



Department of Conservation
Ecology and Entomology:
Alumni Testimonials

Stellenbosch University



Ancois de Villiers (class of 2010)

As an alumnus from the department, I completed a BSc and MSc in Conservation Ecology in 2010 and 2013 respectively. These years were filled with many opportunities for growth-promoting challenges that advanced my personal and professional development. In the following paragraphs, I will reflect on the main aspects of this experience that have had exceptional value to me both in further studies and engaging in the “real world” of employment in the environmental field.

The academic rigour, standard and expectations at the department appear to be exceptional. Following the completion of my studies at the University of Stellenbosch, I had the opportunity to complete an additional MSc in Environmental Anthropology at a United Kingdom university. At the time, this university was one of the top recommended institutions to study anthropology, and one of only a few in the world that provided an accredited degree in environmental anthropology. One should be careful when paralleling this second MSc (a taught masters) with the first MSc (a research masters). However, my impression is that the Stellenbosch MSc was more at a level of a “mini PhD” when compared to the second MSc. For example, during my Stellenbosch MSc studies, students were expected to publish at least one paper based on our work – preferably two. Even our BSc fourth year project was expected to have some potential for publication. However, for my second MSc in the UK, publication was at most an afterthought and an exception. In other words, at Stellenbosch the academic bar was set high with students expected to do meaningful research that is supported by mature scientific principles. This is an expectation that I have come across in only a few other MSc programmes in related fields.

The supportive and hands-on staff at the department further reinforced this standard. The department’s curriculum and staff actively encouraged students to internalise that ecology *includes* people. It was emphasised that any research and management project should engage with relevant stakeholders, that the project should be of value to people, and all contributors should be recognised and provided meaningful feedback of the findings. In addition, staff and supervisors did not shy away from supporting students taking on controversial and challenging subjects.

I have concluded that the department’s approach and philosophy when it comes to developing and applying its academic programmes has helped me to more effectively and comfortably manage the often messiness of working on natural resource management within the highly pressured “real world”.



Conservation Ecology
& Entomology



Craig Galloway (class of 2010)

I did both my bachelor's and master's degrees in Conservation Ecology at Stellenbosch University. Even though I am not working directly in the field of conservation, but rather agricultural sustainability, I feel that conservation ecology prepared me very well for my job. The expectation can never be that a university degree teaches you all you need to know for your job, but rather that it prepares you to be able to learn and grow within any job. That is what the conservation ecology course did for me. I was taught how to gather information, process it and write in a manner that shows my understanding. I learnt how to collect, handle, analyse and interpret large amounts of data, and to then communicate this data so that it made sense in the context it was collected and in the broader context of current and historical research. These are some of the generic skills I learnt, which are very valuable in my work, and I believe are valuable in any job.

The conservation ecology course taught me to think and to apply the knowledge that we learnt. I believe there is great value in studying the diversity of courses offered in Conservation Ecology, as you learn to apply these skills in various fields, which I believe is a lot more realistic and relevant to at least your first few years of work. Most jobs are multi-disciplined, much like the Conservation Ecology course, requiring dynamic people who are able to solve varying problems, rather than just have knowledge about a specific subject. The Conservation Ecology course prepared me very well for such a job. There were some courses that seemed useless while I was studying, but I now look back and see the value in so many of them. I also enjoyed the fact that the lecturers in the Conservation Ecology department are really passionate about what they do. This really engaged me, as they were sharing their passion in lecturing us, rather than just teaching about arbitrary concepts and ideas.



Conservation Ecology
& Entomology



Gabi Kietzka (class of 2013)

When I moved from another university to Stellenbosch's Conservation Ecology and Entomology department, I was anxious of whether I had made the right choice and whether I would fit in with my new class and keep up with standard of work. It is now ten years later and I have completed my bachelors, MSc, and PhD in Conservation Ecology and Entomology, and still haven't left what feels like home. The lecturers are approachable, willing to do whatever they can to help, and their passion for what they do is contagious. My years as part of this community have been the best of my life, which I will be forever grateful for.

The undergraduate program covers a diversity of topics that together define the very essence of conservation ecology. This allows every individual to find what makes them tick and to get a grasp on the complexity of conservation-related issues in real life. Throughout the undergraduate program you are given the opportunity to go on excursions and experience the hands-on side of conservation. In the later years, there are elective courses to choose from and in this way, you are given the chance to dive deeper into what really interests you. It was in my final undergraduate year that I found my love for dragonflies and their use as indicators of water quality. I followed this passion into my MSc and PhD where I spent many days wandering the magnificent rivers of the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal midlands watching dragonflies and other fascinating insects. Even though I have finished studying at the department, it is still opening new doors for me. I have now found myself in a totally different field of entomology, integrated pest management, which I am thoroughly enjoying. This goes to show that even after nine years of studying there is so much to learn and even more passion to gain.



Conservation Ecology
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Liesel Kets (class of 2014)

I completed both my bachelor's and master's in Conservation Ecology and Entomology at Stellenbosch University. During my undergrad, I found the curriculum relevant and stimulating. The passion that ensued from the lecturers strengthened my interest in the field of conservation with each new subject. The wide range of subjects and choice subjects allows for students to prepare themselves for a diversity of career opportunities within this sector, with the helpful guidance of willing lecturers and mentors.

Additional to the theory element of this degree, the department offers various hands-on field trips where students may gain valuable experience in the field. One of my most rewarding excursions was the four days spent on Robbin Island, collecting data for arthropod, vegetation and tortoise research projects to be further carried out by the students under the guidance of our lecturers and post-grads. We had the opportunity to do "*real science*". This type of experience led me to pursue a masters.

My experience as a post-graduate student in the Department of Conservation Ecology and Entomology was a valuable, informative and well-guided one. My supervisors were treasured mentors and leaders throughout the process. Although I am not currently pursuing a career in research, I have no doubt that all the skills and knowledge that I gained in my seven years with the department will help me to achieve my goal of incorporating sustainability and environmental education into school curricula. I am only positive about the path that I have followed to where I am today.