

## **Project Update: September 2021**

June – September 2021

My tree climbing gear arrived in good order and I have been training non-stop. I have now accessed tree canopies of multiple forest trees, assessing the state of flower development. This is quite an adventure and takes concentration, mental fatigue and patience.

On a 2-week basis, I visit all of my focal trees and do monitoring. This includes trekking to individual trees (which are now GPS tagged and described) and noting their production (or lack of production) of flowers. All of the trees included in my research have small, white flowers, so monitoring them takes time and patience - some trees need to be climbed, and others can be seen using binoculars.

I have since June 2021 started a small research assistants' group. These are second year Nature Conservation students, who accompany me on my forest visits. During these visits, we do not only focus on the current project, but I also make time to teach them more about the scientific method, ecology, pollination and conservation. There are 13 students in this group, and with each visit I take four to five students with me.

The process of establishing an environment focused NGO, Forests for Schools, is now further underway. The NGO has officially been registered with South Africa's Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC) after a long process. I now wait for my submission to the Department of Social Development for a final go ahead. I have already designed its website too, which will be published as soon as we hear back from the Department. This NGO will do environmental education at local schools and assist with the planting of indigenous forest trees.

My field work has begun, although only one of the five tree species are starting to produce small flower buds. I expect them to open fully in the next 2 weeks, which will then see me gathering my first pollination datasets. My review paper on Afromontane tree reproduction is also gaining traction - it has gone for a first review between me and my hosts, and I am busy incorporating edits and working on a second draft.

Lastly, me and my host at Nelson Mandela University have developed an MSc project on dying tree ferns in our indigenous forests - the student is in the process of applying for various research grants to fund this venture.





