

## THE WORLD AT THE FITZ

There is a long-standing tradition of Friday morning tea at the FitzPatrick Institute, the idea being to give everyone an opportunity to find out what's going on in the world beyond their offices. A quick tally of the academic and research staff (11), post-doctoral research associates (3), support staff (6), research assistants and volunteers (20) and MSc (34) and PhD students (12) gives an impressive total of 86 people – rather more than the Niven Library can comfortably accommodate and far more than are ever seen at tea. So who are these people that make up the Institute; where do they come from; where are they now and what exactly is it that they do? A closer look at the student component of the Fitz should give a good indication.

At present there are more students than usual at the Fitz as a result of the overlap between the 1999 and 2000 Conservation Biology Masters classes in the early part of the year. Looking at the student body as a whole, 28 are from South Africa, seven are from the rest of Africa and 11 are from further afield. The Conservation Biology Masters Programme acts as a major drawcard for students from countries beyond South Africa; five of the 20 students come from African countries to the north and 11 from



Madagascar, North America or Europe. Of the 28 South African students, 11 are from institutions other than the University of Cape Town, further contributing to the potential diversity of perspectives and interests that are essential for keeping an organisation vibrant.

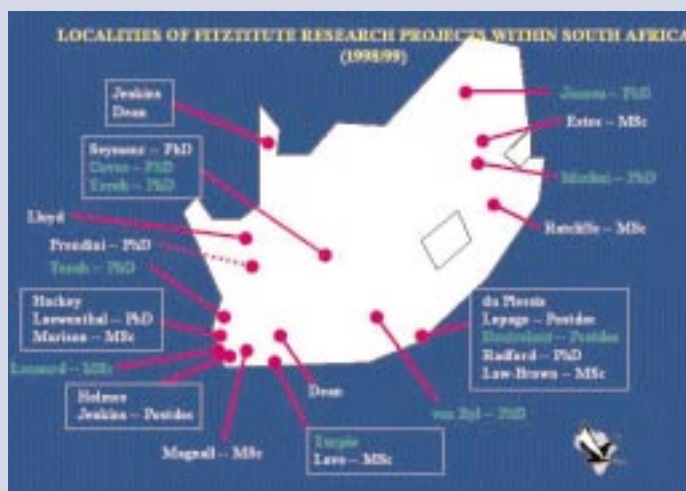
This year's Conservation Biology students are firmly rooted at the Fitz at present and are in the process of completing the coursework section of the programme. However, only 19 of the remaining 35 students are currently at the Fitz: the rest are either in the field or based at other institutions.

This is mainly a reflection of their research interests, and a closer investigation reveals that of the 35 projects in progress, two are on South African endemic birds, 25 include bird species with a wider but mainly African distribution, while eight deal with species other than birds or have a conservation or more theoretical emphasis. It is therefore hardly surprising to encounter Fitz students at work in Namibia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Zambia, São Tomé, the Seychelles (Aldabra), Madagascar, the North

African deserts or remote islands of the Southern Ocean.

Most students return to the Fitz at various stages of their projects and especially to complete their write-ups within close range of their supervisors and the Niven Library. Other members of the Institute are given the opportunity to hear about their research at the weekly Fitz seminars or discussion groups but, for those students who remain at large, the first some of us get to hear about our co-workers' research is, together with the public at large, through the latest issue of *Africa – Birds and Birding!*

Fortunately, the advent of e-mail enables even students from the more remote parts of the world to keep in fairly regular contact with their supervisors. And perhaps there is something to be said for this form of office resource utilisation – how else do you fit so many people into so few offices? □



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