

The Life, Earth and Environment (LEE) research theme was established in 2014 as a highly active community of academics engaged in discipline-based and interdisciplinary research that spans natural, rural and constructed landscapes.

The LEE theme sits within the research portfolio of the School of Environmental and Rural Science at the University of New England and brings together the research disciplines of Botany, Earth Sciences, Ecology, Evolutionary Biology, Environmental Management, Environmental Engineering and Zoology.

Our research theme is underpinned by internationally recognised researchers with strong track records of industry collaboration and competitively funded research projects. These support our large cohort of postgraduate students.

Our theme undertakes broadly based Life, Earth and Environmental sciences focused across five Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) areas undertaken in higher education institutions across the country, and in an international context.



Our purpose is to undertake high quality research that improves our understanding of ecosystems, earth systems and species diversity, as the means to advance ecosystem resilience, and inform management practices to ensure ongoing sustainable landscape use and restoration.

## **Academic Staff**

The LEE Theme is comprised of 29 academic staff, 6 adjunct and emeritus academics, and 20+ postdoctoral fellows. Together these researchers supported nearly 100 Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidates in 2016, across all of the LEE research areas.

### DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR

Professor Fritz Geiser

#### **PROFESSORS**

Professor Jeremy Bruhl

Professor Caroline Gross

Professor Lalit Kumar

Professor John Paterson

Professor Nick Reid

#### **ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS**

A/Prof Nigel Andrew

A/Prof Darren Ryder

A/Prof Karl Vernes

A/Prof Brian Wilson

A/Prof Stephen Wroe

#### **SENIOR LECTURERS**

Mr Rex Glencross-Grant

Dr Paul McDonald

Dr Julian Prior

Dr Nancy Vickery

Dr Janelle Wilkes

#### **LECTURERS**

Dr Rose Andrew

Dr Phil Bell

Dr Stuart Cairns

Dr Richard Koech

Dr Kathryn Lambert

Dr Rudy Lerosey-Aubril

Dr Tommy Leung

Dr Saeed Mahini

Dr Luke Milan

Dr Romina Rader

Dr Ed Saunders

Dr Nancy Vickery

#### **ASSOCIATE LECTURERS**

Dr Kirsti Abbott





# Theme Leader's Review

LEE Theme researchers published more than 100 peer-reviewed scientific papers in 2016, and secured nearly \$2.7M of external research funding, making our theme yet again one of the most active and productive research groups at the University of New England (UNE).

A highlight of 2016 was the completion of our new building, housing the Zoology Discipline, and the new UNE Natural History Museum that will be a huge drawcard for the university and an exciting new way for us to showcase our research to the wider New England community, and interact with them. Our very popular LEE Seminar Series once again attracted world-class researchers to UNE, and was strongly supported by academics and students alike

Overall, UNE achieved excellent results with the Australian Research Council (ARC) in 2016, with the LEE Theme winning two Discovery Early Career Research Awards (DECRA). Late in 2016, the LEE Theme was awarded six of the 11 UNE Postdoctoral Awards granted across the university, so 2017 looks set to be a productive and exciting year for the theme.

Karl Vernes, LEE Theme Leader

## Grants and Awards

The table below lists grants awarded to LEETheme staff in 2016. Where funding commences in 2017, the funded amount is not shown, and does not contribute to the total. This table does not include funds awarded before 2016 that may be ongoing.

Lead Investigator	Project Title	Fund	awarded
Dr Romina Rader	Securing Pollination for More Productive Agriculture: Guidelines for effective pollinator management and stakeholder adoption (submitted through RIRDC)	Rural R&D for Profit	\$974,998
Dr Romina Rader	The mechanisms underlying crop pollinator effectiveness in agroecosystems	Australian Research Council - Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA)	\$372,000
Dr Phil Bell	Opalised fossils and the evolution of Australia's dinosaurs	Australian Research Council - Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA)	\$353,705
A/Prof Darren Ryder	Bylong Valley Rehabilitation Review	Worley Parsons	\$228,719
Dr Paul McDonald	Estimating quail and pigeon populations in NSW for use in 2017 native game bird harvest quota determination	New South Wales Department of Primary Industries - Game Licensing Unit	\$150,000
Mr Julian Prior	Computer applications and data technologies can contribute to sheep industry extension	Australian Sheep Industry CRC	\$120,000
A/Prof Darren Ryder	Nambucca Ecohealth	Nambucca Shire Council	\$105,000
Dr Guy Ballard	Spring Baiting Project	New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service	\$77,478
Dr Brian Wilson	Ecosystem process performance indicators	Office of Environment and Heritage	\$60,000
Ms Michelle Carnegie	Undertake research on engaging women and men farmers in participatory research and extension in Myanmar	ACIAR	\$50,000
Prof Jeremy Bruhl	Species descriptions, images and interactive identification key for the Eastern Australian Lepidosperma (Cyeraceae); one of Australia's largest plant genera	Bush Blitz	\$40,000

