

# Best students in Conservation Ecology & Entomology

These prizes are awarded by the department as an incentive for students to excel and to give recognition to those students who have consistently performed.

## 2013 Recipient of the Prize in Conservation Ecology -Luan le Roux

During the past four years, I always found it quite amusing when people asked me what I was studying. As soon as you say conservation ecology, or in Afrikaans 'bewingsekologie', people always look at you funny and immediately ask what that is. Nowadays I realised that everybody understands when you describe it as environmental management or nature conservation. And in essence, this is probably the best way in which to summarize this diverse and interesting course.

My fondness for nature started at a very young age. Most of my childhood days were spent on a cattle farm near Kuruman in the Northern Cape province. It was here that I was taught to respect and appreciate all the wonderful elements of the veld. It was only later at the age of 11, when I was old enough to accompany my father on winter-month hunting trips, that I truly developed an interest in the identification and behavioral aspects of the different game and plant species. I started with my collection of field guides and information booklets at approximately that time and the knowledge I obtained through these sources I have always held dear and noticeably has been of great help in my subsequent years of studying. At the age of 17 I made the decision that a career behind a desk was not for me and I applied for at that time, the relatively new conservation ecology course at the University of Stellenbosch. Throughout the past four years, the course exposed me to a variety of interesting study fields. And it was this exposure to amongst others, soil science and agricultural economics that drove my decision to turn back to the agricultural sector, where I believe the scope for conservation-based initiatives is immense. This, and the great opportunities that exist for soil scientists in South Africa, has been the main force behind my decision to do a Masters in soil science at Stellenbosch from next year onwards.



However, I realised long ago that it does not matter in what direction my career is heading, as an agriculturalist or whatever, I will always incorporate a conservation way of thinking into my work. And according to me, that means the course has

fulfilled its purpose. For me the most important lesson I learned over the past few years was this - the future of conservation lies in transformed habitats - and agriculture is at the this forefront. I am extremely excited to enter this arena and hope to influence and change the way farmers view their environment.

I sincerely appreciate each and every lecturer's contribution over the last couple of years as well as all my classmates who ended up being amongst my very dearest friends. It has been an amazing four years.

'There is a pleasure in the pathless woods, There is a rapture on the lonely shore, There is a society where none intrudes, By the deep sea and the music in its roar: I love not man the less, but nature more'

### **2013 Best Entomology student - Eleonore Slabbert**

Nature and all its weird and wonderful creepy crawlies have fascinated me from a young age. I still remember my very first 'bug house'! It was my most prized possession and I would always be on the look-out for a new 'gogga' to be discovered. My chosen field of study at Stellenbosch Universities Department of Conservation Ecology and Entomology was thus only a natural extension of this fascination, with not only nature as a whole, but also the delicate intricacies captured within the Lords creepy crawly creations. Admittedly I was at one stage terrified of flying cockroaches; I have luckily had a full recovery since then. My final year as BSc Conservation Ecology undergraduate has by far been a highlight in the four year course, thanks to the fascinating world of entomology I had the privilege to learn more about under the ever passionate and enthusiastic mentorship of Professor H. Geertsema.



My passion for nature finds an equal match in my passion for people, with specific emphasis on community empowerment. I see myself entering into a career focused on community empowerment through applied research, in study fields such as functional ecology, natural resource management and applied entomology. I hope to play a part in promoting and developing a 'sustainable' interaction between communities and their natural resources. One of my long term dreams is to start up a NGO focused on conservation and community empowerment.

As part of my final year project on insects associated with Honeybush (*Cyclopia* spp.) I already had a glimpse of how it would be to merge my passions for ecology, entomology and community empowerment through applied research. Under the guidance of my supervisor, Rhoda Malgas and Genadendal community champion,

Tannie Anna Joorst, I have learnt invaluable skill and life lessons concerning community orientated research. The experiences, skills and lessons I will always treasure greatly and they are sure to be put to good use in the near future as I continue to pursue a career in socially-conscious research. The next step from here is to continue with a Masters degree at Stellenbosch University in applied entomology.

