

PhD project available:

“Do arid-zone ants undergo boom-bust population fluctuations in response to the El Niño Southern Oscillation?”



Photo: H. Gibb



Photo: Aaron Greenville

A PhD project is available investigating how arid-zone ants respond to resource pulses. The project is a collaboration between Dr Heloise Gibb's Insect Ecology laboratory at La Trobe University and Prof. Chris Dickman and Assoc. Prof. Glenda Wardle's Desert Ecology laboratory at the University of Sydney. The student will be based in the Zoology Department at La Trobe University in Melbourne.

Field work for the project will be based in the Simpson Desert in western Queensland, where ant assemblages have been surveyed over more than 20 years. The aim of the project is to determine how these assemblages respond to resource pulses, both spatially and temporally. Long term studies in the region suggest that boom bust population cycles in response to rainfall events driven by the El Niño Southern Oscillation are common in mammals, but invertebrate responses are poorly understood. High productivity refuge areas in the landscape have the potential to buffer these responses spatially. The work will provide fundamental insights into the responses of ants to resource pulses, examining both compositional and functional responses. Field and laboratory work will be well supported with a grant from the Hermon Slade Foundation.

The student will need to obtain an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) scholarship at La Trobe University, and thus a first class honours mark or evidence of publishing in scientific journals will be essential. The preferred starting date for this project is between September 2011 and March 2012.

Closing date for Expressions of Interest: October 14th 2011

Please email a cover letter and 2-3 page CV with contact details for two referees to:

Dr Heloise Gibb (h.gibb@latrobe.edu.au) at the Department of Zoology, La Trobe University, 3086, Victoria, Phone 03 9479 2278

The selected student will be encouraged to apply for a Postgraduate Scholarship to cover living expenses.

For further information, please contact Dr Heloise Gibb (details above) or see

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/zoology/research/insects/index.html>