
47th Annual Congress of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa

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Congress 47 was the first attempt by the Society to reduce the carbon footprint of congress delegates and empower to the community where the Congress was held. Initiatives taken to reduce our carbon emissions included planting trees donated by Western Cape Department of Agriculture at three public schools in Langebaan and Saldanha Bay.

Environmental education sessions were held to teach the staff of Club Mykonos about the impacts that people might have on the planet and how these impacts could be reduced. Staff were trained on ways to recycle their waste, an initiative the management showed interest in taking up permanently in the future.

The Congress started with the Best Farmer SA course on Monday morning which was facilitated by Riaan Dames, an extensive animal production specialist. The course focussed on rangeland management by using the principles of the controlled fodder flow grazing strategy and animal behaviour. At the meet and greet function on the Monday evening, Prof. Johan Hattingh, Professor of Philosophy at Stellenbosch University delivered a mind stimulating talk entitled: "Adaptation and human flourishing in an era of global climate change".

During his talk he challenged policy responses to climate change and outlined why these policies are inadequate in addressing our human needs. During the next three days, presentations were held covering themes such as fire ecology, plant chemistry and quality, restoration ecology, managing biodiversity, vegetation monitoring, ecosystem services and invasive plants. A total of 10 keynote presentations, 63 platform papers and 32 research posters were presented. A special session was also held where an additional 20 research proposals were presented by students.

Keynote presentations were delivered by several invited local and international speakers. These included keynotes by Dr Alan Andersen from CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems in Australia who presented on "Fire management in Australian tropical savannas: biodiversity, greenhouse gas abatement and indigenous livelihoods". Dr Mohammed Said, from the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Kenya talked on "Natural resource management and biodiversity conservation in the drylands of Eastern Africa". Dr Urs Kreuter from Texas A&M University in the USA presented on "Rangeland sustainability, capital and investment in ecosystem services: a social-ecological systems approach".

The Annual Congress also hosted several special sessions. A special session on rangeland commons was held where several presentations were delivered in response to a position paper by Dr Susi Vetter from Rhodes University which challenges the objectives of the draft policy for the sustainable management of veld (range) and forage resources in South Africa. In her talk, she outlined alternative issues that the policy should focus on to ensure sustainable land use on rangeland commons. Response papers were delivered by several social and natural scientists which provided an integrated approach for sustainable land use in rangeland commons. The papers delivered during this session will be published in a special issue of the African Journal of Range and Forage Science in March 2013.

The special planted pastures day was held and was of high standard. The keynote address by Nelius van Greunen, a farmer who also served as a producer member in all structures of the dairy industry over the past 20 years, was instrumental in introducing this session. This session was well structured and the importance of sustainable research led by well-trained scientists on well-organized research facilities within the target area was emphasized. The soil quality for sustainable pasture production session held as a special session for the first time at the GSSA Congress. The keynote address was presented by Dr. Anthony Mills and prompted much interest.

Apart from the scientists from various disciplines, the session also attracted many professionals from the industry, such as seed companies and laboratory service providers.

A special session on bush encroachment was themed “Perspectives on drivers, dynamics and management”. Prof. William Bond from the University of Cape Town presented a keynote on “CO₂ and other global change influences vs local drivers”. Proceedings of this session and the follow-up session to be held at the Arid Zone Ecology Forum Conference to be held in October 2012 will be published in a special issue of the AJRFS.

Congress participants also went on various mid-congress tours which included visits to the West Coast Fossil Park and West Coast National Park where they learned about the Scientific approaches to environmental rehabilitation. At !Khwa ttu San Cultural Village delegates learned about historic and present San cultures and lifestyles. At Buffelsfontein Game and Nature Reserve approaches to alien control in the reserve were discussed and the visit to the Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve focussed on the Langebaan RAMSAR site. A post-congress tour was organized for delegates to visit Robben Island and Table Mountain. Unfortunately, the weather was extremely bad and both parts of the tour had to be cancelled due to high winds and rough seas. Delegates were instead taken on a tour of Cape Town sights and then enjoyed some time at the V&A Waterfront.

On the social scene, several delegates went on sundowner boat trips on the Langebaan lagoon. Participants also took part in a Greek evening on the Wednesday where they were able to break their plates after eating and of which no one had a problem doing. The Gala Dinner was held at Boesmanland Kombuis which include an auction where various sponsored art were sold. Proceedings of the auction will be donated to organizations whose objectives include environmental protection.

At the Gala Dinner, Dr Mark Hardy was awarded with the Prestige Award for his overwhelming contribution to rangeland and pasture sciences in South Africa. Kotie van den Berg of the farm Beeldhouersfontein near Murraysburg received the Peter Edwards Award for the Best Conservation Farmer. The award was presented in recognition of his sound application and practice of the principles of range and forage science and conservation. Dr John Mworia received the award for the Best Paper Published in the African Journal of Range and Forage Science in 2011, for his article entitled "Patterns of seed dispersal and establishment of the invader *Prosopis juliflora* in the upper floodplain of Tana River, Kenya". An Award for Outstanding Academic Achievement was handed to Gabrielle Solomon from the University of the Western Cape in recognition of her Honours.

Winners of the Congress Awards were

- Best Platform Presentation: Alan Andersen - "Fire management in Australian tropical savannas: biodiversity, greenhouse gas abatement and indigenous livelihoods"
- Best Poster Presentation: Dawood Hattas - "The quantification of condensed tannins in African savanna tree species"
- Best Platform Presentation by a Young Scientist: Pieter Swanepoel - "Establishing baseline values for soil quality indicators in the southern Cape"
- Norman Rethman Award: Leana Nel - "The effect of seed coating on the germination and emergence of Lucerne (*Medicago sativa L.*) in sub-optimal environments"
- Best Research Proposal Poster: Nobuntu Mapeyi: "The effect of biogas slurry on fodder production at Macubeni community in the Eastern Cape". Ms Mapeyi will be attending the Annual GSSA Research Skills Workshop in 2013 as part of her prize.
- Faux Pas Award: Melake Fessehazion: discovering that the boiled egg he had taken at breakfast was in fact still raw when he broke it over his plate full of food!



Pieter Swanepoel



Nobuntu Mapeyi



Group Photo of delegates at the 47th Annual GSSA Congress