

# VIEW FROM THE CANOPY

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## LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY'S PATH TO PERMANENT MEMBERSHIP

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AND CHRISTOPHER E. CARLTON (DEPT. ENTOMOLOGY, LSU)



Louisiana State University (LSU) recently joined a growing list of OTS consortium members to commit to becoming a permanent member. During the early stages of our discussions of potential permanent membership, we found the article in the 2011 newsletter – View from the Canopy – on the process by which two University of California campuses achieved permanent-member status, quite useful. As reported in the article, each path towards permanent membership takes idiosyncratic meanders. We hope that by sharing details of our own experience we can provide a few suggestions and inspire others to seek creative pathways towards permanent membership for their institutions.

OTS allows an institution to pay the permanent membership fee (currently set at 16 times the annual membership dues) over a two-year period. This generous timeframe was useful to us, as it was easier for LSU administrators to commit to two rounds of relatively smaller budget contributions, rather than a single larger payment.

In addition, OTS will credit an institution's current annual dues towards permanent membership during the fiscal year in which the process of paying the permanent membership fee begins. For planning purposes, institutions should note that OTS pro-rates those contributions.

LSU submitted the most recent annual dues payment early during OTS' fiscal year 2013-2014 and then made an additional partial payment

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## STATE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Last year was action-packed for OTS. Immediately after our 50th anniversary celebrations with a memorable reception at the Costa Rican Embassy in Washington, we began to celebrate 10 successful years of OTS in South Africa. Our graduate education program saw the introduction of a new, more short 'fundamentals' course that began during winter break, timed to allow more consortium students to take the program without missing the whole spring semester or summer fieldwork. Meanwhile, the OTS education program has been expanding and redesigning our undergraduate semesters in both South Africa and Costa Rica, respectively, focusing student research increasingly on current environmental and human health issues.

OTS research stations have had another busy year with high station occupancy, but that did not deter them from making significant strides toward their goal of 50% reduction in carbon emissions by retrofitting their infrastructure and changing pollution-causing behaviors. On the consortium front, we were happy to see two more OTS member institutions (Louisiana State University and Auburn University) move to permanent member status. FY14 also marked the penultimate year of the OTS 2006-15 Strategic Plan. The plan's goals are now seamlessly integrated into OTS' core activities.

For example, the plan's Education Goal—to *expand the diversity of educational courses offered and students participating in them*—inspired our Graduate Specialty Course Series. These courses encompass a wide range of topics new to OTS, and reach out to students from across the globe. The strategic plan also underscored the importance of advancing minority students in the ecological and environmental sciences; in the last five years, an average of 24% of OTS' U.S. undergraduates came from groups underrepresented in the sciences.

