



grass roots

Newsletter of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa

*Incorporating Vol. 17-3 of the Bulletin of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa
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GSSA Congress special

**Whither pasture
research in southern
Africa?**

***Pastures
information day,
Cedara***

Jobs, bursaries and news

Editorial

Dear Members

This issue focuses on the GSSA Congress in Grahamstown, yet another successful Congress and, this time, jointly hosted by the GSSA and the Thicket Forum.

Mark Hardy, the outgoing President, raised the issue of the decline in Pasture (as opposed to Rangeland) research in southern Africa in his Presidential address (see p. 14).

Another issue that has me deeply concerned is the state of traditional grassland science research in general. The age profile of the Congress delegates is getting younger every year. Injection of new blood and new ideas into any discipline is healthy; but although we've got the new blood, I'm concerned that we don't always have the new ideas. It seems that researchers are rehashing many old questions that were addressed decades ago. This is not a reflection on the enthusiasm or dedication of the scientists; rather, it is a reflection of the chaotic state of research in many government institutions. The new generation of scientists are entering the profession with few mentors left to guide them, and with little communication between government departments. Government research needs a shake-up, and if we don't do it, who will?

Alan Short

The Grassland Society of Southern Africa is dedicated to the advancement of the science and practice of range ecology and pasture management.

We welcome any contributions to the Grassroots, in the form of news, informative articles, reports, short research notes, scientific papers and letters to the Editor. Email alan.short@dae.kzntl.gov.za or admin@gssa.co.za or fax 033-3559 605 or 033-390 3113

GSSA Council

President:
Rina Grant
rina@sanparks.org

Immediate Past President:
Mark Hardy
markh@elsenburg.com

Vice-President:
Pieter Conradie
pw_conradie@yahoo.com

Honorary Secretary:
Lorraine van den Berg
Lorraine.VDB@nda.agric.za

Honorary Treasurer:
Justin du Toit
dutoitJCO@ukzn.ac.za

Scientific Editor:
Peter Scogings
pscoging@pan.uzulu.ac.za

Publications Editor:
Alan Short
Alan.Short@dae.kzntl.gov.za

Public Relations Officer:
Luthando Dziba
Ldziba@arc.agric.za

Chairperson of Trust:
Klaus Kellner
plbkk@puknet.puk.ac.za

PAC Chairperson:
Leslie Brown
lbrown@unisa.ac.za

Additional Member: Editorial Assistant
Khanyisile Mbatha
mbathakr@yahoo.com

Additional Member:
Jorrie Jordaan
jordaanj@agricho.norprov.gov.za

Additional Member:
Susi Vetter
S.Vetter@ru.ac.za

Additional Member:
Susi Vetter
S.Vetter@ru.ac.za

Administrator:
Freyndu Toit
admin@gssa.co.za

Printed by CPW
49 Langalibalele St
Pietermaritzburg
cpwart@telkomsa.net

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On the cover: —Chicory trial at Cedara. What is the future of pasture research in South Africa? (Page 14)

Upcoming events

From www.gssa.co.za

RELEVANCE OF SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY TRAINING TO DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN AFRICA

African Regional Conference of Vice Chancellors, Provosts and Deans of Science, Engineering and Technology (COVIDSET 2007)

Date: 25 - 27 September 2007

Venue: Johannesburg, South Africa

Tel: +254-2-7622619; +254-2-7622620

Fax: +254-2- 7622538

E-mail: info@ansti.org

Website: <http://ansticonference.org/2007/>

7th GIMS User Conference: Integrating our Future

Date: 1-3 October 2007

Venue: Summer Place, Hyde Park, Johannesburg

Website: www.gims.com/

Contact: Antoinette McMaster

Tel: 011 238 6300

Email: amcmaster@gims.com

AGRI OUTLOOK 2007

Date: 25-26 October 2007

Venue: CSIR Conference Centre, Pretoria

Tel: +27(0)12 3488344 or 3612748

Cell: 082-575-4282.

Contact: Minda/Michelle Bornman,

Email: minda@amtrends.co.za

Website: www.agrimark.co.za

Futures Conference 2007

The South Africa Node of the Millennium Project will be hosting its first

International Futures Conference in South Africa in 2007. Conference delegates are expected to include experts and practitioners who are interested in futures research and relating it to both the public and private domains.

Date: 5 - 8 November 2007

Venue: To be confirmed, South Africa

Tel/fax: +27 (0)865 178 278.

Email: infoa@sampnode.co.za

CHEMRAWN XII: The role of chemistry in sustainable agriculture

Date: 2-5 December 2007

Deadline for abstracts: 29 June 2007

Early Registration Ends: 3 Sept 2007

Venue: Stellenbosch, South Africa

Fax: +27 (0)21 933 2649

E-mail: conference@chemrawn.co.za

Website: www.chemrawn.co.za/registration.html

9th International Conference on Goats

Date: 31 August - 5 September 2008

Venue: Mision Queretaro, Juriquilla Hotel, Mexico

NEW WORLD; FUTURE WORLD The 10th World Conference on Animal Production;

Date: 23-28 November 2008

Venue: Cape Town International Convention Centre, South Africa

Tel: +27 12 420 3276 or +27 12 420 3290

Contact: Darlynn Louw

Email: wcap@up.ac.za

News

GSSA Trust formalises funding procedure

The GSSA Trust, an independent Trust fund established to further the aims of the Society, has been through a process of much-needed restructuring, in order to comply with legislation as well as the GSSA and Trust constitutions.

Under the leader-

ship of Winston Trollope, the former chairman, and John Clayton, the Treasurer, the Trust has conducted a thorough review of its financial position. The Trust has now developed a formal policy for disbursement of funds, based on the current and projected financial

position of the Trust, and on the aims of the Society.

Applications to Trust for funding should be made to the Administrator, Freyni du Toit, at admin@gssa.co.za.

Klaus Kellner was elected Trust Chairman in July, at Grahamstown.

Prof Sue Milton Finalist in Shoprite-Checkers SABC 2 woman of the Year Awards.

Prof Sue Milton was nominated by the GSSA for the 2007 Woman of the Year Awards in the Science and Technology category for her outstanding contributions to understanding and teaching the ecology

of the Karoo (see Grassroots Vol 5 no 3, p. 17). Thousands of nominations in seven categories were received by the judging panel, and Sue Milton was one of the three finalists in the Science and Technology Cate-

gory. Prof. Milton was awarded the GSSA Prestige Merit Award for her work, and being a finalist in the Woman of the Year Award is a fitting tribute to her achievements.

