

## Daniel Booyesen (1988 – 2010) Memorial Award



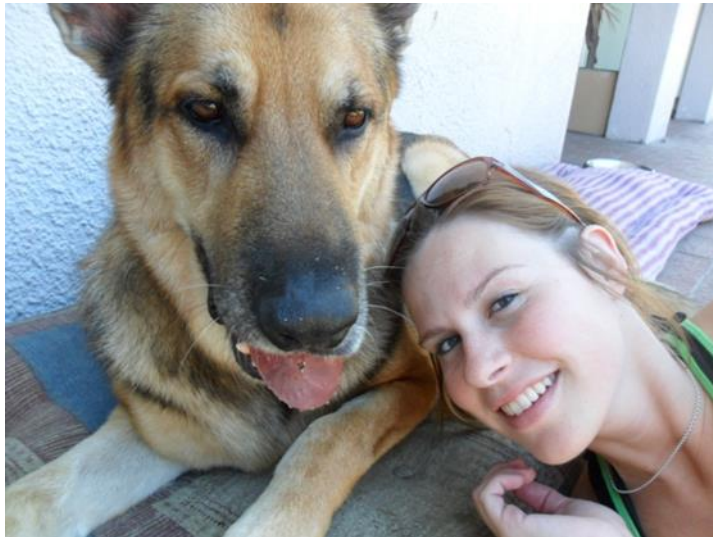
In 2010 the Conservation Ecology programme, and indeed the world, tragically lost a very promising young conservationist. Daniel Booyesen, in his 4<sup>th</sup> year of his Conservation Ecology BSc, held great promise for a bright future – he was academically gifted, passionate, and committed to African Conservation.

To honour his memory, and to promote conservation in Africa, the Booyesen family has generously committed funding towards the “Daniel Booyesen Memorial Award” for the best Conservation Ecology 448 project.

## 2013 Best management plan - Bianca Pronk

Ever since I can remember, I have been fascinated and enchanted with nature, especially animals. I did not grow up on a farm and neither my mum nor dad is the outdoors type. Nonetheless, both of them love nature and animals. I can therefore say that some of my inspiration to work with animals and in nature comes from them. I would definitely not be where I am without them, their support, unconditional love and trust in my abilities.

I grew up in a house that always had man’s best friend.... dogs. Animals have always been part of my life; hamsters, birds, rabbits, mice, rats, cats and dogs. Growing up, my best friends were our dogs, and until this day my best friend is



my dog named Smokey. I was born in East London in the Eastern Cape, and lived there for 22 years. We then moved to Cape Town. I have always known that my passion lied with animals and that I would like to be as close to nature as possible. I always dreamt of and still would like to contribute a positive difference to the world.

After matriculating from Grens High School, we gained information regarding courses that will bring me closer to my dreams. We looked at Marine Biology at UCT, a course at NMMU and Saasveld. The University of Stellenbosch was not my first choice in the beginning, but they offered me what I had a passion and interest for, and I seized the opportunity. I enrolled at the University of Stellenbosch for BSc Conservation Ecology in 2010 and could not be any more grateful for finding this course, as it has brought me closer to my hopes and dreams. Even though I still do not know where I will end up, I am a step closer to my dreams.

I do know however, that I would like to end up somewhere in Alaska, Russia, Holland or any Island, where I can contribute to conservation. I do want to work with endangered carnivores and mammals, especially the wolves, polar bears, wild dogs, leopards, snow leopards and tigers, but wherever I land up I know I will be happy because I will be doing what I love and what I am passionate about. This course has opened my eyes towards conservation and has given me hope in that one day I could also contribute towards conserving as much as possible of Mother Nature.

## **2013 Runner up to best management plan – Jessica Wilmont**

I've been lucky enough to always know that I wanted to work in nature. I used to picture myself driving a minivan, picking up stray animals to provide them with a better life. My dad's job always permitted us to live outside of towns surrounded by nature so conserving our heritage was ignited from an early age. My love for nature has shaped me into the person I am today and I can proudly say I'm not called Eco-Jess for nothing. My passion for the environment is also strongly based on my faith which has given me the drive needed to reach my dream. I'm a firm believer that everyone can make a difference in the environment, no matter how small the act.

Once I heard about this course I knew that was what I wanted to study. I still remember going to the University's open day specifically to look for the Conservation stand which no other students were particularly interested in. Although the first year of the course was extremely general and I felt slightly lost, in the end after the never-ending reports and group tasks I'm ready to make a difference in the conservation field. The incredible friends I have made through-out my time at Stellenbosch definitely helped me get where I am today. Even though we all had different views on conservation, our class had a special bond and I loved the fact that we all knew each other. Sometimes it felt like we were back at school.

