

up WHERE WE belong

UCT rated third for ornithology in World University Rankings

In April 2017 the Centre for World University Rankings released its inaugural subject rankings, which placed the University of Cape Town (UCT) third in ornithology out of more than 26 000 higher education institutions. UCT tied for third place with Lund University in Sweden. The University of Groningen in the Netherlands and Cornell University in the USA achieved first and second places, respectively. The World University Rankings highlight elite universities in the sciences and social sciences based on the number and quality of research articles in peer-reviewed international journals, as well as on the quality of student education. Among South African universities, only UCT, Pretoria and Wits featured in the top 10 for any discipline.

In addition to the Fitztute, UCT benefits from ornithological studies by the Animal Demography Unit (ADU) and the Centre for Statistics in Ecology, the Environment and Conservation (SEEC), both of which have strong interests in bird-related research. Together these three bodies give UCT a critical mass of ornithological researchers and expertise unmatched in the southern hemisphere.

Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Internationalisation, says: 'UCT is very proud that our scholarship in this field has been internationally recognised. Having universities that rank globally (including other South African universities) benefits the country as a whole. It sends a message that the country's higher education system is globally competitive. The



ALEXANDRE VAZ

high ranking in this field demonstrates that African researchers can take the lead in helping to solve African problems and also that they are bringing a strong African voice to global debates. As a university, we are grateful to the National Research Foundation for the funding that we've received to enable much of the work that has happened in this area, putting South Africa and the continent on the map. It is investments such as these that will help to make the issue of African biodiversity visible globally.'

Professor Peter Ryan, Director of the Fitztute, says: 'This is great recognition of the contribution that researchers at UCT make to ornithological studies. Southern Africa has a wealth of birdlife, making it an excellent place to study bird biology. Our birds also face numerous threats, so much of our research is aimed at conserving them and their habitats for future generations. In this regard, we work closely with BirdLife South Africa, a leading environmental non-governmental organisation.'

The fact that UCT is so prominent in ornithological research further validates the success of the National Research Foundation's funding for Centres of Excellence. Research and education at the Fitztute was given a major boost in late 2004 when the Fitz was awarded Centre of Excellence status. This has

Reaching new heights: members of Rita Co-vas's Sociable Weaver team examine a weaver colony in a tree wrapped with plastic to reduce the risk of snake predation.

seen a steady growth in the numbers of research papers published and students graduated. In 2016, the Fitztute published 151 peer-reviewed papers, many in high-impact journals, and graduated seven PhD and 12 MSc students.

The recognition of UCT as a global centre for ornithological research comes shortly after Peter Ryan was awarded an 'A' rating by the National Research Foundation at the end of 2016, the first South African ornithologist to be so recognised. Peter attributes this achievement to the hard work of his students and post-docs.

If you want to learn more about the wide range of projects undertaken by the Fitz's staff and students, download a copy of the recently released 2016 annual report from www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za/fitz/about/report

For more information, contact
The Director, FitzPatrick
Institute of African Ornithology,
University of Cape Town,
Rondebosch, South Africa 7701.
E-mail fitz@uct.ac.za,
tel. +27 (0)21 650 3291 or
visit www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za