Information required for biofuel trials

Sherryn Thompson is trying to get permission to trial switchgrass in South Africa for biofuel purposes. She would like to know whether there would be any objections to these trials and the consequent growing of the grass. She will also be looking at mixing the

switchgrass with the various "prairie grasses" as this method has much higher yields than the switchgrass on its own. Please send her your opinions and any contact details that might help with her research. Email: action1@mweb.co.za

New book released

Graham Kerley together with Andre Boshoff and Peter Lloyd have recently collaborated to release the second edition of C J Skead's *Historical Incidence of the Larger Land Mammals in the Broader Eastern Cape*. Visit the website (<http://www.gssa.co.za/main.asp?nav=Publications>) to view or download the brochure for more details.

All members who have published a book, send electronic brochures to Freyni (admin@gssa.co.za) to post on the website under the "Publications" section .

Goat farmers day at Royal Show in Pietermaritzburg

The KZN Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs hosted a successful goat farmer's day for small-scale farmers at the Royal Agricultural Show in Pietermaritzburg in May. The day was opened by the MEC for Agriculture, Mr ME Mthimkhulu, who

welcomed the farmers and encouraged them to develop their potential as goat farmers. A number of speakers from the Department, HEIFER International, Intervet (who sponsored the day) and a commercial goat farmer discussed various aspects of goat produc-

tion such as goat health, breeding, marketing and showing animals. The farmers expressed their gratitude to the organisers for sharing their information, and the Department and the Royal Showgrounds have agreed to continue their collaboration next year.

Bursaries and study opportunities 2008: Plant Systematics and Biogeography The Rhodes University's Molecular Ecology and Systematics Group (MESG)

The MESG offers a multidisciplinary research programme investigating the flora and fauna of southern Africa. Ongoing and past research projects include molecular systematic studies on plants and animals (molluscs, cicadas, and crustaceans). Exciting study opportunities exist for students in the MESG. MSc, PhD and post-doctoral NRF bursaries are available for students interested in conducting research on the following:

- A molecular and morphological study on lineages within the Euryops / Othonna (Asteraceae) complex. Preliminary investigations have identified several lineages within this group of daisies. An opportunity exists for one or more of these to be studied in detail using DNA and morphological techniques at MSc, PhD or post-doc level.
- The systematics of the daisy genus *Berkheya* and allies. This project will continue an initial molecular study into this interesting group of daisies which have species from the Cape to Ethiopian highlands. The main approach would be molecular, and this project

would make a good MSc or PhD.

- A molecular systematic study of the grass genus *Stipagrostis*. This genus is southern African, and is a major floristic and ecological component of the arid and semi-arid regions of the subcontinent. This study would entail substantial field work / collecting, followed by molecular studies to determine species relationships within the genus. Suitable as an MSc or preferably a PhD project.
- Several phylogeographic studies (i.e. below the species level, or of species complexes) of plants such as the grasses *Merxmüllera stricta* and *M. disticha*, *Bulbine* (Asphodelaceae), and a range of other taxa. Suitable for MSc projects.

Please note that students with a background in systematics (i.e. systematics / taxonomy at the undergraduate / Hons level would be preferred). For additional information please contact Prof. Nigel Barker, Dept. Botany, Rhodes University.

Email: n.barker@ru.ac.za Phone: (046) 603 8715. Fax: (046) 622 5524.

Council News

The Council met on 16 July 2007 prior to the start of Congress 42 at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. The AGM was also held at Congress.

The venue for Congress was excellent and it was pleasing to see the large number of delegates attending. Congress 42 was a joint congress between the GSSA and the Thicket Forum, which ensured good interaction between these two societies. Improved poster and paper adjudication guidelines were tested at Congress.

Council is happy to announce that the GSSA website is contributing tremendously to the communication within the Society, particularly with the *Grassroots* available electronically. Members should however still look forward to receiving a hardcopy, as it currently boasts a new glossy cover. Council is also investigating the possibility of a colour

cover for the *Grassroots*.

A concern has been raised within Council regarding the number of papers submitted to the Journal that need major revision. Is this a result of lower standards and quality or are referees being stricter than in the past?

The financial situation of the Society is steadily improving and some defaulted members have also been convinced to pay their dues. The GSSA has also been registered as a Non-Profit Organization, which holds various benefits for the Society.

The PAC discussed procedures for the registration of professional members and also indicated that it can only serve in an advisory capacity with regards to commenting on Government policies or draft Bills.

New and coordinated advertorial material, such as banners, fliers and posters has been

developed. The Society received some television coverage on SABC 2 and AgriTV also attended Congress. Sue Milton was nominated for the Shoprite/Checkers Woman of the Year Award and she was chosen as one of the three finalists in the Science category. Well done, Sue!

Congress 43 will be held in Mpumalanga in 2008. Rina Grant has agreed to drive the organization of Congress and has already proposed a number of symposia for the event.

Council said goodbye to two members, namely Annelene Swanepoel, the Immediate Past-President and Winston Trollope, the Chairman of Trust. Both made major contributions to the running of the GSSA. Two new members joined Council, the new Vice-president, Pieter Conradie and Phillip Botha as additional member.



Report on the Grassland Science Pastures Information Day held at Cedara on 22 May 2007

Nicky Findlay

Grassland Science, KZN Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs
Email: findlayn@dae.kzntl.gov.za

Introduction

The Pastures short course, run annually at Cedara by the Grassland Science sections of both South and North regions, has, in the past, been aimed at commercial farmers and extension officers. The course content has changed very little over the years and as a result the course has been attended mainly by extension officers and few farmers. It was therefore decided that the 2007 Pastures short course be replaced by an information day aimed specifically at small-scale and emerging farmers.

The theme of the information day was "Feeding your livestock all year round". The objective was to inform small-scale / emerging farmers and extension officers about the basics of planning a fodder flow and the fodder options available to them. Five topics were presented in Zulu by staff from Grassland Science and the ARC-RFI. They included temperate pasture species; tropical pasture species; land preparation, pasture establishment

and fertilisation; fencing and irrigation; and fodder flow planning. The information day also included a static display of implements as well as Nguni goats, Nguni cattle and Merino sheep on pasture.

Presentations

Presentations were prepared by Grassland Science and ARC scientists and technicians.

The talk on land preparation and pasture establishment was presented by Doreen Ndlovu, a Grassland Science research technician at Cedara. In her talk, Doreen discussed the importance of soil sampling and demonstrated a few sampling methods. Land preparation was covered in detail, as a well-prepared land is essential to maximise yield and persistence of any crop or pasture. Doreen also explained the need for fertiliser in any intensive cropping system and how to use the Fertrec soils analysis report to make decisions regarding pasture-specific fertiliser requirements.

Solomon Mthethwa, a research

assistant at Cedara, gave farmers information on summer fodder for livestock using the various tropical pasture species that produce well in KwaZulu-Natal. He was assisted by John Cunningham, Grassland Science's recently-retired control technician who has an in-depth knowledge regarding pasture species suited to KwaZulu-Natal and their use in small-scale and commercial farming enterprises.

