Dr Daniel Ramp

The second full year of the CfCC has been amazing. We have all been working very hard to lay the foundations of the centre’s research, teaching and engagement agendas. Our focus has been to create impact in each of these three areas, which certainly has its challenges. Being a part of an emerging global discipline that spans the sciences, humanities, law and business requires passion and determination. Luckily, we have so far been attracting people to the team with these exact skills and this means the future will be bright. Read further on in this newsletter to find out all about our new research and teaching staff as well as our new students.

The highlight of the year was our co-hosting of the 2nd International Conference on Compassionate Conservation at the University of British Columbia in July. The Born Free Foundation and the Animal Welfare Program at UBC have been vital in helping to establish compassionate conservation as a stand-alone discipline and it was extremely rewarding to see our partnership with them develop into what was a successful conference. Academics, practitioners, and students from around the world descended on Vancouver and all came ready to discuss the challenges facing wildlife today. Congratulations to the team at the Born Free Foundation and also the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in driving the event. We are all looking forward to the 3rd conference being in Sydney in 2017.

Plans for 2016 are well underway and the CfCC has been developing new research programs that will challenge the entrenched lethal paradigm of conservation. We look forward to announcing some incredible initiatives in the new year so stay tuned. Much effort has gone into developing a robust funding model for the centre that straddles university, industry and philanthropic support. This is the key to our success and we hope to increase our support in each of these areas in 2016.

Developments in our teaching practice have been additionally pleasing. It was clear from the July conference that there is a real need for undergraduate and postgraduate opportunities focused on compassionate conservation and we have been working hard to get these going. Working with CfCC associate academics Liv Baker and Rosalie Chapple we have proposed a new undergraduate subject to be taught at UTS next spring and are in the process of developing a Masters program. We have also been working hard to establish pathways for Masters and PhD research students to join the centre. This is challenging for international students as fees and living costs can be high. We have been looking at solutions for this and hope to announce some clear guidelines soon.

Despite all the great progress and new staff and students we still have our work cut out for us. Wildlife still bear the brunt of interventions aimed at reducing human-wildlife conflicts around the world. We are faced with the daunting task of creating sound evidenced-based solutions that accord with compassionate conservations four guiding principles as alternatives to existing practices. We have to be inclusive in our approach to this because the capacity to alienate can be an impediment to change.

As always, the centre remains open to involvement from those who wish to participate so get in touch to see how you or your organisation can participate.

Hoping you all have a merry and compassionate holiday period.
Two major publications for the Centre this year were:

‘Compassion as a Practical and Evolved Ethic for Conservation’ BioScience 65: 323-327

This paper, written by Daniel Ramp and CfCC associate academic, Marc Bekoff, criticises modern conservation practices that ignore the intrinsic value and welfare of individual animals. They discuss compassionate conservation as an evolved ethic for sharing space with nature and a major step forward for conservation.

‘Promoting predators and compassionate conservation’ Conservation Biology 29: 1481-1484

This paper critiques the common practice of killing in the name of conservation and asserts the importance of predators and compassion to conservation efforts:

“Faith in, and tolerance for, killing for conservation is waning. Despite this, killing still monopolises conservation. Visions of restoring ecological communities to ancestral configurations are fantasies that continue to harm millions of animals globally each year. Rather than paralysing action, compassion can help restrain impulsive decisions that cause harm and provide a guiding framework that enables innovation in conservation.”

In July the Centre made headlines when Arian Wallach and Daniel Ramp published an article in The Conversation, entitled ‘Let’s give feral cats their citizenship’, in response to the government’s announcement that they would kill 2 million cats by 2020. This ‘controversial’ article which argued that embracing cats as part of Australia’s environment would benefit Australia’s threatened native species, amassed 240 comments and was shared over Twitter and Facebook nearly 1000 times.

UTS Honours student Melanie Purdy completed a successful project as part of the Bathurst Kangaroo Project. This project is trying to work with the Bathurst community to find ways to share space with kangaroos. The work centred around Mount Panorama and its car race. Melanie was able to identify distinct mobs of kangaroos that had very different patterns of movement and behaviour. This information led to advice being given to council on how best to manage risk of kangaroos hopping onto the race track when races are on. We are hopeful that Bathurst Regional Council will act on this advice and stay strong in light of repeated calls to kill the kangaroos on the mount.

