

FOUNDATIONAL BIODIVERSITY INFORMATION PROGRAMME

FBIP STUDENT FORUM

Kirstenbosch, Cape Town, Thursday, 12 May 2016

MEETING NOTES

Present: Ryan D Orton; Daniel Nkosinathi Mazungule; Precious Tshililo; Mmethi Mpho; Malongweni Nwabisa; Lona Mjindi; Zoe Woodgate; Portia Mailula; Naledi Hlatshwayo; Mariel Bessinger; Phumlani Cimi; Wentzel Pretorius; Fortunate Phaka

Facilitator (s): Leigh Richards (Durban Natural Science Museum) with support from Musa Mhlambo (Albany Museum, Department of Freshwater Invertebrates) and Pholoshi Maake (Agricultural Research Institution, ARC)

Minute secretary: Lita Pauw (FBIP co-ordinator)

INTRODUCTION

During the first part of the meeting an overview and background information were given. Dr Leigh Richards, curator of Mammals at the Durban Natural Science Museum, facilitated the meeting. She welcomed all to the Student Forum and introductions were made. The students and interns represented several institutions including, University of Cape Town, North-West University, Stellenbosch University, University of Johannesburg, Albany Museum, Department of Environmental Affairs, South African Biodiversity Institute and the South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity.

Purpose of the meeting:

To engage with students to establish if there is a need for an annual student forum and to determine if there are any gaps that need to be addressed.

Overview of the FBIP:

The Foundational Biodiversity Information Programme (FBIP) is a long-term programme to generate, manage and disseminate foundational biodiversity information and knowledge to improve decision-making, service delivery and create new economic opportunities. The FBIP is a joint initiative of the Department of Science of Technology (DST), the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

The main approach is to fund large, collaborative and integrated team projects which align with knowledge needs, or which involve participants along the entire value chain from knowledge generation to application for decision-making.

The projects will generate or mobilize species occurrence data, DNA barcode data, and descriptive information on species, and will ensure that the knowledge is co-ordinated, managed and disseminated through appropriate structures and systems.

Importance of students and young researchers:

One of the FBIP's strategic objectives is to attract, develop and up-skill people to ensure appropriate capacity for biodiversity information and knowledge generation, dissemination and application. This includes the training of postgraduate students and the provision of opportunities for emerging researchers. Furthermore, to develop capacity for application and use of the knowledge/data amongst practitioners; the training of researchers and data managers in capture and management of foundational biodiversity data and; the training of researchers in novel approaches to identifying biological material.

It is required from the large integrated team projects, that receive funding from the FBIP, to include postgraduate training and these project teams must include at least one young researcher (younger than 40 at the time of application) and ensure adequate mentorship and involvement as necessary.

Background:

The predecessor of the FBIP, the South African Biosystematics Initiative (SABI) was established in 2002, after the Biosystematics community raised awareness of the plight of systematics in South Africa. SABI was funded by the DST and the NRF and was the predecessor of the current FBIP and contributed funds to research and training in the field of systematics. Through SABI, various human capacity development activities were funded and supported. These included awarding bursaries for postgraduate study, a travel award for postgraduates, student workshops and an annual student forum.

Dr Leigh Richards, Mr Musa Mhlambo and Dr Pholoshi Maake, all members of the previous SABI student community, shared their positive experiences with the group. The students with the support of the SABI committee published quarterly newsletters to share ideas, experiences and knowledge. They agreed that all the initiatives provided a good foundation, and strong collegial bonds were formed. Several of the members are now working in the biodiversity field at different institutions.

OPEN DISCUSSION

The second part of the meeting involved an open discussion with questions and feedback from the students.

What societies / student groups do you belong to or participate in? It was noted that the students participates in a range of societies such as SASSB (Southern African Society for Systematic Biology), ZSSA (Zoology Society of Southern Africa), ESSA (Entomological Society of Southern Africa), ASSAF (Academy of Science of South Africa), EWT (Endangered Wildlife Trust), SAAB (South African Association of Botanist) and SAMA (South African Medical Association).

Is there a need for a FBIP student society or student forum? All student representatives agreed that there is a need and that such a society/forum will be an opportunity:

- To upskill them
- To share the results of their research. It is easier to discuss work and accept comments and criticism from peers
- To share experiences, exchange ideas and network with graduate students of other universities and institutions

- To find a mentor or study leader
- For job networking

What will the purpose of the forum be? The students agreed that the forum could give general support for post graduate students in the form of:

- **Preparation for work environment:** Guidance with work-related issues; What is need to climb the career ladder.
- **Funding opportunities:** Introduction to different funding mechanisms; How to write a successful proposals; How funding applications are reviewed.
- **Training opportunities such as:** Specific software training; DNA barcoding training; Focused biological statistics.
- **Science communication:** Scientific paper writing skills; How to handle comments from referees; Steps involved in preparing and writing a referee report; Presentation skill development that could include 5 min Blitz presentations.
- **Popular Science Communication development:** Introduction to popular science communication; How to write press releases.
- **Support with other challenges such as:** Permits and ethics; How to access data (for example from example Cape Nature); Intellectual property rights; Policy documents explained and broken down.
- **Create awareness:** NRF Expensive Equipment programme; Software licencing, use, sharing and alternatives.

Where we stand now and the next steps:

- It is noted that funding for a student organisation and activities were not included in the current FBIP budget.
- The students recommended that a Facebook group should be established in the meantime.
- It was suggested that a one-day student forum should be an annual feature of the FBIP forum and should be open to post-graduate students and interns working in the field of foundational biodiversity.
- The outcome of today's proceedings will be reported to the FBIP Steering Committee at the next meeting in September 2016 and FBIP management will give feedback to the students.

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