Feeding livestock during winter is a perennial problem and Noma Hlongwane from the ARC LBD Livestock Production Institute (based at Cedara) spoke on the options available to farmers wanting to plant temperate pastures to feed livestock from May through to September. She also mentioned alternatives, such as fodder radish and lucerne, which can be planted dryland and are therefore useful in areas without irrigation.

Raphael Mwandla is a research assistant in the Grassland Science section. He has a great deal of experience in the practical aspects of livestock management and therefore presented the talk on fencing and irrigation. He provided information as to the different types of fencing available, including electric fencing, and the importance of dividing a pasture into camps. Raphael also discussed irrigation equipment and how to ensure even application of irrigation to pastures to ensure uniform growth over the entire area.

The final talk on fodder flow planning was presented by William

Diko, the Grassland Science research technician at the Kokstad research station. This is an important aspect of any livestock production system and refers to a long-term plan that ensures livestock have sufficient food, of the right quality, all year round. William discussed the importance of a fodder flow and the factors to consider when planning a fodder flow. He also highlighted the need for a fodder bank to fall back on in times of food shortages.

Pastures manual

Currently there is very little or, in some cases, no written information available to Zulu-speaking farmers in their home language. The Department is starting to address this need (e.g. the Goatkeepers' Animal Health Care Manual, available in English, Afrikaans, Zulu and Xhosa) but the availability of basic information translated to Zulu is in short supply. The manual given to course participants on the Pastures short course is written in reasonably advanced English, with many scientific and technological terms. It is intended for commercial farmers and extension officers with an understanding of biological processes and a good grasp of the English language. The manual did not meet the needs of the farmers attending the information day and so a new manual was developed, with articles written in both English and Zulu. Each delegate attending the pas-

tures information day received a manual, which contained detailed information on the topics presented by each speaker. The contact details of Grassland Science staff were also included and delegates were encouraged to contact the section should they have any questions in the future.

Attendance

In spite of the bitter weather conditions, a total of 68 people attended, 41 of them (60%) non-departmental staff (farmers and livestock owners). Delegates came from all parts of KwaZulu-Natal, including Dundee, Stanger, Empangeni, Mandeni, Vryheid, Dannhauser, Ladysmith and Wartburg. Snowfalls prevented people living in the Kokstad area from attending.

The way forward

Feedback from the information day was very positive, with presenters being complimented on the type of information provided as well as the manner in which it was presented. Presenters reported that farmers appeared to feel comfortable asking questions in their home language and hence participated fully in the discussions. A post-mortem meeting revealed that:

- The information day should continue to be offered at least every second year, alternating with the formal pastures short course. Grassland Science may look at restructuring the

short course and perhaps presenting a basic and an advanced course to meet the needs of both emerging and commercial farmers.

- Presenting the topics in Zulu contributed to a large extent to the success of the day, and this should be continued.
- Presentations were located at two different sites on Cedara, which necessitated transporting delegates between sites. This created a few logistical challenges, which would be solved by having all presentations at one site.
- It has been suggested that Grassland Science produce a series of posterised modules on various aspects of pasture production. This would facilitate the flexibility of Grassland Science to hold pasture information days throughout the region.

William Diko (centre left) describing a Konnskilde



Photo: Nicky Findlay



Opening of the Vice Chancellor at the Joint 42nd Annual Congress of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa & 4th annual thicket forum meeting

Saleem Badat

Vice-Chancellor, Rhodes University

The chairperson, officials of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa and the Thicket Forum, the Organising Committee, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, molweni, good morning.

Thank you for the kind invitation to open this gathering and a warm welcome to you all to Rhodes University, to iRhini/Grahamstown, to the Makana District and the Eastern Cape. And to our international guests from other parts of Africa and the world, a very warm welcome to South Africa.

It is a great honour for Rhodes University to host this Joint 42nd Annual Congress of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa & 4th Annual Thicket Forum Meeting. I trust that you will find our facilities in accordance with your needs, and us convivial hosts.

I am a simple sociologist whose research field is higher education studies. And so my knowledge of rangeland ecology and pasture management and the subtropical thicket biome is not just extremely limited but, to be honest, non-existent. However, one is never too old to learn and part of the fun of

being a Vice Chancellor is to be invited to gatherings such as yours and to visit new websites and to learn about intellectual endeavours and research and debates in disciplines and fields other than ones own.

Three statements in the documents for this conference especially caught my attention. Permit me to make some observations on each of them.

The first statement was that both the Grassland Society and thicket Forum 'are interdisciplinary fora with a central interest in linking human livelihoods, agricultural production and biodiversity conservation'.

This wonderfully brings together the social (human livelihood), the economic (agricultural production), and the ecological (biodiversity conservation), and signals to me an acute understanding on your part that the development challenge of our society is how do we simultaneously, not consecutively or sequentially, address and balance social, and economic needs and do this in a manner that is environmentally sustainable.

To put it in another way, your statement is a specific formulation of the overall four-fold development challenge that confronts South Africa and underdeveloped or so-called 'developing countries': that is how do we pursue **economic growth**, with **social equity**, and do so in a way that is **environmentally sustainable**; that recognises the need to extend, deepen and consolidate **democracy** in our societies; and finally and crucially, do all of this simultaneously and not consecutively or sequentially.

For many good social it is not an option to postpone one or other elements of this four-fold development challenge or to tackle them in sequence. They have to be confronted, by and large, simultaneously. Further, we need a thick conception of development that is simultaneously human, economic, social, cultural and environmental and not just reduced to economic growth.

This is a formidable challenge, and requires great imagination, creativity and boldness with respect to how we define our social and economic goals, how we develop and implement policies and how we monitor the impact of our policies and practices.

There is, however, no other way – not if we wish to be stable equitable and just societies and leave a world that future generations can inhabit without the threats of great calamities that we seem to be so selfishly and recklessly keen

to bring upon ourselves and bestow upon our children grandchildren and their children.

The second statement that caught my eye was the reference to both the Grassland Society and thicket Forum being 'interdisciplinary fora'.

As you well recognise, the pressing problems and challenges of our natural and social worlds have no respect for the academic disciplines and fields that have evolved over centuries and refuse to elegantly confine themselves to the boundaries that we have drawn around our disciplines and fields. There is value to maintaining a distinction between different disciplines and fields, especially in undergraduate teaching. However, we sometimes unnecessarily make ourselves prisoners of disciplines and fields instead of being open to a meeting of minds around common problems and concerns in an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary way that can engender imaginative new approaches to formulating issues and researching and addressing them.

The final statement that was of interest to me was this conference was expected to comprise of 'academics, land users and government agents'. Having for the past 17 years been involved in higher education policy research and policy development and having for 7 years served as the head of the higher education policy advisory body to two Ministers of Education, it is my experience that the specific con-

stituencies of academics, government, business and civil society are not always easy to bring together, and especially to hold together.