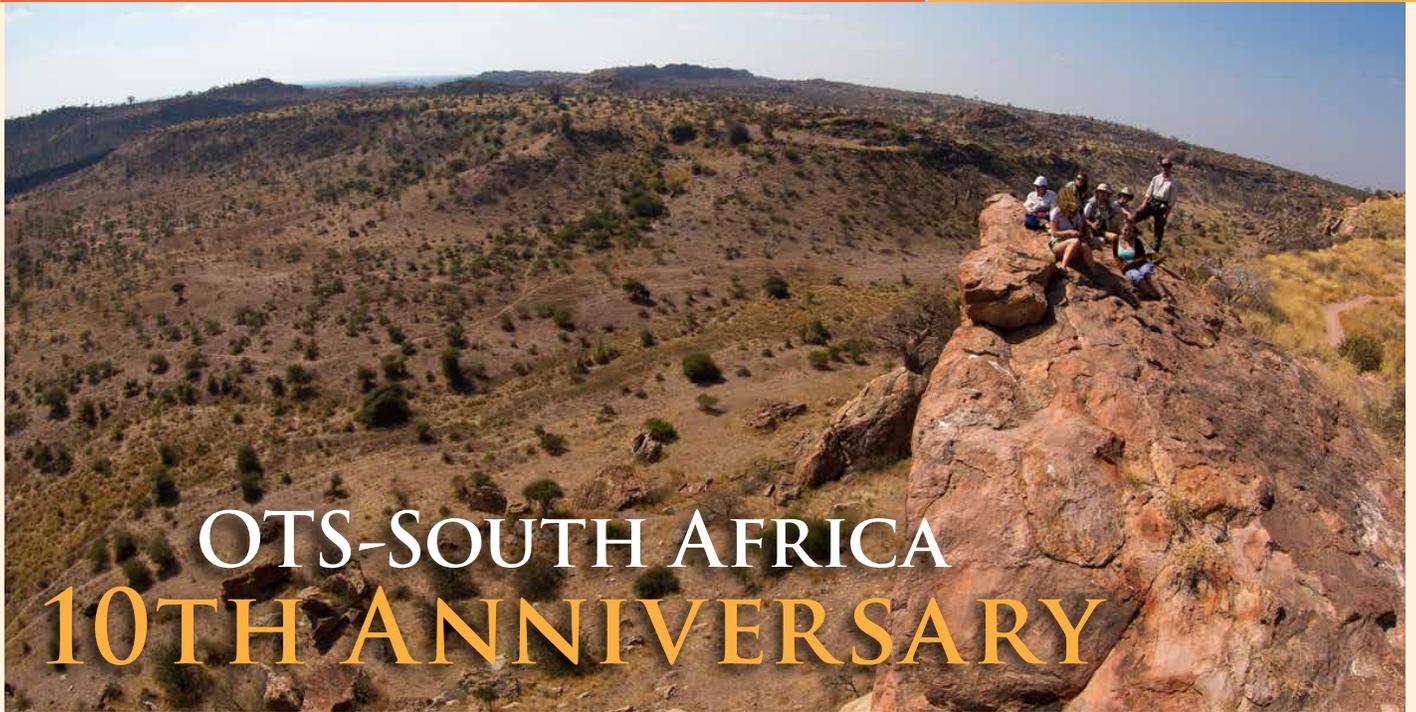
The plan's Research Goal—to *identify and catalyze tropical research around the most challenging problems of the next decade*—led OTS to create new avenues to advance scientific research in the tropics and at our stations. Our Science Director—hired as a result of the strategic plan—has built interdisciplinary and inter-institutional research teams to tackle projects such as *Tempisque Basin Water Management and Sustainability Project*. Another well-received program created as a result of the plan is the annual competition for Emerging Frontiers in Tropical Science Working Groups.

The third programmatic goal—to *strengthen international partnerships and institutional capacity to offer OTS-style educational programs*—has also been an important



focus of the organization since 2006. In addition, the successful completion of efforts to build education and research capacity in seven South American countries, funded by more than \$2 million in grants from three different private foundations. The capacity that OTS has helped build, the Tropical Andes Alliance and local capacity in Suriname and Guyana, will hopefully be sustained long after these grants and OTS' active support end. We now look forward to the next stage in OTS' organizational life. During the OTS' annual meeting in March 2014, our boards and Assembly of Delegates initiated the first steps for our next strategic plan. As we develop a new plan in the coming year, we will build on advances from the last plan while also continuing to evaluate where we can make the most significant impacts on education, research, and sustainable use of natural resources in the tropics.

On to the next 50 years!  
**Elizabeth C Losos**



# OTS-SOUTH AFRICA 10TH ANNIVERSARY

**2014 marked a momentous year for the** OTS-South Africa program. Throughout the year, multiple events were held to recognize the accomplishments and challenges faced over the last 10 years.