Researchers secured in competitive research funds in 2016

Lead Investigator	Project Title	Fund	awarded
Dr Brian Wilson	Improved high-resolution carbon accounting in diverse landscapes for participation in carbon markets	CRC for Spatial Information	\$23,778
A/Prof Darren Ryder	Biological monitoring of low flows in the Nymboida River 2016-2019	Clarence Valley Council	\$20,583
A/Prof Darren Ryder	Environmental Water Knowledge and Research - Foodweb Theme Leadership Group	Murray-Darling Freshwater Research Centre - La Trobe University	\$12,936
Dr Brian Wilson	Greenhouse gas inventory and measurement, reporting and vertification systems and processes	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation	\$12,484
Dr Rhiannon Smith	Determining the age and causes of red river gum dieback in the northern Murray Darling Basin	Australian Institute of Nuclear Science and Engineering	\$11,675
A/Prof Karl Vernes	Determining reproductive sucess and juvenille mortality rates in spotted-tailed quolls	Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment	\$7,500
Dr Brian Wilson	Radiocarbon age of dissolved organic carbon under contrasting land uses in NSW Australia - PGRA Rubeca Fancy	Australian Institute of Nuclear Science and Engineering Post Graduate Research Award	\$7,500
A/Prof Darren Ryder	Can the native Rusty Fig, Ficus rubiginosa, beat climate change?	Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment	\$7,500
Dr Paul McDonald	Co-operative breeding dynamics in the Noisy Miner (Manorina melanocephala)	Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment	\$7,000
Dr Paul McDonald	Re-colonization dynamics of an aggressive species: understanding population movements through gene flow and sex ratio variation in the Noisy Miner	Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment	\$7,000
A/Prof Nigel Andrew	Do bio-gradient, season and competition affect ability of native dung beetles to find and keep resources in Australia?	Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment	\$7,000
Dr Romina Rader	Quantifying the role of 'non-bee' pollinators and the ecological mechanisms underlying the effective delivery of crop pollination ecosystem services in apple orchards	Organisation for Economic Co- operation and Development Co- operative Research Program travelling research Fellowship	\$6,500
Prof Nick Reid	Responses of critical-weight-range, terrestrial mammals to wild canid control.	Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment	\$6,500
		TOTAL	\$2,669,856

## 2016 DECRA Success

LEE Theme researchers were successful in winning two Discovery Early Career Researcher Awards (DECRA), granted to Dr Phil Bell and Dr Romina Rader, contributing to the best result UNE has had in this highly-competitive award category to date.

Dr Bell is researching dinosaur evolution in Australia and his project will answer controversial questions about the identity and biogeographic significance of taxa in this region of Gondwana and resolve uncertainty about Australia's role in the evolution of the world's fascinating radiation of dinosaurs.

Dr Bell will be using his \$353K ARC grant to apply new analysis techniques to an exciting but under-utilised fossil resource from Lightning Ridge.

With her \$372K grant, Dr Rader will undertake the first comprehensive study investigating the extent to which pollinator effectiveness drives the agroecological pollination process nationally and globally.

Dr Rader's project will identify the factors influencing the variation in fruit quantity and quality in a model pollinator-dependent crop with the aim of building knowledge to support Australian production.





## **Publications**

LEE academics published more that 100 papers in 2016. A small selection of these appear below; see page 13 for a full list of publications.

