



Dr Clive Williams and Ellen Curtis

AWS scholarship

awarded for arid plant research

University of Technology Sydney School of the Environment PhD candidate Ellen Curtis is the inaugural recipient of a generous scholarship established by the Australian Wildlife Society (AWS), the country's oldest, and one of the most respected, conservation organisations.

The new research scholarship promotes the conservation of Australian wildlife and is open to UTS postgraduate research students to support projects with outcomes that will help conserve Australian native fauna and flora.

Ellen graduated with a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Environmental Biology with First Class Honours in 2010 having completed a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Biology in 2009.

Under the primary supervision of Dr Andy Leigh, Ellen is continuing her passion for arid plant research, focusing on plant thermal tolerance and recovery at extremely high temperatures for her thesis titled 'Response to and recovery from heat stress – thermal tolerance of Australian arid-land vegetation'.

Ellen hopes that her PhD research will give insight into Australian desert plant vulnerability to high temperature extremes.

'We can apply our knowledge of how species cope with current conditions, including their ability to recover and acclimate in response to various thermal regimes, to better predict species distribution patterns under future climate scenarios. Ultimately, this information will help target

conservation efforts towards those species that are most at risk. Whilst this is the main research goal of my study, I also hope to encourage in others a greater appreciation of the ecology of Australia's arid interior,' she said.

Ellen's field work with Dr Leigh, in conjunction with Port Augusta City Council, at the Arid Lands Botanic Garden at Port Augusta, South Australia has led to a recent trip to the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, USA, where she spent time in the Sonoran and Mojave deserts accompanying Associate Professor Charles Knight and his students on a research expedition. Ellen was invited to California to teach Associate Professor Knight and his colleagues a protocol she has been developing for measuring plant thermal tolerance and recovery.

The AWS scholarship of \$5,000 gives Ellen not only a substantial financial boost but also a personal fillip to continue along a research path in arid plant biology and conservation.

'The generous financial support awarded by the WPSA will help me to purchase additional equipment, which is necessary to expand the scope of my study. While recognising the fundamental importance of my research, I also have a love and appreciation of arid Australia that makes me particularly passionate about ensuring its conservation for the future. Receiving the scholarship reinforces the importance of my research, not just to me, but others so I am especially grateful to the WPSA for their encouragement and support.'

Ellen received her award at the Faculty of Science Annual Prize Ceremony on Friday 5 July.

Her co-supervisors are Dr Brad Murray (UTS) and Associate Professor Charles Knight (CPSU, USA).



Dr Clive Williams, Ellen Curtis and Dr David Murray



Prof Bruce Milthrop, Dr Clive Williams, Ellen Curtis and Dr David Murray