### **2012 Recipient of the Prize in Conservation Ecology and the Keppel Barnard Entomology Award**

My name is Kim Konings and I was made in Amsterdam approximately nine months before 19 June 1989. I have grown up in Somerset West in the Western Cape and thankfully have parents who liked to involve me in manual labour. Through walking dogs, weeding gardens and oiling fences, I learnt to find peace by being outside. Luckily, my parents are avid adventurers and frequently took my sister and I camping all over the Western Cape and beyond. Etosha National Park in Namibia and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park were two of our favourites. I was also privileged enough to travel to cool places overseas like Borneo, Thailand, Laos and Egypt to name a few, because my dad worked for an airline. From these adventures I developed a strong passion for primates, rainforests, organised chaos and broken English. Growing up with a lifestyle of environmental awareness and interest, it would seem obvious that I would be drawn to environmental studies in my future. However, my interests were/are numerous and I always wanted to do everything at the same time. I actually ultimately want(ed?) to become the next Stevie Nicks and contemplated studying music for a while. Becoming a vet was my grade three dream and a nutritionist in early high school. Environmental and conservation work seemed the most constant interest, but with so much desire and so little commitment, I took a gap year and worked in a hotel in the UK with naught but sheep and rain around me. With a new perspective on life I applied for Zoology at UCT and didn't get in due to the lack of Science on my list of subjects. Thankfully the University of Stellenbosch caters for us bad-planners who wanted to do Home Economics instead of Science, and accepted me for Biodiversity and Ecology. During the week of orientation, I rather liked the Agrisciences grape-trampling braai vibe and switched degrees to Conservation Ecology (plus, then I didn't have to do terrifying physics). So thus began my career as a conservationist and ecologist. In my fourth year I finally discovered a parallel universe, namely, the insect world. An entomologist was born. My future plans involve a bit of this and a bit of that. I'd like to travel, share and learn. I may study another undergrad in natural medicine or go and hide out in an ashram in India and practise yoga. To be honest, I don't really know, but most importantly, I'm excited and equipped.



## **2011 Recipient of the Prize in Conservation Ecology**

Heinz Ortmann writes “I was born in Pietermaritzburg on October 18, 1989 and have lived in the beautiful little town of Howick in the KZN midlands for most of my life. I have had the privilege of exploring much of the surrounding areas as my father, being a veterinarian, knows most of the landowners. My earliest memories of nature reserves go way back to the mid 90s when we visited Ithala and Hluhluwe-iMfolozi. This exposure to the outdoors from an early age really started my interest in nature. I have a number of interesting hobbies that include birdwatching and collecting butterflies. At the end of 2007 I successfully completed the Ecotraining Advanced Specialist Bird Guiding course in the lovely far northern Makuleke concession of the Kruger National Park.

I began my studies at Stellenbosch University in 2008. During my first year and for part of my second year I also completed the theory component of the Africa Nature Training field guiding course. Some of that material actually helped later on in my degree. My passion and interest in conservation has been magnified over the years.

Looking to the future I am furthering my studies at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute at UCT in 2012 by doing an MSc in Conservation Biology. I have received a significant bursary which will greatly help my ambition of finishing that particular course. I am sure there will be a lot of new things to get used to but am really looking forward to the challenges ahead.”



## **2011 Recipient of the Prize in Entomology**

My name is Nanike Esterhuizen and I love not man the less, but nature more. I was born and raised in Malmesbury, South Africa, but as a child I spent most of my holidays on farms in Namibia, as both my parents grew up there. This landscape sparked my love for wild animals and open spaces and I always dreamed of becoming a game ranger or wildlife photographer when I grew up.

At the age of 9 I joined the Voortrekkers cultural society of which I am still an active member today. Through camping and hiking I learned many valuable life-skills and spending a lot of time in the wild increased my love for the natural world. When attending Bloemhof Girls' High in Stellenbosch, my explorations of Stellenbosch mountain introduced me to the wonders of the fynbos biome. One of my favourite hobbies is photography and when I go into the veld my camera works overtime. A large part of my passion for nature can also be attributed to frequent hikes in partially alien invaded renosterveld near my home town. Here my father taught me a lot about the veld and tracking animals, but most importantly to appreciate and love all of God's creations.

It is an honour to have received the Keppel Barnard Prize and would like to thank my family for their love and support during my undergraduate course. I will continue my studies at Stellenbosch University, starting with an MSc in Conservation Ecology in 2012, and hope to contribute greatly to the field of conservation in the near future.



## 2010 Recipient of the Prize in Conservation Ecology



Ancois de Villiers (22) was not born in the wild. Her birth took place on 2nd February 1988 in a regular civilized hospital in Cape Town Metropolitan. Ancois writes “Fortunately, I was not confined to urban captivity while growing up. I was constantly exposed to nature, be it through school holidays in reserves, adventuring in the mountains on the family farm (sometimes to the great distress of my mother) or exploring the open veld in

front of my parent’s home. In fact, it was on the veld’s ecology that I made my first observation of the plight of biodiversity in modern times: as new housing developments increased, the local guinefowl flock (of which I was very fond of) declined and finally disappeared.

My first exposure to conservation in action was when I attended the Two Oceans Aquarium “Young Biologist” Course (2004) while in high school. I found the experience most stimulating. This was not only due to the knowledge that I gained or that I had full access to the Two Oceans Aquarium for a week for free, but also the diverse set of people who attended. I was able to interact with other points of views and observe conservation in action. I was fascinated. I could hardly believe that there was a career wherein someone would actually pay me to explore the veld and to learn more about the world.