**Ledogar, J.A.**, et al. (2016). Mechanical evidence that *Australopithecus sediba* was limited in its ability to eat hard foods. *Nature Communications* 7:10596 <a href="http://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms10596">http://doi.org/10.1038/ncomms10596</a>

Coux C, **Rader R,** Bartomeus I, & Tylianakis JM. (2016). Linking species functional roles to their network roles. **Ecology Letters** 19: 762-770. <a href="http://doi.org/10.1111/ele.12612">http://doi.org/10.1111/ele.12612</a>

Rader R, et al. (incl. Gross, C) (2016). Non-bee insects are important contributors to global crop pollination. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113: 146-151. <a href="http://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1517092112">http://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1517092112</a>

Attard, M.R.G., Wilson, L.A.B., Worthy, T.H., Scofield, P., Johnston, P., Parr, W.C.H., and Wroe, S. (2016). Moa diet fits the bill: virtual reconstruction incorporating mummified remains and prediction of biomechanical performance in avian giants. *Proceedings of the Royal Society Series B* 283 20160382. http://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2015.2043

Foster E, Love J, **Rader R,** Reid N, Dillon M, & Drielsma M. (2016). Planning for metapopulation persistence using a multiple-component, cross-scale model of connectivity. **Biological Conservation** 195: 177-186. <a href="http://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2015.12.034">http://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2015.12.034</a>

Nowack J, Cooper CE, Geiser F (2016) Cool echidnas survive the fire. **Proceedings of the Royal Society B** 283: <a href="http://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2016.0382">http://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2016.0382</a>

**Madani N,** Kimball JS, Nazeri M, **Kumar L,** & Affleck DLR. (2016). Remote Sensing Derived Fire Frequency, Soil Moisture and Ecosystem Productivity Explain Regional Movements in Emu over Australia. **PLoS ONE**, 11(1), 1-11. <a href="http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0147285">http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0147285</a>

## Graduates

The following Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) students were supervised by LEE research staff, and graduated in 2016:

#### **Doctor of Philosophy and Chancellor's Doctoral Research Medal**

**Paul Douglas Meek** 'Analysis of the Functionality, Value and Constraints of Using Camera Traps for Wildlife Monitoring and Ecological Research'. Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Karl Vernes

#### **Doctor of Philosophy**

**Catie Maree Gowen** 'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Management Issues for the Endangered Brush-Tailed Rock-Wallaby, Petrogale penicillata, in North-Eastern New South Wales'. Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Karl Vernes

**Lee Ann Hally** 'Systematics, Biogeography and Palaeoecology of Cambrian Series 3 Trilobites and Agnostids from East Gondwana'. Principal Supervisor: Professor John Paterson

**Kathryn Teare Ada Lambert** 'Quantifying the Importance of Lantana Removal, Soil Nutrient Profiles, Insect Assemblages and Bell Miner Density on Bell Miner Associated Dieback' Principal Supervisor: Dr Paul McDonald

**George Thomas Plunkett** 'Systematics, Evolution and Ecology of Eastern Australian Species of *Lepidosperma* Labill. (Cyperaceae)'. Principal Supervisor: Professor Jeremy Bruhl

**Farzin Shabani** 'Modelling the Impact of Climate Change on Future Distribution of Date Palm'. Principal Supervisor: Professor Lalit Kumar

**Jessica Louise Sparkes** 'Quantifying Effects of Wild Dogs, Domestic Dogs and Humans on the Spread of Rabies in Australia'. Principal Supervisor: Dr Wendy Brown



# Researchers gathered with NM Group spatial scientists after successfully flying the mission to acquire the spatial data dataset for teaching and research

# Spatial Dataset to Transform Teaching and Research

In 2016 the LEE Theme coordinated the acquisition of a spatial dataset that will revolutionise teaching and research at UNE's Newholme Field Station. The data was gathered by UK-based NM Group which used a helicopter-mounted LIDaR unit that fires a laser 300,000 times per second and collects information about the reflected light.

The system generates a 3D "point cloud" from the returns, which allows the accurate measurement of the ground surface as well as the height of trees and other 3D features, in unprecedented detail. The light can pass through gaps in the tree canopy so allows the mapping of the ground and tree canopy accurately, to within a few centimetres.

The fly-over also produced a 5cm resolution 4-band RGB, NIR ortho-image. PhD student Arjan Wilkie, who will use this dataset and was a key driver behind its acquisition commented "The resolution is incredible; good enough to see features as small as individual tussocks in a paddock, or the tops of fence-posts."

LEE Theme Leader Associate Professor Karl Vernes said "We have diverse research at our field station ranging from the response of riparian vegetation to de-stocking, to understanding how mammal numbers relate to landscape structure and vegetation condition. All current and future projects like these will benefit from the new data. When it comes to teaching, UNE students will learn from analysing state-of-the-art remotely sensed data for a landscape they can visit within minutes of the campus."