Photo taken by Daniel Ramp of Eastern Grey Kangaroos at Boundary Road Reserve.

Louise Boronyak-Vasco, Stakeholder Manager

In January, Louise Boronyak-Vasco, CfCC’s Stakeholder Manager and Senior Research Consultant at the Institute for Sustainable Future, published an article ‘Using tradeable permits to improve efficiency, equity and animal protection in the commercial kangaroo harvest’ in the Journal of Ecological Economics. This was the culmination of years of research into the value of the commercial kangaroo industry to the Australian economy. Along with her co-author, Dr Neil Perry, an associate academic of the Centre, Louise wrote an article in the Conversation, entitled ‘Kanganomics: It’s not worth killing kangaroos’ that is the 11th top read UTS Conversation article, with over 31,600 reads to date.

In April, Louise’s research into the commercial kangaroo harvest contributed to Humane Society International’s case against the importation of kangaroo products into California. Her research was consequently instrumental in retaining the ban on kangaroo products.

At the 2nd International Conference on Compassionate Conservation, Louise presented, ‘Transforming conservation: Adaptive pathways for managing dingoes in Australia’. Since then she has been working on further research for this paper.
Dr Sophie Riley, Lead Researcher of Law

UTS Law students have developed an Animal Law Case Book under the guidance of Dr Sophie Riley, who leads the Centre’s research area in Law. The cases, selected from Australia, Canada, Israel, the UK and the US, cover a range of animal issues such as Animals as Property; Experimentation; Services Animals; and Criminal Law. The project has not only provided students with a practice-orientated learning experience, but has also made a valuable contribution to the growing field of animal law in Australia. Recently launched at the Voiceless Awards, the book couldn’t have been made possible without a generous grant from Voiceless, the animal protection institute. A digital version of the case book will be freely available to all those interested from www.austlii.edu.au.

UTS Honours student, Gabrielle Craven, completed her thesis on ‘Australia’s Pest Animals: Old Approaches for New Problems: Reevaluating Australia’s Coexistence with Native “Pests” and the Development of Compassionate Conservation’. Gabrielle’s thesis was selected for presentation at the 2015 National Law Honours Student Conference hosted by UTS.

Sophie recently published ‘Model Codes for Humane Treatment of Animals: Australian Law and Policy on Lethal Control of Pests’ in the Journal of International Wildlife Law and Policy, and was invited to join their advisory board of the editorial panel.

In 2016, Sophie will commence co-teaching a Law subject on ‘Environmental Ethics’, which includes a topic on the ethics of dealing with invasive species.

Partnerships

The Centre works closely with a number of key partners to provide inspiration and drive for turning research into action. The Centre’s role as a research, teaching and advisory body lends itself to making academic research accessible to the community.

In 2015 we worked frequently with Voiceless, providing findings from our research to assist with their campaign activities on kangaroos. We engaged with the Born Free Foundation in co-hosting our conference in Vancouver, as well as providing advice to World Animal Protection and the International Fund for Animal Welfare.

In 2016 we look forward to providing new research to our partners to better protect wildlife.

International Engagement

Dr Dror Ben-Ami, International Stakeholder Engagement

In 2015, Compassionate Conservation Middle East (CCME), a satellite group to the CfCC, was established at Tel Aviv University. In July, Dr Dror Ben-Ami and Daniel Ramp presented a compassionate conservation workshop at the university. CCME aims to promote compassionate conservation through research and has already secured an agreement for Tel Aviv and Haifa universities to subsidise compassionate conservation in Masters program research.

There are three compassionate conservation research projects in development with the University of Haifa, Tel Aviv University and the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology. One of these will be a collaborative project with the CfCC and post-doctoral research fellow, Dr Arian Wallach, exploring the ecological role of wolves. CCME also has an agreement in place with Arava Science Center, a research station in the far south of Israel, to host compassionate conservation research.

