

NEWS FROM THE PERCY FITZPATRICK INSTITUTE



Pola Pasvolsky (1918–1999): a R5-million bequest for a Chair in Conservation Biology.



MacArthur Foundation bursaries support black African students studying Conservation Biology at the Fitztitute. Guest lecturer Norman Myers of Oxford University is in the front row, second right.

Fitztitute benefactors promote Conservation Biology

When the late Dr Cecily Niven, together with her husband Jack and sons Patrick, Desmond and Dan, established and financed the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology in 1960, they had a clear vision of a research institute dedicated to the study and conservation of African birds. Little did they envisage how well the seed that they had sown would grow.

The Fitztitute has, over the past decade, been very active in the field of Conservation Biology: today, some 75 per cent of the Institute's research projects address conservation issues in Africa. In 1992, the Fitztitute established an intensive coursework MSc in Conservation Biology that addresses conservation issues in the African context. At its inception, this course was

strongly supported by the Foundation for Research Development (now the National Research Foundation). The main purpose of the course is to educate graduates in a broad spectrum of conservation disciplines, scientific principles and appropriate analytical skills, thereby supplying trained manpower for solving conservation-related problems. Each year, between 10 and 15 students complete the course and the Institute is proud of the fact that well over 80 per cent of its more than 100 Conservation Biology graduates are currently working in the conservation arena or studying towards higher degrees.

Perhaps the best recognition of the international stature of

the Institute's achievements and potential in the field of Conservation Biology came from an unsolicited approach in 1999 by senior officials from the USA-based John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. John MacArthur (1897–1978) was one of the three wealthiest men in America at the time of his death. The Fitztitute's Conservation Biology course was the first South African recipient of a multi-million rand grant from the MacArthur Foundation. These funds are being used to increase the Institute's capabilities to educate promising black African postgraduate students from African countries to the north of South Africa: the first recipients of MacArthur bursaries are currently in the final months of their studies.

Five bursaries have been awarded for 2001 to students from Kenya, Cameroon, Tanzania and Zimbabwe.

More recently, the Fitztitute's scientific capacity building in the field of conservation has been given a huge boost by a generous bequest from the late Mrs Pola Pasvolsky. Mrs Pasvolsky, a lover of art and the natural environment, bequeathed R5-million to endow a Chair of Conservation Biology at the Institute.

Conservation Biology is one of the disciplines that the University of Cape Town has identified as a future growth area: these, and future, bequests will help ensure that both the Fitztitute and UCT remain at the forefront of this rapidly developing and increasingly important science. □

Visit the FitzPatrick website: <http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/fitzpatrick>

Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, Cape Town, South Africa.
Tel. (021) 650 3290; fax (021) 650 3295; e-mail birds@botzoo.uct.ac.za