteng.

It has come to the attention of council members that attendance and congresses are important issues and should be further discussed. It was suggested that one of the council members should visit different Head of Departments to explain the importance of attending Congress and meetings. To enhance the attendance of congresses, President Dr. Mike Peel will write a formal letter to different HOD's for approval of GSSA members and/or council members to attend meetings or congresses. There were 200 delegates for this year's congress which were lower than the previous congresses. The reasons for this were ascribed to be due the major budget cuts from various Government Departments, and perhaps also reluctance to come to Johannesburg.

The preparations for Congress 45 are on track. It will take place from the 19-23 July 2010 in Kimberly. Most of the arrangements will be carried out by SAN-Parks and Northern Cape department of Tourism, Environment and Conservation. The theme for the Congress will be "Challenging to integrate range and forage Sciences in arid and semi-arid landscapes".

The venue will be Tabernakel AGS Church and all sessions will be at this venue. The organizers will try to make a block booking for accommodation at the Horseshoe Motel. The provisional program is as follows:

- Monday – Registration and Meet and greet (McGregor Museum)
- Tuesday – Sessions and Dinner at Marrick Safari's
- Wednesday – Free evening
- Thursday – Sessions and gala dinner (Horseshoe Motel)

All pre and post Congress tours will be organised by the Northern Cape Tourism Authority.

At this stage the total cost to host Congress in Kimberly is R410 000 (R2 800/person excluding accommodation). The cost per person will decrease with an increase in delegate numbers.

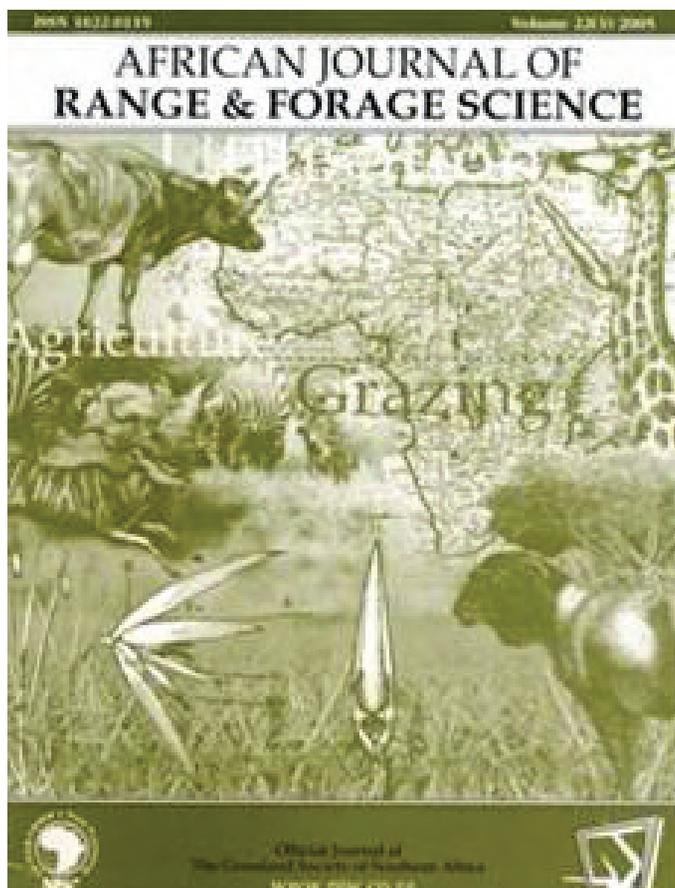
A proposal was presented at AGM to host Congress 46 (2011) in Middleburg at Grootfontein Agricultural Development Institute.

We welcome all the new Council members. 🐾

Benefits to GSSA Members

Three issues per year of the African Journal of Range and Forage Science, the Society's internationally recognised scientific publication.

There are no page charges for GSSA members publishing in the African Journal of Range and Forage Science in 2009





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