

Researcher returning to study Nigerian forests

In 2002, Dr Hazel Chapman (Biological Sciences) led a team from the University of Canterbury to study the forests of a remote, mountainous corner of eastern Nigeria.

This week, she is returning to Nigeria on a quest for a newly identified species and to further develop her research programme there.

Her primary goal for the trip is to conduct research into the evolution of seed dispersal systems. The project includes applied research into the role of forest corridors in allowing fruit-eating animals such as birds, monkeys and chimpanzees to disperse seed within a fragmented landscape.

Her research will also contribute to a newly funded Birdlife International project that focuses on the remote "trans-boundary" area of Nigeria and Cameroon.

During the 2002 visit, one of Dr Chapman's most important discoveries was a new plant species, *Metarungia* sp., which has its closest relatives in the mountains of East Africa. Botanists at Kew Herbarium are currently describing the species. Dr Chapman hopes to find more of the plants, which so far have only been seen in a single forest remnant.

Dr Chapman's research is some of the first botanical work conducted in the region since the 1970s. The forests are crucial "biodiversity hotspots" that have global



Dr Hazel Chapman prepares for her trip to Nigeria.

conservation priority because of the rare and unusual plant and animal species that live there.

She says that her research is also significant because, "many key problems in ecology and evolution

have never been tested in Africa, and almost none in African montane forests.

"But these high altitude forests offer ideal model systems in which to test these hypotheses, because

they are much simpler in terms of species number than neotropical or lowland African systems."

Both University of Canterbury students and Nigerian students will be involved with the research project in coming years. Dr Chapman is currently supervising a Nigerian student from the University of Technology, Yola, and next year two Canterbury students will become involved through the BP Conservation Programme. Josephine Beck and Richard Pender plan to focus on the ecology of a very rare Red Data Listed forest tree *Prunus africana*.

Dr Chapman says that the work will give the students "an opportunity to experience first-hand many conservation issues that are globally important but quite different to those experienced in New Zealand. For example, in New Zealand alien plants and animals are a major problem, but in Africa and many other parts of the world, overpopulation and associated pressures are more of an issue."

Dr Chapman's research is funded by a number of international and New Zealand organisations including Birdlife International, the World Wildlife Fund, the Whitley Foundation, Flora and Fauna International, the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, the Percy Sladen Trust and the University of Canterbury.

Laura Sessions

CTA partners explore credit transfer pathways

Ways to facilitate student movement between qualifications offered by the Canterbury Tertiary Alliance partners are the focus of a project being undertaken by the CTA's Credit Transfer Working Party.

Project manager Jacqui Lyttle is seeking staff input on how the alliance partners — Canterbury University, the Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, Lincoln University and the Christchurch College of Education — might establish mobile credit pathways for students who start a qualification in one

institution and want to finish it or upgrade it in another.

"While there are established credit transfer arrangements amongst universities in New Zealand, these have tended to be conservative and do not generally apply to movement between universities and other tertiary institutions. The aim of the project is to move from a case by case approach, requiring individual student applications, to a more structured and certain process."

The objective is in support of the Government's requirement for institutions to take steps to facilitate movement and access for students between tertiary institutions.

"The Government is expecting institutions to work collaboratively and to develop guiding principles setting out clear pathways for the mobile learner," Mrs Lyttle said.

Comparability between complementary courses and levels would need to be established when considering credit transfer, she said.

"CUAP [the Committee on University Academic Programmes] sets out quite clearly that credit transfer must recognise the distinctive differences between institutions and the integrity of their programmes. The aim is to facilitate access and promote new study opportunities, without

compromising the quality or standards of qualifications."

Mrs Lyttle said an example already in place was the three-year Diploma of Jazz offered by CPIT. After two year's study, with good academic results, a student could do a further year at Canterbury's School of Music and achieve a BMus.

- Staff members interested in discussing the project or who have suggestions on qualification pathways that could be established with other institutions, should contact Mrs Lyttle on 364 2831 or email jacqui.lyttle@canterbury.ac.nz

