

Project Update: January 2008

Work-to-date

Although the project 'Burning for Biodiversity' has only been running for a few weeks, good progress has already been made. In November, the project advertised two Masters bursaries widely across South Africa, and we had more than 20 applicants. Two suitable applicants were found. Both these students had good academic records and some experience with fieldwork in conservation areas in the country. The students have already begun literature reviews and field planning for their first fieldtrip. It is anticipated that they will start their first field sampling in February or March.

Dr Catherine Parr (Project leader) spent time in Kruger National Park and in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve in November and December 2007. During this time she was able to lay the foundations for fieldwork in 2008. Importantly, she was involved in capacity building with a very successful three week fieldtrip sampling termites and other invertebrates on the Kruger long-term experimental burn plots. This work involved training Mr Hendrik Sithole (Invertebrate manager, Kruger National Park), and Mr Vellie Ndluvo (Technical assistant, Kruger National Park).

In addition, Dr Parr was also in contact with the Communications Manager in Kruger NP (Michelle Hofmeyer) regarding the future production of a poster and/ or leaflets for the general public illustrating the importance of fire in savannas.

Immediate Future Plans

- Fieldwork by the two MSc students is scheduled to start in February or March.
- Commence identification of ants and termites collected in the November sampling trip.
- Field sites in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi GR to be determined in February with the assistance of Dr Guy Boggs (Charles Darwin University, Northern Australia). Dr Boggs is a GIS expert conducting his sabbatical with Dr Parr. He will assist in the location of field sites of particular fire frequencies.
- Dr Parr to present a paper on savanna conservation at the 5th Kruger Networking Meeting, Skukuza in April.