This is not because there is not recognition among all such constituencies of the need to work together and to build mutually respectful, beneficial, reciprocal relations to address our common concerns and challenges. The reality, however, is that there are sometimes (but perhaps here I am being too diplomatic and I should say that there are often) different and divergent interests, varying immediate concerns and therefore, understandably, differences emerge in how issues are conceptualised, which issues are prioritised, the discourses and languages through which they are discussed, and how approaches, strategies and the like are formulated.

In my view this is an unavoidable element of the coming together of different constituencies and a not unhealthy aspect of different constituencies finding each other and learning to think, debate and labour together. Whatever difficulties and tensions may arise, the important thing is to appreciate the value of such coming together, to be sensitive and respectful of different views and to recognise that we need each other if we are to address the concerns, problems and challenges that are our common lot.

To the extent that you successfully bring and hold together academics, land users, government

and other constituencies, my congratulations to you on this endeavour and significant achievement.

In closing I would like to tell you a short story about a man who lost his car keys on a wet and stormy night. While searching under a street light he was observed by a kind Samaritan, who offered to help him find his keys. After searching under the streetlamp for fifteen minutes without success, the now cold and wet Samaritan asked, "Are you sure you lost them here?" The other man replied, "Not really. I lost them somewhere between the pub and the car, but here is a good place to look because it is light enough to see."

I don't know what proportion of time you spend in the light or in the dark. But what I am clear about is that universities and scientific disciplines and fields, must focus not only on lit areas but must also illuminate areas of darkness as part of their essential role of advancing human understanding of our natural and social worlds.

Universities and scientific disciplines and fields must, however, also illuminate in another sense. Beyond communicating with a peer scientific community, they must also engage around science and knowledge with other social actors who have an interest in the results of intellectual labour.

Stephen Jay Gould notes, there is a 'long and honorable tradition of popular presentation of science',

(Continued on page 19)

Towards achieving our vision of advancing rangeland ecology and pasture management in Africa

Mark Hardy

Western Cape Department of Agriculture
Email: markh@elsenburg.com

There are two points regarding the functioning of our Society that I would like to address this evening:

The first is that we have a sound, vibrant and growing Society.

Second, we need to proactively develop mechanisms whereby the Society encourages and facilitates membership of professionals, technical advisors, Agribusiness and practitioners whose livelihoods depend on the sustainable use of rangelands and pastures. These are the people at the coalface, who work at the level where our science really matters.

To expand on these points.

The Vision of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa is:

Advancing rangeland ecology and pasture management in Africa

And our Mission:

- *To be a dynamic and inclusive forum for scientists and practitioners in rangeland ecology and pasture management, and*
- *To champion the sustainable use of rangelands and pastures*

for the benefit of people and the environment.

We are going through difficult times but to focus briefly on our successes:

Our administration has never been stronger; Our financial woes are being addressed and, thanks to the support of the GSSA Trust, we are now in a process of rebuilding the financial viability of the Society with great success; We have a well managed and high quality, internationally recognised Journal; Through our newsletter and website we update members on relevant issues within our discipline and provide members the opportunity to exchange views on pertinent issues; The GSSA Trust has been revitalized; The Professional Affairs Committee (PAC) is now at full strength and in a better position to support our Professional members and attend to the Society's response protocol; Council is guided by a structured Strategic Plan.

We have re-structured the format of our Congresses so that besides providing opportunities for

members to present their research to their peers, we accommodate special sessions, workshops and symposia organised by members and interest groups. Judging from the registrations for this and the two previous congresses, members find this format to be stimulating and worthwhile.

Rangeland ecology dominates Congress

Over the past 20 years or so issues involving rangeland ecology and management and ecology have dominated our congresses and publications. We have been very successful in providing a forum for scientists, technical advisors and managers in rangeland and wild-life conservation to present and discuss their work among their peers. Over the past decades we seem to have built an extensive knowledge-base on, for example: Fire and its role in vegetation management for various purposes; The response of individual species and plant communities to defoliation; Root growth of trees, shrubs and grasses; Preferred and avoided food types for domestic and wild animals; Restoration techniques; Plant/animal interactions; Rangelands and people; and many others.

Issues involving rangeland ecology and management and ecology have dominated our congresses and publications.

We know that this knowledge-base continues to grow and is being used by conservation agencies to manage conserved areas and is often incorporated into legislation.

My conclusion from the above is that we are indeed achieving at least part of our Vision and Mission — that is, to advance range ecology and to be a dynamic and inclusive forum for scientists in rangeland ecology; and we provide an administrative framework within which the membership can operate.

From this perspective the Society is sound and vibrant, and can look forward to an exciting future.

However, the Society must also strive to remain effective within the major changes that have occurred in the socio-

political and economic environment in South Africa in particular and southern Africa in general. These changes have had a massive impact on the role that Society members have traditionally played in developing understanding of rangeland function and process, and the development of systems that support sustainable use of resources.

In my opinion the current “soundness and vibrancy” of the Society is a function of the increasing dominance of rangeland ecology that has emerged over the past 15

to 20 years. Unfortunately there has been a parallel decline in the contribution to the Society's activities by traditional grassland scientists, pasture agronomists and practitioners. This is not to say that I believe there is anything wrong with having an enthusiastic, strong and active membership that is involved in all aspects of rangeland ecology. On the contrary, the Society is has come through difficult times with flying colours because of the enthusiastic contribution of these members. What we need, however, is to provide the framework within which we can achieve those parts of the Vision and Mission that "advances pasture management", provides a "forum for scientists and practitioners in pasture management" and "champions sustainable use of pastures".

The importance of the forage industry

Pasture is used here in its wider meaning to include livestock production from both veld and cultivated pasture. Reference to the proceedings of our conferences, Journal and special publications during the first 25 years of the Society's existence, shows quite clearly that we have our roots in traditional pasture/grassland science. Much of the focus was on veld and pasture for livestock production. And rightly so: more than 70% of the land surface of South Africa (and much of the rest of Africa) is allocated to

some form of livestock production from veld. The rest is cultivated, urbanised or within conservation areas. And cultivated pastures comprise a significant proportion of the area under cultivation.

The structures that supported the traditional grassland science research and extension activities have largely been removed due to alternative policies guided by the socio-political and economic changes that have occurred in SA in the last decade and a half. The lack of job opportunities in pasture research and extension has dramatically reduced our membership in those fields. Universities have been forced to alter their curricula to provide training in fields where graduates have the potential for gainful employment. This has led to a downward spiral of membership involved in pasture management and quite naturally, fewer contributions to our congresses and publications from this sector of the Society. The decline in scientific and technical contribution from the pasture fraternity has reduced the networking opportunities for those members who are still involved in traditional pasture research and, naturally their motivation to remain involved in the Society. Similarly agribusiness has few incentives to remain involved in the Society, and few consultants or leading practitioners attend congress these days.

