

The School of Biological Sciences Newsletter

Welcome to a revitalized and reformatted School of Biological Science's Newsletter. Mark and I have decided to keep the format brief and informal and to publish bimonthly. So if you have an item that you wish to include in the next issue please forward the document to Mark with a title and a two line summary so that we can link the document to the newsletter.

Unbelievably, Semester 1 of 2004 starts in a couple of weeks. The coming year will be an exciting one of transition and challenges, but will also bring the potential to reinvigorate our work and position the School to grow and improve over the next few years.

Roz Hinde

Dr Clare McArthur joins the School

Dr Clare McArthur commenced her appointment in the School on the 27th of January 2004. Despite the usual breakdown in logistics with painters and the like, Clare is now settled in to Rm 303 and the adjoining laboratory (Rm 302) in the Heydon Laurence Building.

Clare McArthur:

I have just taken up a position here as lecturer, having spent the last nine years in the School of Zoology at the University of Tasmania, and the CRC for Sustainable Production Forestry. Before that I was at Monash University, Clayton and Miami University in Ohio. I'll be teaching in terrestrial ecology and other units as I slot in. My main research interest is the evolution and ecology of plant-herbivore interactions. Plants can't run (although they can sometimes hide). Instead, they have an array of physical and chemical characteristics that make it difficult for animals to eat them. I am particularly interested in the behavioural and physiological ways in which mammalian herbivores deal with these plant characteristics. I'm also interested in whether mammals exert selective pressure on plants, or whether they are just the meat in the sandwich; coping with the responses of plants to other factors, such as abiotic or insect selective pressure. I have recently started to add predators into my research picture - the third trophic level in this system. How does predation risk modify foraging behaviour of herbivores? Does that, in turn, affect plant communities? Finally, I am fascinated by the role that spatial patterns of vegetation - and the scale of these patterns - play in plant-animal interactions. How do size, complexity and spacing of vegetation patches affect foraging by individual specialist or generalist herbivores? How do they affect survival of local populations of small mammals, such as bandicoots? I hope to set up some collaborative research with anyone in the School who thinks these sorts of questions could fit in with their own interests.

Status of the Appointment of the Chair in Biology

Applications for the Chair in Biology have closed and calls for referee's reports have been requested for a short list of eight applicants. The selection of the final short list is scheduled to be completed shortly and an update will be included in the next edition of the Newsletter

Andrew Oulianoff seconded to ITS

The School's IT Manager, Andrew Oulianoff has accepted a secondment to ITS for six months commencing on February 16th. During Andrew's secondment Ralph Maddox is the first point of contact for IT matters. In order to make Ralph's life easier and to preserve his sanity, he will only accept requests for IT support through the School's IT request page which can be found at the following link (<http://www.bio.usyd.edu.au/SOBS/ADMIN/sobs.html>). If you cannot access the web page or there is an absolute emergency then please email or phone Ralph.

College of Science and Technologies Review of College Workshops

The School is again undergoing a review of the workshops in spite of major concessions and consolidation with the Faculty of Agriculture in 2002. The current proposal is for all the College workshops to be centralized into a single entity. The College has proposed that there be two major 'hubs', one on the Darlington Campus and the other on the Camperdown campus, with individual Schools/ Departments retaining a 'service station'.

We have repeatedly stated that we are opposed to any centralization of our staff and resources and are actively involved in the review process to try and ensure that we retain our staff and our workshop.

The initial phase of the review process has now been completed. As yet there is still no documentation of the proposed structure, however it is definite that the existing structure will change. We are awaiting the release of an outline of the new CST workshop and a more detailed plan in the next few weeks.

Roz, Sam, Basil and myself greatly appreciate the support of the School in this difficult process and we will keep you informed of any developments as they occur.

Award for Post Graduate Supervision and Personal Chair

On a brighter note, Professor Chris Dickman was awarded the Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Research Higher Degree Supervision for 2003 and also received a Personal Chair for his outstanding research.

Administration Notices

Please do not forget to check the School's Administration pages on the website for all the latest committee and School Board meeting minutes. The pages can be found at the following link <http://www.bio.usyd.edu.au/SOBS/ADMIN/sobs.html>

Submissions for March/April Newsletter

Please send submissions to Mark Ahern electronically at the following email address, mahern@bio.usyd.edu.au

If you include images please keep the file sizes to a minimum.