



Murray Darling Freshwater Research Centre

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What are the fungi up to?

Elliot Newspapers Scholarship funds honours student research

Through its annual honours student scholarship program, the Elliott Newspaper Group, administered through the Murray Darling Association's Environment Foundation, supports Honours level students conducting research into issues important to the sustainability of our river systems. The scholarship annually provides \$5000 to fund both the research and the student.

The 2008 scholarship winner is Stephanie Suter, a La Trobe University honours student enrolled at the Albury/Wodonga campus of La Trobe. Stephanie's honours thesis will investigate the role of aquatic fungi in determining nutrient availability in a flowing river. This type of research contributes to a broader understanding of complex freshwater ecosystems and the dynamics within them.

Stephanie will carry out her honours project under the supervision of Dr Gavin Rees at the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre, and Dr Ewen Silvester and Dr Roger Croome of La Trobe University in Wodonga. The detailed study of freshwater fungi will look at the differences in colonisation of different types of native leaf litter by the fungi, which get to work breaking down leaf litter and releasing the nutrients contained within.

In recent years the scholarship has been awarded to Michael Decalis who studied at University of Adelaide, and Kate Engledow; a former Mildura local who studied at the University of Adelaide and went on to work at the Mildura Laboratory of the Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre (MDFRC).

Stephanie has excelled throughout her undergraduate studies within the Department of Environmental Management and Ecology at La Trobe Albury/Wodonga. She has taken part in a Summer Scholarship program with MDFRC in Wodonga, enjoyed a further placement with City of Wodonga and travelled to New Zealand in 2007 to present at a major water conference being held by the Australian Society of Limnology and the New Zealand Freshwater Sciences Society.

Stephanie is pursuing her interest in aquatic fungi in her honours year because, as she says ". . .this project . . .may be important for future management decisions concerning the riparian vegetation of our rivers. With many reaches of the Murray-Darling Basin being lined with native and exotic species of vegetation, it may reveal a difference in decomposition patterns associated with different types of leaf litter, which may have an indirect effect on higher order consumers, from the invertebrates to the fish. By understanding the microbiology of Australian systems we can develop our own management strategies based on our unique flora, fauna and environment. In this way we are more likely to contribute towards the sustainability of our rivers."

Dr Todd Wallace, Officer in Charge at the Murray Darling Research Centre in Mildura, was involved in selecting the successful candidate for 2008. Dr Wallace said "This important scholarship is one of three scholarships that the Mildura Laboratory of the MDFRC are proud to be involved in. The Elliott Scholarship supports students who are undertaking research projects that generate knowledge about river systems in the Murray-Darling Basin. The research focus is usually on issues that are important locally. It is the potential of the projects to improve the

condition of rivers and wetlands in the Mildura district that makes this program worthwhile and appealing to local investors such as Mr Ross Lanyon of the Elliott Newspaper Group.

Brian Grogan, Chair of the Murray Darling Environment Foundation said “We are very happy to work with the Elliot newspaper Group to provide opportunities for bright young stars like Stephanie to kick start her career in freshwater ecology. We hope she goes on to many bigger and brighter things”

The Elliott newspaper group, in conjunction with the Murray Darling Association Environment Foundation will be providing another scholarship in 2009.

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