An overview of the Dept. of Forest Resources and Wildlife Management - National University of Science and Technology, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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After due procedure from the Commission (1988) for a second university, then the Foundation Committee and Act of Parliament (1990), NUST received its first intake of students in April 1991. The first graduation duly followed in May 1995. By then student numbers were around 1200, and by mid-2008 there were 5000, in six faculties.

In late 2001 UNESCO sponsored Prof. A.A. Oladumeij from Nigeria to be attached to the Department of Environmental Science and Health, where among other things he laid the foundations and syllabus for a Department of Forest Resources and Wildlife Management. Meanwhile the first seven students entered in 2001, most of them eventually graduating in October 2005. The first member of staff for the new department was recruited in early 2002, being Dr P. Nyathi *. Others were recruited a year later, etc. Meanwhile we started a 7th intake in August 2007, and all our undergraduates now stood at 122 over the years, with 62 having graduated so far.

So much for history, and by exam time in May 2008 affairs were as 'normal' as could be expected in the country's abnormal situation. Our degree is a four-year honours, and in 2005 we had effected changes to the original programme to include more forest and wildlife courses. Our 2nd year is now left with only two 'service' courses out of the 12 courses that each year must do. The truly innovative aspect of the NUST degree comes in the 3rd year which is the industrial attachment year. I think we learned this from Bulgaria, and the system is now copied by several other new universities in Zimbabwe. For a minimum of seven months in that 3rd year, each student is attached to a stakeholder company for practical experience of forestry or wildlife business. Often this period stretches to ten months. Companies could be government authorities, district councils, NGOs, industries, and ranches. We have found that in general this attachment system works brilliantly, normally the companies like the students (who are smart, hard-working, honest, and have 'clean' attitudes), and take one every year. Some students get job offers from the companies. We hope that students and their companies can conceive their 4th year

projects, and do the data collection by the end of that attachment year. As for the students themselves, they get a good baptism into the adult world, they learn how to be truly fluent in English (all our students have English as a second language), and they gain a lot in self-confidence. As nearly all of them are urbanites, albeit with their rural roots, the experience shows them something of what goes on in the industry, and hopefully pushes them into a global context.

In early 2007 Rob Koenig visited the university and reported on our constraints (*Science*, 2007, 316: 684-5). We had problems with vehicles, fuel, computer laboratories, laboratory equipment, etc. Perhaps only our library was functioning at a reasonable level. Our department was and is lucky in that we have maintained a good staffing level throughout, and today there are seven lecturers with support staff. However by June 2008 the wheels had truly come off, most staff were on 'stay-away', salaries in Zimbabwe dollars were depreciating by the day because of rampant inflation (as I write we are now receiving US dollars every Friday), and we could register only newly arriving 1st year students in August. Soon even they were told to go back home, though we did remain open for graduates. In January 2009, tuition fees were pegged in US$ or equivalent, but by mid-February our department has so far registered only six students from an intake that should be 90, and the Faculty of Applied Sciences as a whole has registered just less than 10% of expected intake! A tragic nadir from the euphoria of April 1980.

Meantime as most will know, there is a lot of forestry and wildlife work to be done in Zimbabwe (but a lot fewer jobs than there should be). We are perhaps lucky to have several graduates, with thanks to the French CIRAD for funding three of them. Our first, and in-house, PhD was finished and presented in mid-2008, and is being sent out to external examiners. From the sixty-two 4th year projects so far produced, only one has been published (*African Journal of Ecology*) and a second is in press (*Pachyderm*), and this performance needs to be improved. As a department we are emphasising studies on the utilisation of trees, e.g. baobab, marula and pine; the conditions necessary for their seed germination; and soil fertility in general.

For wildlife, we are particularly interested in the behaviour of wild mammals, from elephants and rhinos to rodents, and in the responses of ungulates to hunting in CAMPFIRE areas. These last have been well investigated over the years in their economic benefits, but little has been done on the ecological consequences and the actual benefits to the wildlife in terms of conservation. CAMPFIRE is a famous concept, and our department is involving itself in issues of the sustainability of all natural resources in communal areas with appropriate authority. It is well known that wildlife and trees have taken a hammering since 2000 and the so-called land reform programme, and conservation must always suffer in the face of economic collapse. But I suppose our motto is that "hope springs eternal…!"

** Nyathi suffered an untimely death on 28th February. Earlier, on 4th January, one of our female lecturers died in childbirth.*