

## **Project Update: September 2008**

### Work-to-date

Two MSc students (Bradley Reynolds and Andrew Davies) have registered through the University of Pretoria, and have commenced fieldwork. They both had a long autumn field season in March/April-May.

Andrew, working on the impact of fire on termites, had the large task of setting up hundreds of cellulose baits (i.e. toilet rolls!) throughout his field sites – he will be monitoring these in the coming months to get an indication of species richness, termite activity, and decomposition rates. Most recently Andrew has set up an additional project assessing how fire influences the critical process of decomposition. This has involved making and laying out hundreds of litter bags on the experimental burn plots which will be checked in the winter months, and again in the summer months, to determine the role of termites in grass and litter decomposition. Working across Kruger National Park, and in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi is challenging logistically but Andrew's hard work and determination is paying off. Early results indicate that the effect of fire on termite assemblages may vary with season, although the response also may vary with savanna habitat type.

Bradley also had a long first field season. His spider sampling is particularly comprehensive – perhaps the most comprehensive ever conducted for community ecology studies in savannas. Due to the detailed nature of his fieldwork and logistical difficulties which increase sampling times (carrying a 5m ladder through thick savanna is not easy!); sampling at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi has been suspended for the time being. Bradley has just commenced his spring sampling again in Kruger NP.

A paper was presented on savanna conservation at the 5<sup>th</sup> Kruger Networking Meeting, Skukuza in April by the project leader, Catherine Parr. Following this visit, Catherine had a research trip to Pretoria in mid-August. During this time she held discussions with Bradley, Andrew and Berndt van Rensburg of the University of Pretoria re. MSc progress. Catherine also spent time in July at the Natural History Museum in London learning skills for termite identification under the guidance of Dr. Paul Eggleton of the Termite Research group.

Future plans include continued fieldwork for Bradley and Andrew. Hendrik Sithole (SANParks) will be accompanying both MSc students with their fieldwork to get a better understanding of sampling techniques for spiders and termites.

