

# annual reporting

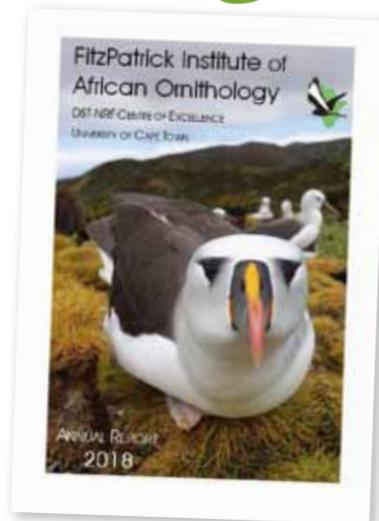
The beginning of the year is arguably the busiest time of the year at the Fitz. It's the height of the field season for many projects, new students are arriving and old students are rushing to finish their theses by the February deadline (UCT allows graduate students to submit theses until the start of the new academic year without having to pay fees for the year). The last thing we need is more things to do in January and February, yet this is also the time when we have to write the annual report.

We'd rather write papers than reports, but it's important to have a record of the activities of the Fitztitute. The annual report lists the staff, students and many research associates, as well as all publications and key sponsors. But the bulk of the report outlines our research activities over the year in review. Each project has a brief rationale, followed by the research activities and highlights and the list of participants. These texts are used to update the project accounts on the Fitz

website [www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za](http://www.fitzpatrick.uct.ac.za), but the entire report can be downloaded as a pdf to read offline.

This year the diversity of projects is impressive, ranging from brood-parasite interactions and understanding colour polymorphism to mitigating direct human impacts and global change. I can't begin to do justice to the range of topics here and encourage you to visit the website and pick from the smorgasbord of projects on offer. I thank Hilary Buchanan for chasing staff members for text and images and for designing the report and Rob Little for checking the accounts.

There's a reassuring sense of stability to the reporting process. The rate of change from year to year is modest – a few projects start, a few finish, but most continue. It's only when you look back over the longer term that you appreciate the very dynamic nature of the research and the growth of the Fitztitute from its humble beginnings. In 2020 we will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the



Fitz and I'm confident that Cecily Niven would be proud of what her vision has become – a highly regarded research institute in one of the world's top 200 universities.

The world also has changed a lot since 1960, but it will change even more during the next 30 years. And, unfortunately, much of the change is likely to be for the worse. A recent study suggested that even if the Paris Agreement targets are met (which seems very unlikely), we will be committed to an ice-free Arctic by 2050 and there is compelling evidence that the West Antarctic ice-sheet breaks up when atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> exceeds 400 parts per million. We passed this milestone in 2016, yet we continue to burn fossil fuels faster than ever. There's much talk about 'future-proofing' institutions in the face of the fourth industrial revolution, but how do we future-proof our society in a world where 200 million people have to move

*There's plenty for raptorophiles in the 2018 Fitz Annual Report, from Pygmy Falcons to Martial Eagles. This image, captured by a nest camera, shows one of Megan Murgatroyd's tagged Verreaux's Eagles preparing its nest.*



WIKIMEDIA/CREATIVE COMMONS (2)

*There is a rise in popular opposition to political complacency in the face of looming catastrophic climate change, led in large part by young activists such as Greta Thunberg (right).*



because of sea-level rise? And in these conditions, conservation will be the last thing on people's minds.

We simply cannot afford to continue on the business-as-usual trajectory. We need to alter people's attitude to the environment from being a nice-to-have luxury to an essential foundation for modern society. This is particularly challenging in a South Africa struggling to rebuild from the crippling impacts of widespread corruption. The national agenda is understandably focused on job creation and economic growth, but we cannot sustain either without a stable, predictable environment. It is worrying that in his 2019 State of the Nation address President Ramaphosa made no mention of the environment, and environment issues barely featured in the lead-up to the general election.

We have a very short window of opportunity to change our future climate trajectory, but to make any meaningful change will require radical action, akin to the wholesale restructuring of economies

during the Second World War. This might seem impossible, but there is a growing groundswell of opposition to the complacency that has seen the warning signs ignored for the past few decades. We all need to re-examine our lifestyles and act to reduce our carbon footprints, but also pressure governments to act decisively to address this crisis.

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## NEW NIVEN LIBRARIAN



The Niven Library was established at the same time as the Fitz to house the collections of the Southern African Ornithological Society. It now holds the largest collection of ornithological literature in the southern hemisphere and is open to all BirdLife South Africa members.

At the end of 2018 Susan Mvungi resigned as the Niven Librarian to take up a position at UCT's Graduate School of Business. She has been replaced by Janine Dunlop, a highly experienced librarian who has worked at UCT since 1994. Janine was an archivist in UCT Library's Special Collections for 10 years and she has already started to make the many valuable sets of field notes housed in the Niven more accessible.

She was then appointed manager of UCT Library's Digitisation Unit, responsible for making dissertations and archival collections available online. In 2014 she became communications manager at UCT's Centre for Educational Testing for Access and Placement, and in 2016 she completed her Master's in Information Technology with a dissertation on the role of UCT libraries in supporting researchers' academic use of social media.

Although the communications role proved a stimulating challenge, Janine missed her calling as a librarian and she jumped at the chance to return to a library environment. In addition to running the Niven, Janine will assist with the day-to-day management of SAFRING. We welcome her to her new position.