# UNE Ecology Students take to the Himalayas

In May 2016, 17 UNE students completed a 2-week field unit in Bhutan, studying the ecology and biogeography of the eastern Himalayas. This trip, on the back of a similar successful venture in 2014, gave the students a grounding in aquatic ecology, wildlife ecology, vegetation communities, and the biogeography of Bhutan and the Himalayan region.

Throughout the trip, students were immersed in the distinctive Bhutanese culture revolving around Bhutan's concept of Gross National Happiness as the primary indicator of progress. This international study tour provided UNE students with practical experience in ecological techniques, within a global educational context to further motivate them in their study.

David Mailler, a student on a past trip commented "The experience had a significant effect on my world view and how I engage with my studies. The country has a very different philosophical and economic outlook to Australia ... some lessons can be learned from the Bhutanese approach to culture and environment".

The study tour was led by LEE Theme staff Karl Vernes (Wildlife), Darren Ryder (Aquatic Ecology), and Caroline Gross (Vegetation Ecology), along with Raj Rajaratnam (Biogeography) from the School of Behavioural, Cognitive and Social Sciences. In 2016, this team were successful in obtaining New Colombo Plan funding from the Australia Federal Government, allowing us to offer the unit again in 2017 at a substantial cost saving to students fortunate enough to enrol.





## UNE Natural History Museum

The UNE Natural History Museum will open its doors in early 2017. Throughout 2016, museum staff and affiliates carefully relocated the collection from the old Zoology Museum, established new exhibits and set about the task of labelling specimens and developing interpretive signage. An engaging series of displays will provide a link between UNE research and the general public's interest in science.



## LEE Publications 2016

Algahtany M, Kumar L, & Khormi H. (2016a). Are Immigrants More Likely to Be Involved in Criminal Activity in Saudi Arabia? Open Journal of 1 *Social Sciences*, 4(3), 170-186. http://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2016.43023 Al-Jaryian RAJ, & Kumar L. (2016a). Changing global risk of invading greenbug Schizaphis graminum under climate change. Crop Protection, 88, 2 137-148. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.cropro.2016.06.008 Al-Jaryian RAJ, Kumar L, & Taylor S. (2016b). Modelling the current and potential future distributions of the sunn pest Eurygaster integriceps 3 (Hemiptera: Scutelleridae) using CLIMEX. Pest Management Science, 72(10), 1989-2000. http://doi.org/10.1002/ps.4247 Allen, L. & Mitchell, D. Rex (2016). A new record of the swamp wallaby, Wallabia bicolor (Desmarest, 1804), (Marsupialia: Macropodinae), in 4 South Australia. The South Australian Naturalist 90: 17-23 Algurashi A, Kumar L, & Al-Ghamdi K. (2016c). Spatiotemporal Modeling of Urban Growth Predictions Based on Driving Force Factors in Five 5 Saudi Arabian Cities. ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information, 5(8), 1-19. http://doi.org/10.3390/ijgi5080139 Andrew NR, Ghaedi B, & Groenewald B. (2016a). The role of nest surface temperatures and the brain in influencing ant metabolic rates. 6 Journal of Thermal Biology, 60, 132-139. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtherbio.2016.07.010 Attard, M.R.G., Wilson, L.A.B., Worthy, T.H., Scofield, P., Johnston, P., Parr, W.C.H., and Wroe, S. (2016). Moa diet fits the bill: virtual reconstruction incorporating mummified remains and prediction of biomechanical performance in avian giants. Proceedings of the Royal 7 Society Series B. DOI: 10.1098/rspb.2015.2043 Barati, A., Etezadifar, F., and McDonald, P. G. (2016) Fragmentation in eucalypt woodlands promotes nest-tree occupancy by a despotic 8 species, the noisy miner (Manorina melanocephala). Austral Ecology, 41: 897–905. doi: 10.1111/aec.12382. Beckmann, C, and McDonald, P. G. (2016) Placement of re-nests following predation: are birds managing risk?. Emu 116: 9-13. Bodole C, Koech R, & Pezzaniti D. (2016d). Laboratory evaluation of dripper performance. Flow Measurement and Instrumentation, 50, 10 261-268. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.flowmeasinst.2016.07.012 Bondarenco A, Körtner G, Geiser F (2016) How to keep cool in a hot desert: torpor in two species of free-ranging bats in summer. Temperature 11 3: 476-483 Chi QS, Wan XR, Geiser F, Wang DH (2016) Fasting-induced daily torpor in desert hamsters (*Phodopus roborovskii*). Comparative Physiology 12 and Biochemistry A 199: 71-77 Cooper CE, Withers PC, Hardie A, Geiser F (2016) Marsupials don't adjust their thermal energetics for life in an alpine environment. 13 Temperature 3: 484-498 Cotsell N, & Vernes KA. (2016b). Camera traps in the canopy: surveying wildlife at tree hollow entrances. Pacific Conservation Biology, 22(1), 14 48-60. http://doi.org/10.1071/PC15030 Coux C, Rader R, Bartomeus I, & Tylianakis JM. (2016a). Linking species functional roles to their network roles. *Ecology Letters*, 19(7), 762-770. 15 http://doi.org/10.1111/ele.12612

