

NSCF NEWS

Communication from the Natural Science Collections Facility Hub Team

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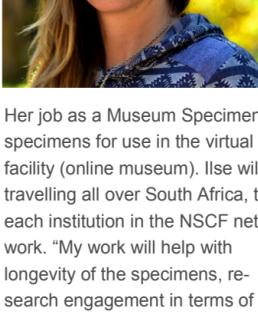
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New Staff: Who are they?

The NSCF has hired three new staff members that started working in our Pretoria Office on 1 July 2019. Two of them in photography and one in communication. Meet Museum Specimen Photographers Ilse van der Merwe and Margaret Bartkowiak, and the Science Communication Officer, Fulufhelo Gelebe.

Ilse van der Merwe

Museum Specimen Photographer



This bubbly, chatty personality in the form of Ilse van der Merwe has joined the NSCF Hub Team as a Museum Specimen Photographer. Her interest for photography started when she was 16. She learnt more while teaching than studying. Ilse spent 10 years as an adult educator of photography, which she enjoyed because she was able to share the knowledge that she has. However, she says: "I am excited to not teach, but to learn as this job is more technical than artistic."

Her job as a Museum Specimen Photographer entails taking photographs of type specimens for use in the virtual facility (online museum). Ilse will be travelling all over South Africa, to each institution in the NSCF network. "My work will help with longevity of the specimens, research engagement in terms of researchers not having to travel in order to study specimens, public engagement and preservation of collections.", says Ilse.

This job marries my love for the environment and my passion for photography. I am looking forward to seeing the collections and gaining knowledge from the scientists behind the collections but nervous about damaging precious specimens.

Ilse has always had an innate interest in wildlife. Her experience involves industrial photography where she was capturing landscapes, document photography, capturing old documents, ten years as a photography lecturer at The Market Photo Workshop and more recently, teaching a photography diploma course at Damelin College.

In 2006, Ilse completed her studies in Photography at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) through student loans, which she paid off herself. She also studied Environmental Management which she didn't complete due to lack of finances and time.

Ilse was born in Pietermaritzburg and moved to Benoni at 11. She went to England on a two-year holiday visa after her studies, where she did a lot of erotic arts photography.

The highlights of Ilse's career have been documenting the behind the scenes musical tribute to Oliver Tambo, especially listening to stories about the political revolutionary.

Margaret Bartkowiak

Museum Specimen Photographer



Margaret Bartkowiak is the reserved, Polish-South African nature enthusiast who has joined the NSCF Hub Team as a Museum Specimen Photographer. Her passion for photography stemmed from her God-grandfather whom, when Margaret was four years old, owned a camera and would always take photos of Margaret and of nature. Throughout her career, she has been greatly influenced by Sir David Attenborough.

Margaret's job as a Museum Specimen Photographer is one of documenting type specimens by capturing them in very high resolution at different angles, in order for researchers to use the photographs for research instead of them travelling to where the specimens are, and for the public to learn about the specimens. "There is a lot to consider when doing this job, as we will be dealing with different kinds of specimens, some tiny, some big, some are wet collections, some are dry"...all these factors determine and influence the photographers processes.

"I am looking forward to learning about natural sciences, new techniques and technologies."

Margaret's experience includes working part-time at an Image Library, Environmental Education in an NGO, Studio Photoshoots, Live Music Photography and Product Photography.

Margaret's parents moved from Poland to South Africa before she was born. She went to Arcadia Primary and then later to Pretoria Girls High which she found difficult but built her character. After matric, Margaret didn't know what she wanted to do with her life, and so she took a gap year, saved up and travelled the UK. She then studied for a higher national certificate in photography for one year, worked as an assistant manager for five years and did a short film course at South Thames College.

Moving back to South Africa, Margaret worked as a photo-journalist for South African newspapers, which proved to her that photo-journalism was not a field she enjoyed.

Fulufhelo Gelebe

Science Communication Officer



Fulufhelo Gelebe is a rural Muvenda who believes in learning from everyone she comes across and enjoys engaging with people from all walks of life. She joins the NSCF Hub Team as a Science Communication Officer, which she considers an accidental dream come true. Fulufhelo's childhood dream was to become a scientist. However, she stumbled upon her career of destiny in science communication, which she first learnt of while doing outreach work and later on while doing a science communication course that she thoroughly enjoyed. Her mentor is a Communications Specialist named Debbi Shultz, whom she has fun working with and learning from.

Consider Fulufhelo your friend, as you will be hearing from her soon because her work involves compiling newsletters (she will be profiling people in the network), managing social media accounts, developing a communication strategy and outreach. "I am most looking forward to establishing great relationships with the people in the network and having the NSCF known and understood throughout South Africa", says Fulufhelo.

"I cannot wait to hear the amazing stories of the people in the network and collections."

Fulufhelo has experience in outreach, media liaison, social media management, science and general communication and administration, which she gained during her time with her previous employer, National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF).