The next chapter in my story awaits in Namibia where I'll be an intern at a wildlife rehabilitation centre. I hope to one day specialise in that field where I'll be able to grant animals a second chance to life in the wild. I can't wait to get in the field and actively conserve our beautiful wildlife.

*"Nature is not a place to visit. It is home."* - Gary Snyder

## 2013 Best research project - Corlé Jansen

My transformation into a conservationist has been one of many adventures and ups and downs. I'm not what you would consider a 'people-person' and I have always felt a deeper connection with animals and nature than with people. Growing up I've always wanted to be a vet – until I realised that you needed good grades in high school to make the cut. Let's just say that



studying has never been my strong point. I'm lucky that my parents love nature and since our road trip to the Kruger National Park in 1999 trips to Namibia, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and the Karoo became a yearly ritual in our house. After our first trip to Namibia in 2004 I fell in love with photography – it was a way for me to finally express myself and the fact that you could capture the beauty of nature in one shot to keep forever had me fascinated. I decided photography would be the best route – I will only have to pass everything at school (except for Biology – this was the only subject which I cared enough about to actually work hard in) and I can escape to the wilderness to just take photographs and be. I graduated from Parel Vallei High School in 2007 and enrolled at City Varsity School of Media and Creative Arts for a 2-year diploma in Professional Photography. I loved it here and for a short while the glamour corrupted me and I dreamed of working as a portrait photographer in London or New York. However, nearing the end of my 2 years here, an amazing September holiday to Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park opened my eyes to where my heart truly lies: nature.

In 2010 I enrolled as a full-time student at Stellenbosch University in Conservation Ecology. I've always watched nature documentaries and I later developed a preference for shows involving leopards. They became my favorite animal and as I grew older my obsession grew. Visiting the

Karoo from a small age, I could never understand the hatred so many farmers had in response to such amazing animals. I knew that through conservation I would be able to play a role in the persistence of these beautiful creatures and help both farmer and leopard. I did my fourth year project through the Cape Leopard Trust setting up camera traps in the Cederberg to determine leopard densities in this region. I'll be continuing my work with the CLT for my MSc next year where I will be working in Namaqualand assessing the diet of carnivores in this region. I hope to continue working in human-wildlife conflict throughout the world and understanding the dynamic between man and beast. My four years of undergrad have been amazing and I wouldn't give it up for anything in the world. I have finally found something I'm passionate about which encourages me to work hard and give it my all. I also met like-minded people here, people that are as crazy as me about wide open spaces. I've finally found my niche.

## Runner up to best research project - Gabi Kietzka

I was born and raised in the town of Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal. Both of my parents studied at Stellenbosch University and were involved in agricultural and forestry research. Growing up in a home surrounded by people who loved nature and chose career paths associated with it, was without a doubt what sparked my passion for conservation from a young age. Throughout my school career at Epworth Independent School For Girls, I upheld my reputation as the official school "tree hugger" and was an active member and eventually head of the school's environmental society, Earth Active. During



this time my love and interest in the environment flourished. In 2009 I led a team of Epworth girls to the Nationals of the WESSA-Mondi Environmental Quiz and it was at this point in my life that I realized my purpose was to help conserve the biodiversity of our world. I have always believed that in order to achieve this I must aim to live by and inspire others to "be the change you want to see in the world". My years spent at Stellenbosch University have been the best years of my life and the knowledge I have gained has further motivated me to strive to make a difference. Having now completed a BSc in Conservation Ecology and fallen in love with the beautiful town of Stellenbosch and the Western Cape, I have decided to further my studies in

2014. My final undergraduate research project made me more aware of the potential and important uses of dragonflies as indicators of ecosystem health, which I aim to apply in the Cape Winelands for my post graduate studies.

## **2012 Award winner 1 (joint award): Roderick Juba**

I have always been interested in the finer details of nature. I was born in a small neighborhood outside Humansdorp in the Eastern Cape. Here I was exposed to not only raw nature, but also realized the importance of a working relationship between man and his surroundings. As a community of mostly subsistence livestock farmers it was important for us to maintain natural veld in the best condition possible to enhance growth. This made me realize that the healthier the environment, the greater the welfare of the people. I then set out to become an ecologist, which was a hard decision really, as my parents insisted I become a medical doctor. Judging by my performance in the microbiology lab, I definitely made the right decision by not taking that route. I never really aspired to be anything other than an ecologist, except for my week-long dream of becoming a sound engineer. The reason I didn't pursue this dream was the sudden establishment of a hiking club at my school, which I immediately joined and rekindled my passion for nature.