16	Crea C, Ali RA, & Rader R. (2016e). A new model for ecological networks using species-level traits. <i>Methods in Ecology and Evolution</i> , 7(2), 232-241. http://doi.org/10.1111/2041-210x.12471
17	Croft P, Hunter JT, & Reid N. (2016f). Forgotten fauna: Habitat attributes of long-unburnt open forests and woodlands dictate a rethink of fire management theory and practice. Forest Ecology and Management, 366, 166-174. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.foreco.2016.02.015
18	De Palma A, Abrahamczyk S, Cruz-Lopez L, Cunningham SA, Darvill B, Diekotter T, Farwig N. (2016a). Predicting bee community responses to
19	DeSantis, L.R.G., Field, J., Wroe, S. (In Press). Dietary responses of Sahul (Pleistocene Australia-New Guinea) megafauna to climate and
20	Doty AC, Stawski C, Law BS, Geiser F (2016) Post-wildfire physiological ecology of an Australian microbat. Journal of Comparative Physiology B: 186: 937-946
21	Doty AC, Stawski C, Currie SE, Geiser F (2016) Black or white? Physiological implications of roost colour and choice in a microbat. Journal of Thermal Biology 60: 162-170
22	Drielsma M, Foster E, Ellis M, Gill RA, Prior JC, Kumar L, Ferrier S. (2016). Assessing collaborative, privately managed biodiversity conservation derived from an offsets program: Lessons from the Southern Mallee of New South Wales, Australia. <i>Land Use Policy</i> , <i>59</i> , 59-70. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2016.08.005
23	England JR, Paul KI, Herrmann T, Polglase PJ, Cunningham SC, Madhavan DB, Perring MP. (2016a). Previous land use and climate influence differences in soil organic carbon following reforestation of agricultural land with mixed-species plantings. <i>Agriculture, Ecosystems &amp; Environment</i> , 227, 61-72. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.agee.2016.04.026
24	Foster E, Love J, Rader R, Reid N, Dillon M, & Drielsma M. (2016a). Planning for metapopulation persistence using a multiple-component, cross-scale model of connectivity. <i>Biological Conservation</i> , 195, 177-186. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2015.12.034
25	Geiser F (2016) Conserving energy during hibernation. Journal of Experimental Biology 219: 2086-2087 JEB Classics Invited
26	Geiser F, Gasch K, Bieber C, Stalder GL, Gerritsmann H, Ruf T (2016) Basking hamsters reduce resting metabolism, body temperature and energy costs during rewarming from torpor. Journal of Experimental Biology 219: 2166-2172
27	Gross, C.L., Fatemi, M & I.H. Simpson (2016). Seed provenance for changing climates: early growth traits of non-local seed are better adapted to future climatic scenarios, but not to current field conditions. <i>Restoration Ecology</i> , DOI: 10.1111/rec.12474
28	Hobley EU, Le Gay Brereton AJ, & Wilson B. (2017). Forest burning affects quality and quantity of soil organic matter. <i>Science of the Total Environment</i> , <i>575</i> , 41-49. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2016.09.231
29	Hobley N, Baldock J, & Wilson B. (2016g). Environmental and human influences on organic carbon fractions down the soil profile. <i>Agriculture, Ecosystems &amp; Environment</i> , 223, 152-166. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.agee.2016.03.004
30	Hobley N, & Wilson B. (2016d). The depth distribution of organic carbon in the soils of eastern Australia. <i>Ecosphere</i> , 7(1), 1-21. http://doi.org/10.1002/ecs2.1214
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