In March, the Annual Savanna Science Network Meeting, held in Skukuza, provided a great forum to celebrate the 10-year research achievements of OTS-South Africa. All researchers working in SANSPark attend the conference to disseminate their research and provide feedback to the park's scientific services and managers. This year's event featured an OTS sponsored cheese and wine reception, during which OTS-SA

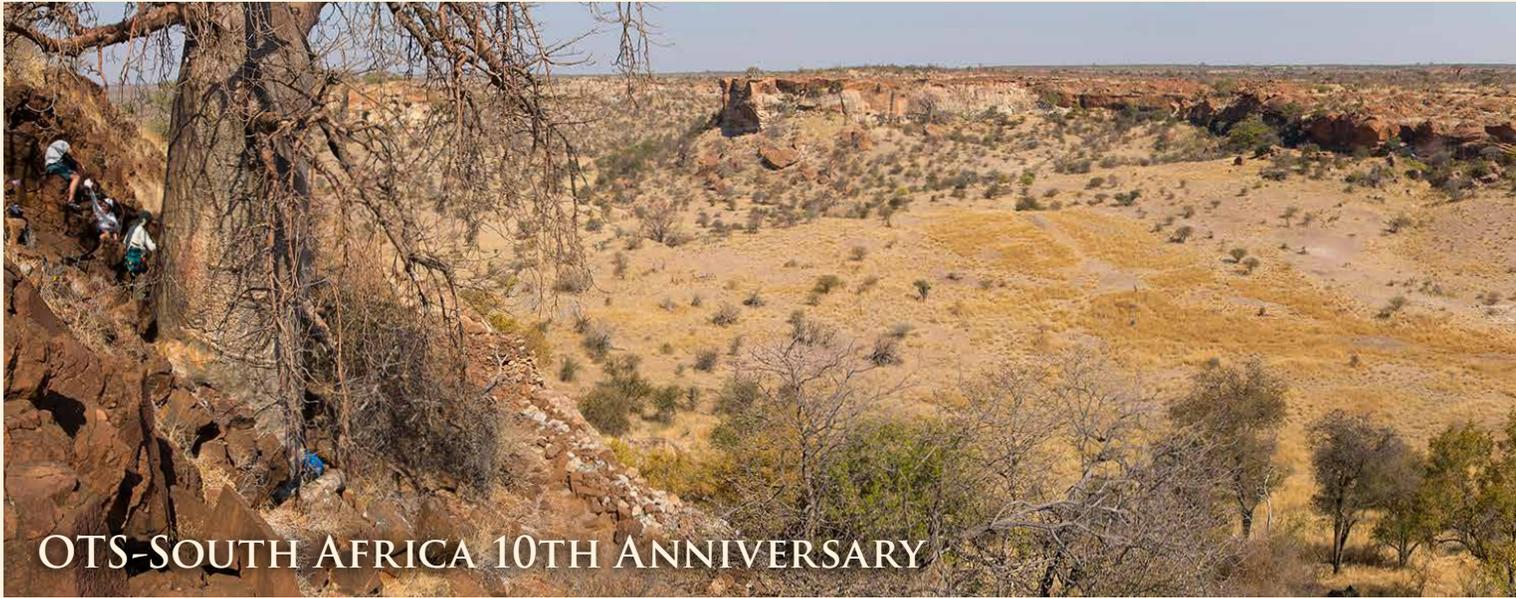


acknowledged the various individuals at SANParks, the University of Witwatersrand, the University of Cape Town, and other local partners who have contributed to OTS South Africa programs over the past decade.

In July, a reunion for alumni and staff members of OTS-South Africa was held in the Skukuza Science Leadership Initiative (SSLI) campus in KNP. The Undergraduate program has an extremely close network of alumni. In fact, 92% of our alumni remain connected to OTS and received overwhelming responses to the invitations. While many could not afford to fly to

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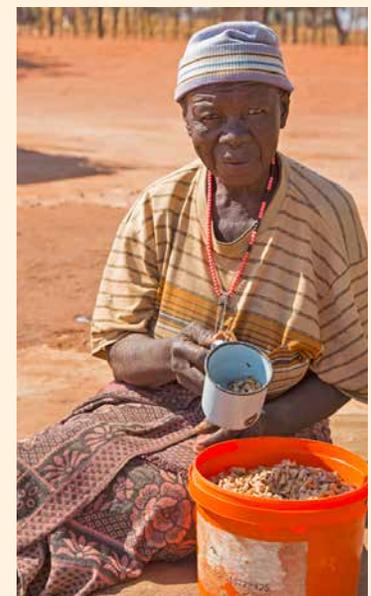
OTS-SOUTH AFRICA 10TH ANNIVERSARY

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South Africa, 35 alumni from 15 courses made the long journey for the four-day program. During the four days, staff and alumni recreated some of their semester experiences in Skukuza: fieldwork, game drives, soccer, braais, sundowners, and shared meals and stories around the fire.

