

personnel changes



Dr Robert Thomson has been appointed as a senior lecturer, filling the post vacated by Tim Crowe's retirement at the end of 2013. Robert grew up in Pretoria. An early interest in garden birds led to a hobby in aviculture. He started birding seriously in high school, and became an enthusiastic bird ringer. He graduated from the University of Pretoria with a BSc Hons, then moved to Finland to pursue his research interests.

After completing his PhD on species interactions in boreal bird communities at the University of Oulu, Robert worked on avian influenza surveillance in Cambodia and Mongolia. He then returned to Finland where he has held a series of research fellowships investigating avian habitat selection decisions in the face of 'enemies'. He has been working on Pygmy Falcons in the Kalahari for the past few years, and plans to expand his work in the region to examine the role of Sociable Weavers as a keystone species in arid savannas.

The untimely death of Phil Hockey, coupled with retirements and resignations, has seen five new staff join the Fitz over the past year or so: three academic staff and two in support positions. This FitzPatrick Report introduces the new incumbents, who include the first female academics since Bunty Rowan was at the Fitz in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Dr Susie Cunningham was appointed as a lecturer in 2015 to continue the Hot Birds research programme at the Fitz, and to assist with running the institute's conservation biology MSc course. Susie hails from New Zealand, and has been interested in birds for as long as she can remember. When she was 11, she worked as a field assistant on a study of parental investment and breeding systems in Stitchbirds on Mokoia Island and, when she was 12, she started a two-year study of seabird abundance in Cook Strait.

After completing a BA and BSc at Victoria University of Wellington, Susie studied the sensory systems used by kiwis to detect their prey, for her BSc Hons project at Massey University. She continued this work for her PhD, and came to the Fitz as



a post-doctoral fellow on the Hot Birds programme in 2010. Over the past five years she has expanded this project from the Kalahari to include fynbos birds, and was the natural choice to carry forward Phil Hockey's vision for the Hot Birds programme.



Following Prof. Graeme Cumming's departure to Australia in mid-2015, **Dr Claire Spottiswoode** has been appointed to the Pola Pasvolsky Chair of Conservation Biology. Claire grew up in Cape Town and is well known in the birding world for the excellent bird-finding books she co-authored with Callan Cohen. She started birding aged seven, and by the time she was 18 had seen 800 bird species in southern Africa.

Claire's research career was equally precocious, as she worked in renowned behavioural ecologist Anders Møller's lab in Paris during her vacations as an undergraduate zoology student at UCT. After completing her BSc Hons at UCT, she moved to the University of Cambridge where she completed her PhD on life-history evolution in African birds. Supported by a series of research fellowships based in Cambridge, she went on to establish a vibrant programme on African brood parasites (honeyguides, cuckoos, and cuckoo finches; see www.africancuckoos.com), working mainly in Zambia, and has recently started working on honeyguide-human interactions in northern Mozambique.



Among the support staff, **Gonzalo Aguilar** moved laterally within the Department of Biological Sciences to assume many of Chris Tobler's responsibilities as Principal Technical Officer at the Fitz, following Chris's retirement at the end of 2014. Gonzalo hails from Chile, and moved to South Africa in 1989 to undertake research on systematics and population genetics of subterranean rodents. He joined the staff of the then Botany Department in 1995, and is enjoying his new position at the Fitz.

Finally, **Susan Mvungi** has been appointed as the Niven librarian following Margaret Koopman's move to SAEON, the South African Environmental Observation Network, in early 2015. Susan was born



in Tanzania but grew up in Zimbabwe and Lesotho, where she developed a keen interest in birds by accompanying her father on his birding trips. After obtaining an engineering degree from the University of Lesotho, she came to UCT where she gained her MSc in Library and Information Science with distinction. Prior to joining the Fitz, Susan was working with visual media archives, and is looking forward to further developing her knowledge of birds and their biology.

These new staff members bring an exciting blend of youthful enthusiasm and relevant skills to the Fitz team. We are confident that they will ensure that the Fitz remains one of the world's leading ornithological research institutes in the years to come.

The Niven Library houses the collections of BirdLife SA and the Southern African Ornithological Society, and is open to BLSA members during office hours.

For more information, contact The Director, Percy 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