I heard about the Conservation Ecology course at Stellenbosch and in no time had my Life Orientation teacher making arrangements for me to get everything I need. At the time I also applied for some funky course at NMMU, but I was never going to be interested in any other university as long as Stellenbosch would take me. In retrospect, if I had known it was going to be this hard I would have thought twice about applying. My four years as an undergraduate have been bumpy to say the least; mostly fighting through my first two years to make HEMIS (credits to stay in res). During this time I realized I am really terrible at exams and started focusing on my writing skills. This was mostly inspired by a line from one of my favorite rappers, "a goal is just a dream with a deadline". I thus set out to reach my goal which was to become an exceptional writer. It was only in my fourth year that I finally saw the fruits of my hard work, my best academic year on campus.

I started working part-time in the conservation ecology department in 2009 and in doing so, greatly enhanced my understanding of the scope of the field. It also helped me to become more organized in the lab, field, and in handling data. Needless to say, I would like to work in a similar environment when I have finished my studies. I am currently enrolled for an MSc in Conservation Ecology and would like to leave this place with a PhD.





## **2012 Award winner 2 (Joint award): Karlien Malan**

My first encounter with nature was at the age of 2 weeks; my parents took me as a newborn to the Kruger National Park. I believe that my love for nature was not just awakened in the early stages of my life but that I inherited it from my grandparents and my parents. My love for nature is deep rooted and is part of my identity. So when the time came to choose a study area, there was no question about it, conservation ecology was my calling. The four year course learned me so much about the environment, how to make difficult decisions and most importantly how to think critically. In the final year of the conservation course you had to choose a project to do. When I perused the list of projects that were available my heart sank, there was absolutely nothing that interested me. So I decided that I would make up my own project. I still remember the day I decided on a topic; my friends and I sat on the grass of the rooi-plein, I told them that I really liked wild dogs and then we brainstormed what I could do. I decided to do a project on preventing and managing rabies in African wild dogs. My supervisor gave me contact details of a student who had done a project on wild dogs the previous year and he helped me get access to Thanda Private Game Reserve in KZN. I filled a temporary position at the game farm as endangered species monitor and helped monitor the wild dog pack on the reserve. The first day we encountered the wild dog pack I realized that it is the first time I have seen them in the wild and not on a TV screen or in a magazine, the moment was overwhelming and one I will never forget! They are magnificent creatures and I hope that I contributed a little to their survival. Currently I am enrolled as a masters student at Stellenbosch University. My project is on parasitic mites that occur on rodents in South Africa. It is really exciting to work on parasites, it's like a whole miniature ecosystem that you discover when examining the host organism. My study will hopefully shed some light on the scant available knowledge on the ecology and diversity of chigger mites of South Africa.



## 2011 Award winner: Sarah Chippendale

I was born on the 25<sup>th</sup> April in Mowbray Hospital in Cape Town: a day earlier than expected. In retrospect, this early arrival makes sense: I am usually restless and easily feel claustrophobic, hence preferring to play outdoors. I grew up in Cape Town, where guineafowl and hadida were considered the



local wildlife. As a child I was not allowed my own pet, so I had to improvise by using insects from our garden: I would name them, give them swimming lessons in the basin (they kept failing, I kept trying) and take them to school in a matchbox (oxygen depletion didn't cross my mind). Not quite the beginnings of a conservationist. However, I was lucky enough to be able to escape the burglar bars, electric fencing and high walls of the city at our holiday house in Langebaan - and later in Plettenberg Bay - where I was able to explore the vegetation, tidal pools, beaches and estuary without hindrance. After matriculating from Herschel Girl's School in 2007, I began my degree in Conservation Ecology at Stellenbosch University in 2008, where the combination of practical experience and scientific discipline appealed to me. I greatly enjoyed the four years spent studying at Stellenbosch and the degree and surroundings have not only stimulated by passion for the environment, but also provided me with a strong foundation of skills and knowledge needed for future endeavors.

However, my attempts at conservation are still very suspect: goldfish last a maximum of 2 weeks in my care and squirrels tend to hurl themselves at my car. Therefore, as opposed to concentrating my efforts on single species conservation, I am more attracted to understanding how whole ecosystems function,

and how all the different puzzle pieces come together so efficiently and resourcefully: I am a great believer in Lovelock's *Gaia* concept. I am currently living in Edinburgh and attending part-time courses through the University of Edinburgh in geology, art, architecture and photography. In 2012 I hope to expose myself to many different forms of conservation through volunteer work/internships, to gain a more worldly perspective, to perfect my fly-fishing skills and catch a wild salmon.