Along with the alumni gathering, a Parents and Alumni Course fundraising initiative was held from July 5 – 15, 2014. The course was designed to give the families of alumni and friends of OTS a taste of the OTS South Africa experience. This year's participants included the Kaplan family, Jay Taft (OTS Board of Directors), and Tobey Miller (OTS Board of Visitors). The goal was to provide a broad introduction to the subject matter the students deal with on the program. In doing so, they left South Africa with a clearer understanding of the critical issues in ecology and conservation. The group traversed the northeastern corner of the country, starting in Skukuza in the south of the KNP, then headed to Mopani Rest Camp and further north to HamaKuya, and eventually Mapungubwe National Park.



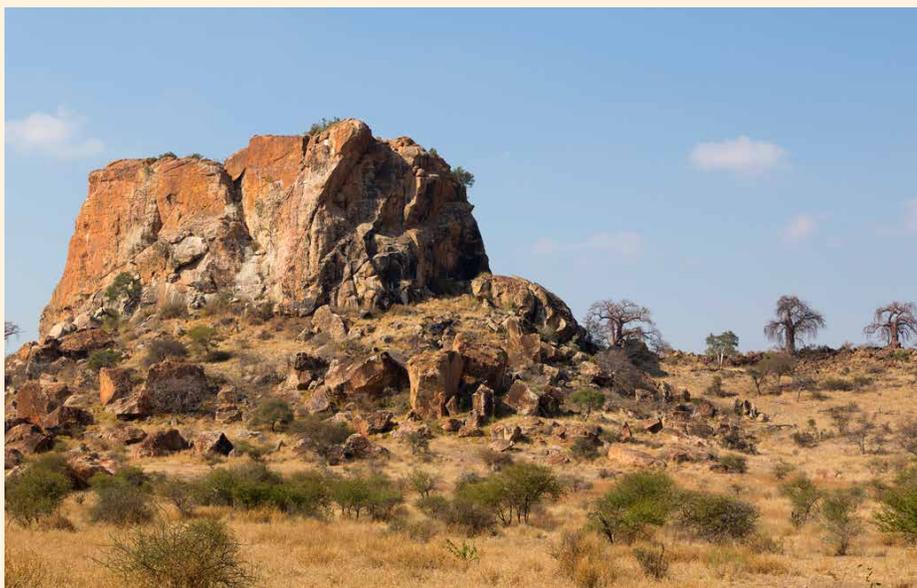


### Looking Forward

As part of OTS' larger organization, financial, and programmatic development, plans are underway to expand the OTS South Africa program. In conjunction with the OTS South Africa 10-year anniversary reflection and review process, we have completed a five-year, forward-looking business plan that includes a cost benefit analysis of the expansion of undergraduate courses as well as an infrastructure needs assessment. In January 2014, we began running two parallel semester programs: the OTS south semester, and the OTS north semester. The class size will be smaller (18 students as opposed to 24), and the academic programs are identical minus slightly different emphases. The courses will start together in Nylsvley, where we will cover the introductory lectures. Afterwards, the two groups will split off from each

