



Advancing Indigenous Flora

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Announcement of 2016 awards

The Botanical Education Trust awarded a record amount of R123 505 this year. This previously unequalled sum was largely made possible by recent generous donations from people who care about our indigenous botanical heritage. Only interest on donations to the Trust is used and such donations are fully tax deductible.

However, the amount available for distribution was still only about half of the total requested in the grant applications, which meant some very deserving applicants had to be turned down. Some of the successful applicants received less than half the amount for which they applied. A range of interesting projects, aimed to conserve our natural flora, received funding.

The diverse projects supported include a grant of R16 575 to the Roselands Trust, which exposes young people, usually for the first time, to our natural environment. Most children don't notice plants, and it is an exciting challenge to try and cure "plant blindness". The Roselands Trust will explore possibilities and provide feedback that could guide other local attempts to instill a positive plant-awareness in children.

Capacity building in botanical sciences among older students also received support, as some of the awards made this year were to applicants whose research contributes towards higher degrees. Gracious Mona and Dean Phillips, who are both MSc students, were awarded R20 000 and R18 530 respectively for taxonomic studies. These studies correctly define plants in their appropriate species, leading to accurate assessment of population size and occurrence. This, in turn, ensures better-informed biodiversity assessments and strategies aimed at biological conservation. One of these studies involves *Stenoglottis* a genus of orchids. Being popular in the horticultural trade, these may be threatened by overexploitation as well as habitat loss and climate change.

The Orange River system is the largest fresh water resource south of the Zambezi and its vegetation is much altered by hydrological changes such as building of dams. The impact of this on the river's vegetation is the subject of a study by Marco Pauw, who received funding of R20 000.

Aloes are endemic to sub-Saharan Africa and the greatest diversity of species is concentrated in southern and eastern Africa. Stephanie Payne was awarded R20 000 towards her study, which is the first to explore the role of small mammals in Aloe pollination. Sylvie Kremer-Kohne received an additional amount of R5 000 towards her already-funded study of the endangered Aloe *lettyae*. Her study will help facilitate urgent conservation management decisions for this rare species.

Some plant species have the ability to absorb metals from the soil and concentrate them in extremely high levels. As contamination of soils with heavy metals poses an increasing problem, this work will have a positive influence on habitats of conservation concern. Certain metals that can be hyper-accumulated are also essential nutrients for food fortification. Ms Nadine Scutte and Prof Stefan Siebert were awarded R13 400 to further explore this useful group of plants.

Dr Anina Coetzee, who has previously done excellent work supported by the Trust, was granted a further R10 000 towards her study investigating the relationship between bird behaviour and the evolution of flower colour in *Ericas*. This will provide further insight into the largest genus of the biodiversity hotspot of the Cape Floristic Region. This area, threatened by land use and other environmental changes, requires informed effective conservation management.

The Botanical education Trust, which will celebrate its 10th anniversary next year, is chaired by Charles Botha while a past president of the Society of Chartered Accountants, Neil Gerber, serves as honorary treasurer and Professor Julia Botha is the secretary. Some of the country's most eminent botanists/botanical authors also serve as trustees, namely Professor Braam van Wyk, Dr Neil Crouch and Dr Hugh Glen. The other Trustees are attorney Ms Frederike Liasides, horticulturist Chris Dalzell and Ms Zaitoon Rabaney who is the Chief Executive Officer of the Botanical Society of SA. All Trustees serve in a voluntary capacity.

It remains crucial that funds continue to be raised. The Trust has 18A status with SARS, which means that donations are tax deductible. A donation, no matter how small, will serve conservation in perpetuity as only the interest on it will be used. Payments can be made into the account of the Botanical Society of SA, Nedbank, Durban North branch code 135226, account number 1352029901, but please state clearly that it is for the Education Trust (if further details required, contact Sandra Dell @ 031 201 5111 or botsoc-kzn@mweb.co.za).

Best wishes

Charles Botha
Chair
Botanical Education Trust