The cultivated pasture and forage production industry may seem foreign to many delegates here this

evening. How many of you are aware of the massive livestock industry that depends on cultivated pastures? Some examples:

- There are approximately 250 000ha dry land legume pastures in the Western Cape that form an integral part of the crop production system
- An estimated 200 000ha under irrigation and dry land pasture and forage production for the roughage requirements of the 2 500 million litre milk production industry (R5 billion turnover at farm level)
- A formal pasture and forage seed industry of approximately 15000 tons of seed for the local and export market, an industry worth approximately R150 million.
- A large and expanding beef production industry based on pastures.
- Added impact of climate change leading to an expectation by industry of marginal cropping areas being planted to pastures and forage crops in support of an expanding livestock industry.

What of the potential for pasture and forage crops in support of the developing agricultural sector, the millions of individuals whose livelihoods depend on livestock having access to rangelands? Is the knowledge base regarding livestock improvement and livestock systems that is being developed for our com-

munal grazing lands, discussed at our conferences and published in our Journal, reaching the right audience? Or are we simply serving academia?

While we might not have many experienced researchers, extension staff and advisors involved in pasture and forage production systems as members of our Society there is a formidable industry out there dependent on veld, pasture and forage crop production for their respective livelihoods. This industry is supported in the private sector by various Agribusiness enterprises with their own consultants and sales staff, private consultants, farm managers and the producers themselves. The public sector is involved mainly in supporting smallholder and emerging farmers. If we look at our membership, contributions to our conference proceedings and publications we have a very poor record in serving and supporting this major component of our Grassland Science discipline.

How do we rectify the imbalance and work towards achieving the goals imbedded in our vision and mission? There have been similar appeals in past Presidential addresses (e.g. Trollope (1985)– on development of sustainable livestock systems for developing agriculture, and Tainton (1987) on science for the sake of science or in support of the land user). I would like to remind delegates to this congress and members of the Society at large of some of the points made



Photo: Sheila Househam

Lucerne cultivar trial at Makhathini Research Station, Zululand

by Dave Goodenough during his address in 2002. He pointed out that 24% of the membership of the Grassland Society of New Zealand was made up of farmers. The Grassland Society of Victoria, Australia with a membership of 2000, of mainly farmers/producers and industry with about 200 scientist/researcher members. Similarly, farmers form a large proportion of the membership of the Australian Grassland Society and the Society for Range Management in the USA. Opportunities are provided for presentations by farmers/producers and interaction with researchers. I support Dave's call for "greater synergy with the farming community" but would stress that we need not look to "serve" that community but to facilitate the pasture and forage production Industry's active involvement in our Society so that they and we, as the scientific community, can use our combined wealth of knowledge and experience towards advancing pasture management in

Africa.

The Society's efforts aimed at making a meaningful contribution at farm scale to the broader pasture and forage production industry have not been successful. I believe that this is partially because we have not had, and still do not have, the capacity to maintain initiatives such as presentation of farmer's days and special symposia that address the needs of the Industry. Furthermore, while we have actively forged ahead and encouraged workshops and symposia on ecological issues at our annual conferences, we have not made the same efforts for issues involving pasture production.

A different approach

I suggest that the Society takes a different approach. As stated before we have a strong professional and administrative structure that has the potential to provide a dynamic and inclusive forum for scientists and practitioners in rangeland ecology and pasture management. We should use this structure to facilitate closer contact/links with existing producer organisations such as the NWGA, RPO, MPO, SAN-SOR, the Pasture Association and the Grassland Development Trust. The GSSA should have a member of its Council responsible for maintaining links with these and similar organisations, and facilitating opportunities during our meetings for presenting symposia, special sessions and workshops that meet the com-

mon or individual scientific and technical management needs of those organisations. These organisations could also then draw on the Society's membership to assist them when presenting their own information days, or on the Society's Professional members to act as consultants if required. And we can maintain (enhance) our scientific integrity while doing so!

I strongly urge the Society to actively facilitate the inclusion of the broader pasture (including veld) and fodder production community/ Industry into our Society towards the achievement of our Vision of advancing rangeland ecology and pasture management in Africa.

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Congress opening address

(Continued from page 13)

and we should not make the 'mistake' of 'equating popularization with trivialization, cheapening, or inaccuracy'.

He rightly states that 'the concepts of science, in all their richness and ambiguity, can be presented without any compromise, without any simplification counting as distortion, in language accessible to all... people'.

This stress on communicating beyond simply a scientific community is a call to ensure that our universities, as part of their knowledge generation and dissemination roles, engage actively with the South African public and act as catalysts of public education. After all, we are, as universities, meant to advance the public and social good.

I wish you an enjoyable stay at Rhodes University and in Rhini/ Grahamstown, a stimulating and productive congress and conference, and trust this occasion will contribute to the further development of the Grassland Society and Thicket forum and to future exchanges of this kind.

And, I declare this Joint 42nd Annual Congress of the Grassland Society of Southern Africa & 4th Annual Thicket Forum Meeting officially open!



Livestock development in the rangelands: Is there a way forward for resource constrained communities and individuals?

Synthesis of sessions held at the 42nd GSSA Conference, Grahamstown, July 2007

Cam McDonald

CSIRO Sustainable Ecosystems, Brisbane, Australia

Email: Cam.McDonald@csiro.au

Background

The technical, cultural and resource constraints facing emerging farmers in South Africa is enormous. Otherwise well-intended land settlement schemes, such as SLAG (Settlement Land Acquisition Grants), have largely failed to produce successful commercial agricultural enterprises due to problems of limited technical background, poor animal and land management and the large number of non-active beneficiaries expecting to reap benefits from the holdings. While LRAD (Land Redistribution for Agricultural Development) is arguably having greater success, there is, currently a continuing problem of lack of tenure, lack of knowledge and lack of resources for beneficiaries to move forward. One of the more successful programs seems to have been the farmer Share-Equity scheme. Many smaller projects designed to assist

emerging farmers, including a number of overseas aid projects, have had little lasting effect due to poor framing of the emerging farm context, inappropriate technical interventions and/or lack of on-going support from the relevant tiers of government.

The Rangelands: People, Places and Policy sessions at the recent GSSA conference attempted to address these issues with an aim to seeking out positive options to improve the prospective success of emerging farmers making the transition to commercial status. Most of the session presentations identified problems and constraints, while a lesser number did offer some suggestions for overcoming them. These presentations were followed by a discussion session that sought to find a way forward.

The following is a summary of the presentations and the ensuing discussions. It should be noted that these discussions were limited in

scope to the extent that there were no emerging farmers present at the forum to give their viewpoint.