I began my studies at the University of Stellenbosch in 2007. At first, I registered for BSc Biodiversity and Ecology; however I converted to BSc Conservation Ecology in my second year. My fascination has only increased as I was exposed to inspiring people and concepts both in and outside the class room.

I am passionately looking forward to continuing my development in conservation. Short term goals include gaining practical experience in conservation through internships and volunteering (2011) and completing a successful master’s degree (2012-2014). For now, my future career seems to be directed to the sustainable agriculture and game farming field. My ultimate goal is to contribute to the stimulation of a positive synergy amongst the seemingly opposing forces of economy, society and ecology.

I look forward to continue challenging myself to improve by interacting with people with different views and to be an effective “conservation tool” in society. And to live in the wild as much as I can.”

## 2010 Recipient of the Prize in Entomology

Elri Franken writes “I was awarded the best Entomology student award for 2010 (the first time this award has been presented). This was surprising to me for quite a few reasons. Let’s start at the beginning.



I was born in a little town called Volksrust on 28 October 1988. We soon moved to the lovely city of Nelspruit in Mpumalanga which I still call home. I wish that I could say studying Entomology or even Horticulture (which was my other major) was my lifelong dream. It wasn't. As a little girl my one (and only) goal was to become a veterinarian surgeon, this was fuelled by my overwhelming love of animals, nature and everything agriculture. The less romantic side of

becoming a vet was soon exposed to me and I decided to rather focus on another side of agriculture. Cut flowers and floriculture was my main driving force for deciding on Horticulture. I decided to take Entomology with my major, Horticulture, not really expecting to like it at all or knowing where it will fit in. I was (and am still) so surprised at how interesting, informative and absolutely crucial this field is to successful integrated agriculture. My initial reaction shows the importance of overcoming the 'perception challenge' when one is looking at insects. I was also exposed to Nature Conservation, Ecology & Entomology which also shed light on conservation and our human role on the planet. I would recommend Entomology to anyone I came across. During my two years of Entomology I met lovely, interesting people and I would like to thank the Department for all the support and encouragement they give to their students. Next year I am starting my Masters in Horticulture working on the spectacular indigenous orchid, *Disa uniflora*. I see an academic future for myself continuing my studies to at least Doctoral level and ultimately becoming a professor. I truly believe that one should never pass on an opportunity to gain knowledge, and continuing my studies would be a great privilege.”

## 2009 Recipient of the Prize in Conservation Ecology

Was awarded to Jacques Smit. Unfortunately no Bio was received from him.

## 2008 Recipient of the Eugene Marais Prize in Conservation Ecology



This year's award went to Adam Bannister (23). Adam grew up in the suburbs of Johannesburg. Determined not to fit into the mold of a typical city boy he spent every moment playing in the garden exploring fishponds, breeding birds, and rearing mice and lizards. He has been fortunate enough to travel around much of southern Africa and has a great interest in wildlife. Birds are his greatest passion. At an influential age of 5, Adam was part of a 52 part TV series commissioned by Walt Disney. The name of the program was 'Bush School' and featured on K-TV at weekends. This program allowed him, over a period of 2 years, to spend all his holidays in the Sabi-Sand Game Reserve, away from the high walls and congested city. His love for nature grew...

A decisive moment came in his life when in 2004 he took a Gap Year after completing his secondary education at Redhill High School. He travelled alone to South America in a quest to see the rainforests he had dreamed of as a kid and the magical animals he had seen in numerous David Attenborough documentaries. Based in the foothills of the Andes in the tiny country of Ecuador, Adam completed an 8-week volunteer stint in the Amazon Rainforest. Isolated from all of life's conveniences and thrown into the raw wild, living with local tribesmen and directed by a handful of British scientists, Adam soon realised that ecosystems like this are too precious to simply lose. On flying out of the rainforest, a 2 hour flight to the nearest town, he watched in despair as the forest canopy slowly disappeared as one flew closer to civilization, only to be replaced by slash and burn and cattle fields. The 'Jungle-Bug' had bitten him and seeing this unsustainable destruction of one of the earth's true remaining wilderness' motivated him to return to South Africa and get involved in the field of conservation.

Adam is currently seeking ways to link conservation issues with social issues. "I believe it is naive to think of conservation in a bubble...we need to realise that even if we do not like it, nature must pay for itself! The trick is to start exploring innovative ways and means to get nature and people to start working together". He hopes to use 2009 as a practical year of idea exploration; trying to help him get an on-the-ground perspective of conservation issues in Africa. As of now he plans to conduct a 3 month ranger training course and then travel up to Malawi. Here he will be part of a 2 man team who will spend 5 weeks kayaking the eastern shore of Lake Malawi. As for what happens after that? "Who knows, maybe I'll get conveniently lost in Malawi for a while".