In 2016, presentations are scheduled for Haifa University and the Nature Reserves Authority, and CCME is seeking to include compassionate conservation in conservation curriculum. These are exciting days for CCME, which is still very much in development.
Dr Liv Baker, Leader in Teaching & Learning

In 2015, Dr Liv Baker and two undergraduate students, Mariel Becker and Angus Mclean, from Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, visited the CfCC to investigate the psychological and physiological impact of human-disturbed kangaroos in Bathurst. Mariel and Angus were both awarded Wesleyan University summer fellowships to conduct this important research. Mariel further received an Explorers Club grant to present at the 2nd International Conference on Compassionate Conservation, where she joined the likes of other CfCC staff and associates.


There are exciting plans ahead for engaging students across the globe. A compassionate conservation study abroad program has been proposed, which will be driven by a partnership between the College of the Environment at Wesleyan University and the CfCC at UTS.

Dr Arian Wallach, Chancellors Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in Compassionate Conservation

We are very fortunate to welcome Dr Arian Wallach to the CfCC, who was appointed one of just fifteen UTS Chancellors Post-Doctoral Research Fellow positions for 2016. Arian, who founded the Dingo for Biodiversity Project (www.dingobiodiversity.com), will be focusing her research on compassionate alternatives to lethal control of non-native wildlife. Lethal control of non-native wildlife is one of the most common activities for the conservation of biodiversity, yet bears high costs and risks, lacks efficacy, and causes significant animal welfare harms. A compassionate alternative may exist: enabling apex predators to limit population irruptions of non-native species. Just as the return of wolves is helping the recovery of the Yellowstone ecosystem in North America, dingoes may help prevent further mammal extinctions in Australia. Arian’s four year project will experimentally test whether the recovery of apex predators can provide an alternative to lethal control that is effective, efficient and ethical.

Dr Finbarr Horgan, Lecturer in Compassionate Conservation

In January 2016, the Centre will be joined by Dr Finbarr Horgan, a renowned ecologist who has worked in many different places in the world. For the last 8 years Finbarr has worked at the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines as a Senior Scientist, where he led
the Rice Ecosystem Health Research Group. He has specialised in non-lethal approaches to management of production landscapes and wrote a book on deep ecology in Latin America in the late 90s. Finbarr will continue his research program in Asia, focusing on Sri Lanka, as well as assisting with our research on non-lethal strategies for production landscapes in Australia. He will also take over teaching of geological processes in the School of Life Sciences here at UTS. We are very excited to have Finbarr join our growing team. Finbarr is open to having new students so please get in touch with him and the team for opportunities.

Research Students

Dr Andrea Harvey, PhD student

Dr Andrea Harvey, a renowned Veterinary Specialist, recently joined the CfCC as a PhD candidate in the School of Life Sciences, and has been awarded a prestigious Chancellors Research Scholarship. Andrea’s project, the first of its kind in Australia, aims to gain further information about the population and behavioural ecology and welfare of wild horses in Australian ecosystems. Wild horse management is a highly political topic, with significant controversy surrounding both the necessity to manage populations, and currently used methods of controlling populations. A novel immunocontraceptive agent is also being trialled in captive semi-wild horses as a potential non-lethal means of limiting population growth where interventional population control is required.

Caitlin Austin, PhD Student

Caitlin is undertaking a PhD in the School of Life Sciences at UTS. Her project will assess the welfare of kangaroos across a gradient of disturbance throughout regional NSW. She will assess welfare through behavioural observations and physiological measures of stress such as faecal cortisol, body condition and parasite load. Few studies have investigated the welfare of wild animals but this study is crucial in understanding the effect of anthropogenic factors on the wellbeing of kangaroos. Caitlin has recently conducted a pilot study in the Southern Highlands where she investigated the demography of sub groups of kangaroos in the area and recorded behavioural data.
Ray Mjadwesch, Masters Student

Ray is undertaking a Masters project in the School of Life Sciences at UTS that analyses the existing government survey data and methods used to estimate kangaroo populations. Ray is drawing upon historic literature, and current knowledge of kangaroo reproductive biology/ecology to inform his current post-graduate research. He is stratifying survey data to provide a new model for kangaroos in NSW, which will explore the disparity between reported and actual kangaroo abundance and distribution. Ray has previously presented results in the form of threatened species nomination under the NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995 (www.kangaroosatrisk.net), as well as having presented expert witness evidence in the ACT, and has reviewed the situation in Queensland. Ray is regularly called by vets, police, council staff, wildlife organisations and members of the public to deal with injured or lost kangaroos and other wildlife.

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