Problems

There have been many attempts at intervention, most aimed at improving some dimension of veld management or animal production. However the success rate of these interventions has generally been low; for which a number of reasons were identified:

- in communal areas, there are numerous and conflicting objectives for the use of the rangeland. A survey in the Eastern Cape revealed 23% of farmers used the communal area for grazing, 16% for collection of dung, 17% for timber, 19% for medicinal plants, and 25% for firewood. Others use it for cropping or collecting thatching material.
- most farmers do not herd or kraal their cattle, which can then present a problem for those with crops.
- over 50% of farmers lack knowledge of rangeland management and over 80% do not link resource degradation to high grazing pressure, burning or bush encroachment.
- many farmers have a poor knowledge of animal management (both animal health and herd management), and no knowledge of veld carrying capacity.
- there are no restrictions on use or access to communal areas, however, fences are not a solution, as they interfere with the free movement of people and animals around the communal area.
- there is a lack of institutional arrangements to enforce farmers rights.
- in communal areas, over 70% of farmers have less than 8 animals. This reduces their flexibility to manage, buy and sell, and limits their support from government. Most government support goes to those with large herds. Farmers prefer to keep their cattle and sell smaller animals, such as goats.
- most farmers are over 60 years of age and are reluctant to risk any major change in their circumstances. They avoid risk by keeping a few cattle as a form of savings, for milk, for ceremonial purposes, or for ploughing, and rely on government welfare. Hence, they may not be interested in becoming commercial farmers.
- fire can be good for plants but threatens people, their homes and their livelihoods.
- a lack of suitable land for grazing can be a problem for individual farmers as well as communal farmers. They have a shortage of winter feed, but commercial practices may not be suitable.
- most emerging individual farmers have no secure tenure to

their land as yet, which deters them from making any capital improvements, even if they had the resources.

- most lack the resources to take the first step towards commercialization, even if they want to.
- Often, access to markets is limited, and many farmers distrust the marketing system.
- Government policies have overlooked farmer's motives for keeping cattle.

Towards solutions

In the ensuing discussion session there were three clear messages that were continually reinforced:

- The need for a participatory approach; farmers/community had to be involved right from the outset of any project,
- The need for an integrated approach; any intervention strategy had to look at the whole system (social, economics, environment, infrastructure, services), and
- The need for on-going support; projects need to train local extension personnel so that after any project finishes, they can provide follow up support.

It is quite apparent that while most emerging farmers, both communal and individual, lack the necessary knowledge and skills to operate commercial enterprises, a good many either do not really want to be commercial farmers, or have limited realistic understanding of what is

actually required to operate in that sphere. Hence, intervention aimed at improving animal or veld condition will be of little interest to them, and unlikely to gain their support. In reality, current research agendas relevant to emerging farmers are heavily influenced by government and agency agendas. It is critical that the community identifies any problem that these agendas are meant to be addressing. However, due to lack of knowledge or real interest on the part of emerging farmers, they may not be aware there is a problem i.e. they don't know what they don't know. Hence, care needs to be taken in determining the community needs.

Farmers who do want to be commercial, or at least partially so, may be able to grow forage crops and store it for the dry season to help alleviate the winter feed shortage. This will keep their animals in better condition and reduce the pressure on the veld, but requires a major intervention, in the form of cropping. Alternatively, farmers could be trained to make better use of the existing resources rather than introducing some whole new strategy. However, to do this, may require government policies and will require better mechanisms for enforcing any regulations or local rules. In communal areas, the small herds need to be managed as part of a big herd. For individual farmers, use needs to be made of successful farmers to act as role models.

For those farmers who really do not want to be commercial, one pos-

sible way to alleviate the pressure on veld resources may be to provide alternative ways for them to make or save money, so they don't have to keep more cattle than can safely be accommodated. For this group, there is an urgent need to create new opportunities and enhance their capacity to act independently. Here, an integrated approach that looks at the whole community is most important. Maybe what they need is not more animals or more feed or better veld or animal management, but rather a better road so they get their animals to market, or to get to an alternate source of employment. In that case, they need to build appropriate alliances with other institutions, rather than the Department of Agriculture.

Despite the high failure rate of past projects, there have been successes, and these need to be documented, and made more readily available so they can be used as a framework for future projects. However, any framework needs to be flexible to adapt to the different circumstances and varying conditions. Where they have worked, there has usually been a complete community involvement, and a strong sense of ownership of the activities. Existing scientific data needs to be placed into a more user friendly format, and combined with local knowledge and common sense to provide good extension material for both farmers and

Despite the high failure rate of past projects, there have been successes, and these need to be documented

extension officers. This information should cover a wide range of topics such as animal and veld management, bush control, use of fire, economic management, etc. and should provide a step-wise process for resource constrained farmers to progress.

It is also clear that, to ensure any long-term benefit, government policy makers also need to be involved. One way to influence policy-makers may be through some appropriate application of economics. For any given strategy, analyses showing the economic, environmental and social benefits to the particular small holder and subsistence farming system, as well as to government, could possibly help influence policy. There is a need for innovation in ways for people to invest in and develop private control of certain resources in community areas. Again, government policy could help.

Co-ordination in addressing the different requirements within any community will always present a challenge. Nevertheless it needs to be done. Co-operation between different government agencies, different projects within agencies, and different local and overseas aid projects, is essential. Perhaps the range and forage working group and the ARC could play a pivotal role in this.

Conclusion

Not only do emerging farmers lack sufficient land and finances, most have little technical knowledge of animal and veld management. Compounding these difficulties, communal farmers have the long recognized problem of sharing resources, conflicting objectives, and the complexity of communal management, while for many individual farmers; land tenure is an added problem.

Clearly, any attempt to improve the livelihood of emerging farmers will involve an integrated approach between the farmers and scientific, extension and social expertise, and government policy makers. Any intervention strategy will need to take into account resource constraints, risk management, and the social and economic objectives of the individual or group concerned. There needs to be a step-wise process to improve their well being, which generates resources that can be used to improve their well being further, and so on, in an incremental manner. Above all, the emphasis should not just be on improving veld condition or increasing beef or crop production, but must include developing sustainable livelihoods.



The 2007 Peter Edwards Award

Susi Vetter and Pieter Conradie

Congress Organising Committee
Email: S.Vetter@ru.ac.za

The Peter Edwards Trophy is awarded at the annual GSSA Congress to a land-user in the province in which the Congress is held. This prestigious award is presented in recognition of sound application of the principles of range and forage science and conservation. The aim of the award is to recognise top land-users in different areas of southern Africa and thereby encourage the wise use of natural resources. The award is named in memory of Peter Edwards, a pasture scientist who was born in Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape. The trophy was first awarded in 1981 when the GSSA congress was hosted in the Eastern Cape and since then, many outstanding livestock farmers and game ranchers have been added to the list of recipients.

The 2007 adjudication was done during late June, which is the driest and most challenging time of the year and we found this to be a good time to visually appraise the farms and see how farmers were managing. Our panel consisted of Tony Palmer (ARC, Livestock Business Division), Pieter Conradie (Döhne Agricultural Research Station) and

Susi Vetter (Botany Department, Rhodes University). Despite Tony and Pieter battling with different versions of the flu during our five days on the road, we thoroughly enjoyed the experience and returned inspired by what we saw on the five farms we visited.