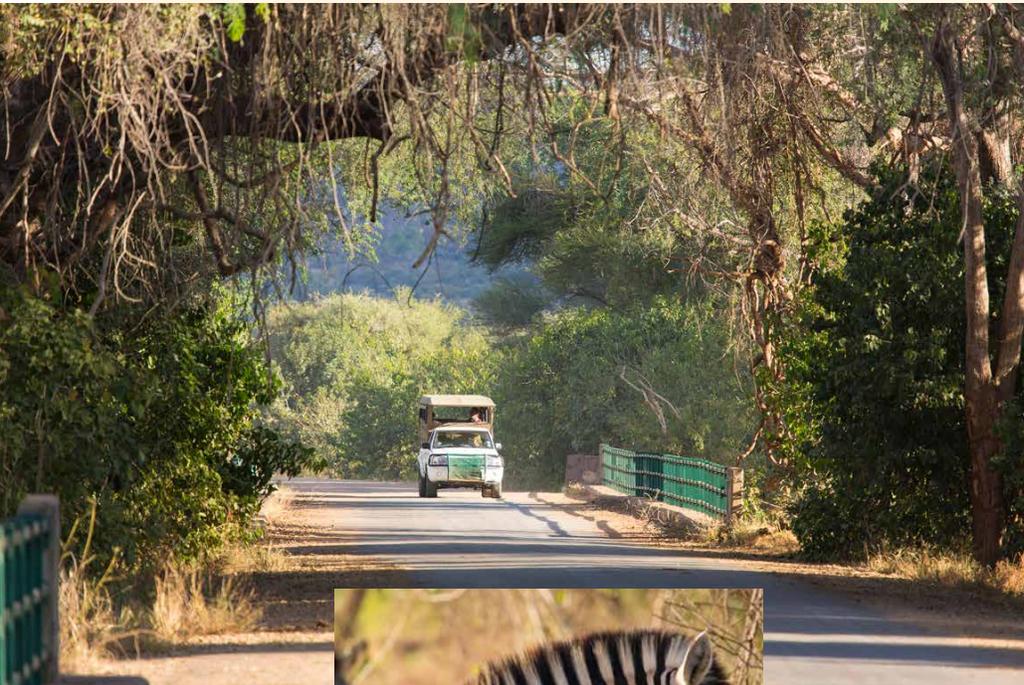
other. The north semester will be focused in Skukuza and northern Kruger Park, while the south semester will spend more time in the Cape region. During the upcoming program expansion, we plan to use this opportunity to also upgrade our limited infrastructural resources, expand support staff, and provide additional staff training for the new semester program. After ten years, OTS will be establishing a more permanent infrastructure for its programs in KNP. Up until now, OTS has run programs of high academic quality with limited and temporary infrastructure. The strong in-country partnerships and trust developed during this period have led to the donation from SANParks for an education/research facility in Skukuza. This new 'campus' will

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## OTS-SOUTH AFRICA 10TH ANNIVERSARY

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be developed through the Skukuza Science Leadership Initiative (SSLI), a partnership of OTS, the Nsasani Trust, and SANParks. The Nsasani Trust is an educational non-profit organization, based in Skukuza, dedicated to the training and empowerment of South African students. The SSLI mission is to build classroom and housing facilities to support the education, research, conservation, and management mission of both the park and OTS. The initiative and new facilities will not only be used by programs such as OTS' semester program, but will also incorporate students from South African communities surrounding the park. The hub will bring together local and international scientists and park managers in order to ensure that intellectual capital and science skills are transferred to South African students and technicians.

Building the SSLI campus in the middle of KNP has commenced. We completed Phase 1, the renovation of some existing facilities and the building of a new fence, with \$330,000 in support from SANParks. Phase 2, the building of the lecture theater, is starting and hopefully will be completed within the year. We were fortunate to receive \$290,000 funding from the NSF FSML grant that will enable the building of much needed laboratory space and library. Once the lecture theater is built, we should be able to start running the semester programs at the site which would immediately alleviate some of the teaching challenges. We are currently in the process of fundraising energetically for the development of Phase 3: kitchen, housing, and storage facilities.



# LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY'S PATH TO PERMANENT MEMBERSHIP

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towards permanent membership late during the same fiscal year – together amounting to 73% of the total permanent membership fee. Generous donors contributed an additional 11% of the total. The final payment will be made at the end of OTS' 2014-2015 fiscal year.