Fulufhelo obtained her Bachelor of Science Degree in Biochemistry and Microbiology at the University of Venda and then completed two short courses: Science Communication at Stellenbosch University and Community Journalism at UNISA. She plans to study further in the field of Science Communication and at the end, obtain a PhD in the field. She went to Dimani Agricultural High where she credits her matric mathematics mark to her mathematics teacher, Mr Tshikosi. She went to Beuster Primary where she would teach fellow learners English every morning.

Falcon Influx

A Durban Natural Science Museum Story

Written by: David Allan (Curator: Birds) and Mmatjie Mashao (Technical Assistant: Birds), Bird Department, Durban Natural Science Museum



Photo: An adult male Amur Falcon

On the evenings of 9 and 21 March 2019 two devastating hailstorms hit the towns of Mooi River and Newcastle respectively in KwaZulu-Natal. Both towns support nocturnal roosts of Amur Falcons and the resultant mortality of the birds was extensive. Over 800 falcons at Mooi River and over 1100 at Newcastle succumbed immediately or shortly after the storms. The day after each of these storms saw staff from the Durban Natural Science Museum going to collect the dead carcasses from local wildlife rehabilitation centres to bring them back to Museum. The almost 2000 carcasses are being stored in a large container freezer at the Museum which has adequate space for such a large sample of medium-sized birds.

The carcasses arrived at the Museum jumbled up in large plastic rubbish bags and were both soaking wet and in most cases filthy dirty from the mud, vegetation and pellet-debris on the ground below the roosts. Over the past weeks and months Museum staff, interns, volunteers and local bird-club members have all worked to clean, dry and individually bag each specimen. Working with colleagues from various universities, including UKZN, UCT, Wits and Pretoria, the process of extracting data from this unique sample of birds is ongoing.

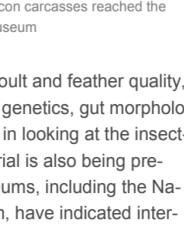


Photo: The state in which the falcon carcasses reached the Museum

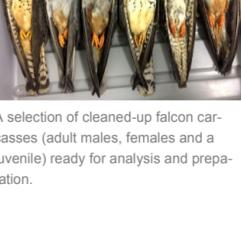
Research avenues being pursued include morphometrics, moult and feather quality, pesticide contamination, stable-isotope analyses, population genetics, gut morphology and diet. The Museum is collaborating with KZN Museum in looking at the insect-dominated stomach contents of these birds. Specimen material is also being prepared for the Museum's avian collection. Several other museums, including the National Museum – Bloemfontein and the East London Museum, have indicated interest in receiving specimen material for their own collections.

The Amur Falcon is a remarkable little raptor. It has one of the longest migrations of any bird of prey, breeding in the Amur River basin of China (extending marginally into adjacent parts of Mongolia and Russia) and migrating to southern Africa through southern Asia and eastern Africa, including a unique trans-oceanic flight from the coast of India to Somalia.

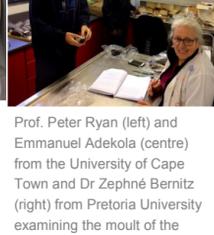
The mass mortality caused by the two hailstorms is undoubtedly tragic, making it even more important to ensure that the maximum scientific benefit is forthcoming from these events.



Museum volunteers (left to right) Sinenhlanhla Tineza, Kimone Reginald and Noxolo Dlamuka drying falcon carcasses after they had been washed.



A selection of cleaned-up falcon carcasses (adult males, females and a juvenile) ready for analysis and preparation.



Prof. Peter Ryan (left) and Emmanuel Adekola (centre) from the University of Cape Town and Dr Zephné Bernitz (right) from Pretoria University examining the moult of the falcons at the Museum.

Join us on Social Media

Like/follow, share/retweet and comment



@NSCFSA

This is a new page, aimed at communicating to the public about the value of collections, the activities of the NSCF and of institutions.

The 'Natural Science Collections Facility' group remains active, and is aimed at communicating to institutions, and not the public.



@NSCF_SA

This is a new account, aimed at communicating to the public about the value of collections, the activities of the NSCF and of institutions.



@nscf_sa

This is a brand new Instagram account also aimed at communicating to the public about the value of collections, the activities of the NSCF and of institutions.

Let's connect!

Follow each link and **like/follow** the NSCF pages on social media, we will like/follow you back.

Send us your news, to feature in the NSCF newsletter!

Send to: Fulufhelo Gelebe, f_gelebe@sanbi.org.za

The NSCF is a virtual Facility, comprised of a network of institutions that hold natural science collections that are accessible to external researchers. The NSCF was established as part of the Department of Science and Technology's Research Infrastructure Roadmap and co-ordinated by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

Natural Science Collections Facility (NSCF)

South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)

Pretoria National Botanical Gardens

2 Cussonia Avenue, Brummeria, Pretoria, 0184

Tel: +27 (0) 12 843 5183

Web: www.nscf.co.za