The farms were found in diverse agro-ecological areas, from Karoo veld with an annual rainfall of less than 300mm to climax mountain veld where an annual rainfall of over 1000mm is not uncommon. While the Karoo farm had last seen rain in November 2006 at the time we visited, the farms around Bedford and Grahamstown had had record rainfalls in 2006 and early 2007, and the challenge there was coping with the prolific grass growth before it became tough and unpalatable. It was a challenge to compare these different farms and to identify a winner, and this was made even more difficult by the fact that all finalists were very impressive. All showed great commitment and creativity, applied sound conservation farming principles and were actively involved in their communities - and as a result achieved exceptionally high overall scores.

Despite the ecological differences, the farming approaches we observed had a lot in common. Each farmer had identified a veld management system suited to their resource and had adapted their livestock production system accordingly. All farmers we visited had felt the effects of lower or unstable meat and wool prices, higher input costs and

tougher labour laws and thus cut costs to a minimum by doing away with unnecessary activities. Only one of the finalists regularly provided supplementary feed - the others rarely if ever supplied extra feed and instead adjusted animal numbers to match the productivity of their veld.

All finalists had a small but stable staff component of between 4 and 8 workers - a third of the size a decade ago. This illustrates the efficient manner in which these farming systems are run, but also the full-time commitment and hard work each individual has to put in on a daily basis. Two of the farmers had established farm schools, one encouraged his workers to keep some own livestock on the farm and all provided solidly built and serviced housing for their staff.

Our finalists agreed that conservation farming is a long-term commitment, a lifestyle and a passion. This was illustrated by the fact that four of the finalists are third, fourth or fifth generations on the farm.

Our first visit took us to Lochart Ainslie at his farm Glen Gregor in the Kowie Valley near Bedford. The farm has been in the family since 1837 and Lochart represents the fifth generation. His son Hugh recently joined the farming venture. The main enterprise is cattle farming, with hunting as a side line. Lochart also keeps some Dorper sheep as well as a flock of boer goats to help control bush encroachment. Lochart is a pioneer in the battle against *Acacia karroo* encroachment which is a major challenge in the lower lying

sweetveld parts of his farm. He has hosted symposia on the subject and is actively combating encroachment using an integrated approach of mechanical clearing plus herbicide, fire and 1000 boer goats. The higher altitude parts of his farm represent a different challenge with *Cymbopogon*-dominated climax mountain veld. Lochart devised a system using patch burning and grazing by mature oxen which utilize and improve the mountain veld. As a result he has seen improved basal cover and species composition, reduced abundance of *Cymbopogon* and an increased carrying capacity of 600 large stock units. Lochart is also an active member of the local soil Conservation Committee and Farmers Association. He established the Mill Cricket Ground on his property with the historical mill as clubhouse and this is used a venue for local and international cricket matches. When we left we were convinced we had our winner and the remaining visits were mere formalities – but we were surprised and pleased to find some stiff competition out there.

Our next visit took us to Beacon Hill near Grahamstown. The farm is owned and run by John Gush and his son Richard. They have been active members of the Conservation Committee, the local study group and John has been a leader in the farming community for many years. John and Richard keep meticulous records of all enterprises on the farm, which include cattle, sheep, game and eco-tourism. Conservation works erected by John's father have

resulted in previously eroded areas beautifully stabilised and covered by bush and grass. We also saw some magnificent *Themeda*-dominated veld maintained by judicious grazing management and the use of fire. When Richard, a civil engineer, came to the farm in the late 1990s the need for additional enterprises was realised. In 2001 Amakhala Game Reserve was established together with five fellow farmers as partners. Amakhala is now one of the premier private game reserves in the area and the reserve and all lodges remain family run.

Rob Wilmot's farm Boekenhout is nearby in the Alicedale area. Rob is one of the few farmers in the area still successful with sheep farming, of which there is a long and proud history in his family. Much of the farm is on grassy fynbos and the challenge is thus preventing dominance of fynbos shrubs and utilising a grass sward which quickly grows and becomes unpalatable when not managed well. We saw a noticeable difference in the density of indigenous and alien bush between Rob's and the neighbouring property. Nevertheless, there are scattered clumps of indigenous bush on the farm which add shelter for sheep and plant diversity. A number of rare species such as *Oldenburgia grandis* (donkey ears) are well preserved on the farm. We were not surprised that Boekenhout has been used by the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture as a benchmark for Grahamstown False Macchia veld type. Rob has served as chairperson of Farm-

ers' Association and Albany Conservation Committee and was recently chosen to serve as mentor to developing farmers on the revived Conservation Committee for Albany.

Tony and Lynn Phillips farm at Bucklands along the Great Fish River. The farm is now almost completely surrounded by conservation areas including the Great Fish River Reserve, which has increased the challenge posed by ticks and jackals. The vegetation type is Valley Bushveld, and we were delighted to find the veld in pristine condition – in considerable contrast to the neighbouring conservation area – with an impressive component of spekboom and excellent grass cover. Tony and Lynn started out as teachers but decided to make a career change and went to study at Grootfontein Agricultural College. They keep a combination of cattle (magnificent Bonsmara stud), Angora goats and hardy Dorper-Damara sheep. The grazing system is high impact grazing with cattle for two weeks, followed by goats for two weeks and then eleven months' rest. Water provision has been a big challenge but all of the many camps have good water points which, despite the intensive short duration grazing system, were surrounded by a dense grass sward. Lynn developed ecotourism on the farm, although the presence of hippo soon stopped the river rafting activities.

Our winners – by a narrow margin, but undisputed – were Trenly and Wilmari Spence who farm on Kriegerskraal in the Kamdeboo near

Graaff-Reinet. Trenly took over the farm in his early twenties after the death of his father. He developed the farm infrastructure, dividing large and heterogeneous grazing camps into a system of nearly 150 small camps which are intensively used. He developed underground water to provide permanent and sufficient water supply to all camps. He also extended his father's irrigated lucerne fields to 30 ha which he now mainly uses as a cash crop but which provide a buffer in extreme years. We were impressed to find that despite having had no rain in nearly eight months, and while his neighbours had been feeding their livestock for two months, Trenly still had ample grazing reserves and did not anticipate the need for supplementary feed. Trenly was the first farmer to introduce Nguni cattle to the area in 1997 and his example has been followed by several farmers in the area. He has since served as chairperson for the Nguni Stud Breeders Association. He now keeps equal proportions of Nguni cattle, Angora goats and hardy Dorper-Damara sheep which he keeps in mixed herds. This has proved to be effective in utilising the veld fully during short, intensive 3-day grazing spells, and also reduced the vulnerability to jackal predation. Despite criticism from many of his peers, Trenly developed, maintained and adapted his intense short-duration grazing system. He monitors his veld on a regular basis, measuring shrub and grass cover and keeping photographic records. He has documented