Prior to our campaign here at LSU towards permanent membership, previous LSU OTS Delegate, Bruce Williamson, had negotiated an agreement between the College of Agriculture (on behalf of the Department of Entomology and the School of Renewable Natural Resources), the College of Science (then known as the College of Basic Sciences and on behalf of the Department of Biological Sciences), and the School for Coast and Environment to share the cost of LSU's annual dues. To codify the arrangement, relevant LSU administrators signed an official in-house Memorandum of Understanding about ten years ago, and then renewed the agreement about five years ago. Even though the memo simply identified how our annual dues were paid, and would have needed to be renewed at the next five-year mark, it probably smoothed the way towards permanent membership by keeping OTS relevant and topical for various LSU administrators.

We have identified three other key items which ultimately led to a successful campaign. One key to our success was Elizabeth Losos' invitation to selected LSU administrators to attend the OTS 50th anniversary celebration in Costa Rica. Chris D'Elia (Dean, School for Coast and Environment) and Guillermo Ferreyra (Dean, College of Science) thoroughly enjoyed their first-hand experience at the La Selva Research Station and at the joint Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC) – OTS meeting. Furthermore, they each returned from the meeting with a personal appreciation of the high quality of the programs offered by OTS for both students and faculty, the importance of institutional membership in OTS, as well as the value of permanent membership.

A second key to our success, developed from suggestions made by Deans D'Elia and Ferreyra upon their return to LSU from the meeting in Costa Rica, was that we convene a one-hour seminar at LSU to share with faculty and administrators the myriad opportunities available to students and others through OTS. Elizabeth C. Losos (President and CEO of OTS) and Julie Denslow (Chair, OTS Board of Visitors and former President of OTS) were our special guests and featured speakers. Dr. Losos



## PERMANENT MEMBERS

- Auburn University**
- University of California - Irvine**
- University of California - Santa Cruz**
- University of Connecticut**
- University of Florida**
- Louisiana State University**

For more information on how your institution can become a Permanent Member, please email [ots@duke.edu](mailto:ots@duke.edu).

gave an overview of OTS, courses, stations, and the general benefits of membership in the OTS consortium. Julie gave a personal history and the meaning of institutional membership. Chris Carlton described his specialty course (*Beetle Taxonomy and Tropical Biodiversity*) and delighted the audience with a description of his course's discovery of a new species of beetle at the La Selva Field Station (now officially named *Leptochromus laselva*). Five current and former graduate students (Mike Ferro, Andrew Flick, Katherine Hovanes, Metha

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## A Newsletter of the Organization for Tropical Studies

**About OTS** OTS is a non-profit consortium of over 50 research institutions, colleges and universities from the United States, Latin America, Africa and Australia. OTS' mission is to promote education, research, and the responsible use of natural resources in the tropics.

The View from the Canopy is produced by the OTS Development Office. To submit comments or news items, please contact Cathleen Lemoine at 919-684-6969 or via e-mail at [cathleen.lemoine@duke.edu](mailto:cathleen.lemoine@duke.edu). Special thanks to Laurence Kruger, Jordan Lucore, and Nathan Lord for their photography contributions to this publication.



## LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY'S PATH

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Klock and Scott Kosiba) highlighted the special meaning of an OTS experience from their individual perspectives. Finally, Kyle Harms briefly outlined the specific advantages to permanent membership. The seminar was especially effective in inspiring our two key deans to engage higher-level administrators.



The third key to our success was securing a pool of private donations, prior to requesting funds from the administration. When Dean Ferreyra met with LSU administrators, our ability to show commitment from others was instrumental in leveraging commitments from the administration. LSU's Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Stuart Bell and LSU's Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development Kalliat Valsaraj agreed to

contribute university-level funds, which fulfilled the total for permanent membership dues.

We are already seeing returns on the investment towards permanent membership. Our first undergraduate student in several years took an OTS course this past summer, two graduate students signed up for courses, and Chris is planning a second offering of his specialty course at La Selva. Even though these types of benefits to membership could continue to accrue through annual membership, we are already seeing immediate dividends from permanent membership. As we told our campus during our seminar earlier this year, just think of the returns we would have made on our investment if we could have become permanent members 50 years ago when LSU first joined the consortium. We are now well on our way towards the next 50 years and beyond!