



## NEWS FROM THE PERCY FITZPATRICK INSTITUTE

### *The birth and rise of the Fitztute (PART 1)*

In 2010 the FitzPatrick Institute is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. For this reason, the Fitz News contributions to *Africa – Birds & Birding* this coming year will take the form of a series of retrospectives, providing a background of how the Fitztute came to be what it is today.

In 50 years, many more corporations perish than survive, let alone flourish. All, however, undergo some change. By changing and adapting successfully, the core of the Fitztute's *raison d'être* – to be a centre of excellent research and scholarship – has survived intact since its founding.

The Fitztute was officially opened by the Principal of the University of Cape Town, J.P. Duminy, in December 1960. That was the year of the Union of South Africa's golden jubilee – the Union which Sir Percy FitzPatrick, after whom the Institute is named, did so much to bring about.

Sir Percy FitzPatrick (1862–1931) was an outstanding South African of many achievements, but is perhaps best remembered by most as the author of the classic book, *Jock of the Bushveld*. He was the father of four children, and it was his only daughter, Cecily (1899–1992), who was the visionary for the establishment of the Fitztute. In 1958, assisted by her husband Jack Niven, Cecily garnered the support of the South African Ornithological Society when she announced that the Percy FitzPatrick Memorial Trust would make available the initial capital endowment to launch the Fitztute.

Today, the Fitztute's Niven Library stands as a memorial to the Niven family's foresight. From humble beginnings, it is the most comprehensive ornithological library in the southern hemisphere, and probably the most comprehensive collection of African bird literature in the world. The University of Cape Town (UCT) paid tribute to Cecily Niven in 1968 by awarding her an honorary doctorate.

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As Cecily's vision took shape, three universities were approached by the founding committee in its search for a willing and suitable host institution. After an early show of enthusiasm, the University of the Witwatersrand declared itself out of the running. Rhodes and UCT then ran neck and neck for a while before the final decision was made to base the Fitztute at UCT, despite the Niven family home being much closer to Grahamstown. A key factor that tipped the balance in UCT's favour was the University's undertaking to provide a dedicated building



*Cecily Niven, whose vision and drive led to the establishment of the Fitztute in 1960. The Institute's library is named in honour of her family.*

to house the Institute. This was indeed provided and built around a magnificent wood-panelled library. In September 1960, the Fitztute's first director, Dr Jack Winterbottom, took up his post, and the Fitztute was officially born, blissfully unaware of the political storm clouds that were gathering on the far horizon.

If you would like to be part of our 50th Anniversary celebrations and our bursary and research fund-raising drives, please contact the Institute's Director, Prof. Phil Hockey, Percy FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, South Africa 7701. E-mail [phil.hockey@uct.ac.za](mailto:phil.hockey@uct.ac.za), fax +27 (0)21 650 3295; tel: +27 (0)21 650 3291/0 or visit [www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za](http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za)

*We have a vision to build on the successes of the past to ensure even greater contributions to science, conservation, education and outreach in the future. We hope that you will be prepared to invest in ensuring that we achieve this vision. Please visit our website for further details of how you can assist, corporately or individually.*