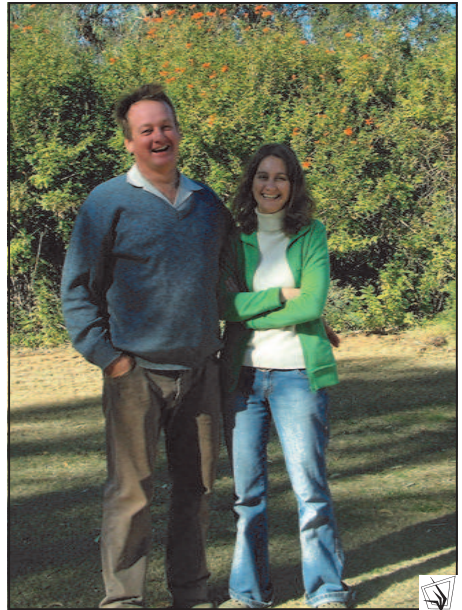
**Trenly and Wilmari Spence:
Good grass cover after 8
months of no rain in the Karoo**

improved plant cover and composition and also increased livestock productivity from 28 ha/LSU to 9 ha/LSU over 20 years of farming. He credits the full and non-selective utilisation followed by very long recovery periods which prevent the loss of palatable perennial shrubs and grasses in this arid environment. He has also undertaken veld reclamation in eroded areas using a 'happloeg' and introducing preferred grass species. Trenly and Wilmari are active in the local study group.

Altogether, our farm visits provided much food for thought on the future of farming in the province. Clearly some land is in excellent hands, and in some cases the next generation is showing an interest in continuing the farming venture. But there has also been a massive shift to game ranching, driven in part by very high prices offered for land by buyers from cities and overseas. While this is probably good news for

biodiversity and tourism, it also raises the question of the future of farming as more and more farming infrastructure is removed, farming communities and their social and educational facilities are becoming thinner and conflicts between farmers and game reserves become more common. We came away feeling that good farmers deserve all the recognition and support they can get and hope that the Peter Edwards Award makes a contribution to this.

**Our winners Trenly and Wilmari
Spence**



Congress 2007

Rhodes University, Grahamstown

Susi Vetter

Congress Organising Committee

This year's Congress was held at Rhodes University in Grahamstown in association with the Thicket Forum. The meeting was well-attended with nearly 250 delegates including some people who came only for the 2-day Thicket Forum programme. The joint meeting was a great success, thanks to a joint organising committee which worked closely together from the beginning and also the very similar interests of the two groups. Hopefully this will mean more GSSA members joining future Thicket Forum meetings and more "Thicketeers" joining the Grassland Society.

Over 80 platform papers and nearly 50 posters were presented, with posters being given a prominent position and enough time for short presentations. The Congress was off to a stimulating and thought-provoking (if technologically challenged) start with an opening address by the Vice Chancellor of Rhodes University, followed by three topical keynote addresses by international speakers.

Left: Richard Eckard
Right: Deep in discussion



Saleem Badat, the Rhodes VC, encouraged the Grassland Society to simultaneously tackle the biological, economic and social aspects of rangeland research, policy and development, and not to be afraid to tackle uncharted territory. Richard Eckard from the University of Melbourne spoke on the effect of intensive grazing systems on greenhouse gas emissions and some recent research efforts to understand and mitigate these. Urs Kreuter from Texas A&M University highlighted the need for integrating the human dimension in rangeland research and management and echoed the sentiments expressed in the opening address. Fred Provenza from Utah State University concluded the opening session with a talk about the links between animal genetics, learning, feeding behaviour and the impact of this on rangeland vegetation,



Photos: Graham Peddie

highlighting the opportunities an understanding of these presents for innovative and low-cost range management.

Fred's address set the scene for a symposium on linking plant-herbivore interactions theory to rangeland management. This was the first of several symposia and special sessions – others included papers and a discussion session around resource management issues facing emerging and communal farmers and a very successful day-long symposium on planted pastures and dairy farming. The Thicket Forum held a workshop around issues in the game industry, particularly the controversial topic of the impact and role of extralimital game species, and the National Range and Forage Working Group led a workshop around a new national rangeland monitoring programme. The crowd had a distinctly international flavour with delegates from Australia, the UK, the USA, Uganda, the Netherlands and Mozambique. A group of student from Texas A&M University attended the first day of the Congress.

Three fully subscribed post-Congress tours were held and by all accounts stimulating and much enjoyed. Winston Trollope and Wayne Vos took a group of 40 delegates to two private game reserves where they heard about the challenges and experiences involved in switching from livestock farming to wildlife conservation while keeping an eye open for the plentiful wildlife. Gillian McGregor took a tour to witness the

rehabilitation of old pineapple lands to healthy pastures under the management of the Yendalls, local farmers who have been keeping Nguni cattle. Pieter Conradie organised a tour to complement the dairy and pastures symposium which highlighted different dairy enterprises in the area.

The Congress venue seemed to get the thumbs up from our discerning conference goers, particularly those “young at heart” delegates who took the party to the nearby pub on several occasions! The Thicket Forum arranged a performance by local entertainers “Boet en Swaer” at their opening dinner on Tuesday evening. Although Swaer (or Boet?) was unavailable, Boet (or was it Swaer?) had people in stitches before the party animals of the Thicket Forum and the GSSA took to the dance floor. The final dinner was as always a highlight, celebrating the award winners and ending in a good party as only Grassland and Thicket folk know how!

I'm sure everybody who has been to one lately will agree that much of the credit for the growing success of the GSSA Congresses goes to Freyni whose professional attitude, financial know-how, people skills and hard work make it a joy to organise and attend the Congress. A big thank-you from the organising committee and delegates!

Those who missed the 2007 Congress – don't make the same mistake next year when the GSSA meets in Badplaas!





Tukulu – A Pioneer’s Story is the heart warming story of Edgar and Mary Matthews – true pioneers in veld conservation and management, borne out of the need to survive one of the harshest droughts in living memory – 1927. Only 159 millimetres of rain fell in that year – cattle died in untold numbers and the landscape turned to dust; only three pigs and a few fowls survived on Tukulu. This is the account of a remarkable man who loved the land. He was incredibly observant, deep thinking and his determination to survive and stay on his beloved farm led to innovative and

pioneering conservation methods. Edgar was determined to evolve a system whereby he would survive any further droughts and never suffer the crippling devastation he and his family had just experienced. His love of Nature and deep insights led to revolutionary methods of farming. Edgar Matthews was the father of veld management and rotational resting, a true soil conservationist, a man who was ahead of his time.

*Tukulu is available through the GSSA;
email admin@gssa.co.za*