## 2007 Recipient of the Eugene Marais Prize in Conservation Ecology



Lize Joubert (22) was born in Humansdorp in 1986. She grew up on her parents' farm in the Tsitsikamma area, and went to the Primary School in Humansdorp in later years. In 1994, 19 farms (theirs included) were bought by the government and given back to the Fingos as part of the country's land reform policy. The Fingo tribes were formed when Nguni groups – fleeing Shaka Zulu – moved to the Eastern Cape. In 1835, after years of oppression by the Xhosa, they

appealed to the Cape Government and Sir Benjamin d'Urban gave them permission to settle on the banks of the Great Fish River - later known as "Fingoland" (en.wikipedia.org). More than 100 years after the Fingo tribes' translocation, they claimed their ancestral land back. Consequently, Lize's family moved.

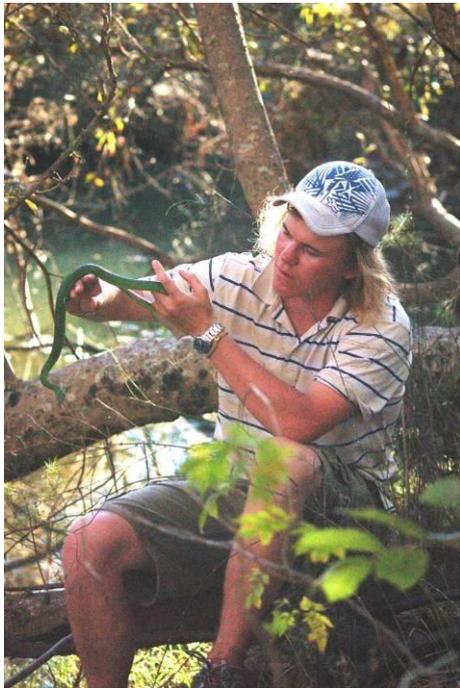
Because all Lize's close family lived in the Boland at that stage, they also decided to join the clan. After searching high and low for a new home, her parents bought a farm directly south of the Bredasdorp Mountains on the Agulhas Plain. On this property - still owned by the family – they farm with a mixture of cattle, wildflowers (e.g. Proteas) and Honeybush tea. Lize attended the local primary in Bredasdorp from June 1994 and matriculated at the local high school in 2003. For her entire school career, she spent the weeks in the hostel. Weekends and holidays, however, were the times when she and her family would ask the question: "What is over the next hill?" ... and they would go and explore. Her entire life is marked with highlights of time spent in nature with friends and family.

Lize started her degree in Conservation Ecology at the University of Stellenbosch in 2004, graduated in 2007 and started with her MSc in Conservation Ecology in 2008. Her current study deals with Ecological Networks between timber plantations in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. She has a wide range of interests, but everything essentially boils down to her passion for the idea of sustainability. This is not easily attainable. In fact, she thinks that much research and a mind change of "epidermiese proporsies" (Quote: Oom Oubaas from 7de Laan) is necessary to make this possible.

Sustainability is something that you have to set your mind to. A way of initiating this process is to start searching for solutions to the problems and obstacles constantly raised by various parties of interest - in stead of focusing on the problems themselves. As soon as you do this, your whole view / perception of the world as we experience it today will change. And this, she believes, is the way forward!

## 2006 Recipient of the Eugene Marais Prize in Conservation Ecology

The award went to Simon Capon (23 yr). Simon's formative years were spent on a farm in the south of Zimbabwe close to the town of Bulawayo where he was born and completed the majority of his primary school education. This was where he first developed a passion for nature, becoming a keen birder and snake lover. His family then sold their farm in Bulawayo and relocated to a farm North East of Harare. He completed his primary and secondary school in Harare, where he attended St Johns preparatory school and St Johns College. In his final year of primary school his father sadly passed away and his mother was left to run the farm with the help of their dedicated farm manager. In 2001 he completed his Cambridge A-level certificate then took a gap year where he did a computer course, worked part time at an animal rehabilitation centre and helped on the family farm. In 2003 he enrolled at Stellenbosch University initially studying a BSc Animal Science with a major in Conservation Ecology. However after his first year he decided to shift to Conservation Ecology full time. He really enjoyed the conservation ecology courses



and found many of the lecturers inspiring and very knowledgeable. During the course of 2005 his family sadly lost their farm in Zimbabwe under the ongoing Land redistribution exercise and made a decision to move to the United Kingdom. Simon had initial plans to continue his studies to a Masters level in conservation ecology but has decided to take a year out and hopefully return in 2008 to continue with a MSc in Conservation Ecology. He also plans on obtaining a FGASA guiding certificate which he hopes will give him a more practical handle on wildlife in general with its integration with tourism and conservation. He believes that this would put anyone in good stead, with a degree plus a practical knowledge of the environment. In the long term he plans on gaining some work experience in Africa in the conservation field and dreams of one day opening a large conservation area in Africa.