

CTHB STUDENTS VISIT THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF INSECT PHYSIOLOGY AND ECOLOGY (ICIPE) IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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Two CTHB-funded MSc students from the University of Venda (Mr Rollet Ramavhale and Mr Rofhiwa Isaac Mmbengeni) visited ICIPE in Kenya from 30 August to 12 September 2015 to attend a course on insect identification. This was necessitated by the need to confirm the insect identifications they had done for their research projects. The two had a lot to learn about insect taxonomy, which was facilitated by Dr R. Copeland and his three lab technicians: Mr. J. Gitau, Mr J. Bukhebi and Ms. J. Muriuki. During the course, they went through the insect identification keys across four insect Orders: Hemiptera, Coleoptera, Hymenoptera and Diptera.



Figure 1 (Left): Dr Copeland demonstrating how to capture live insects on camera in the lab Figure 2 (Right): The identification of a specimen, with Dr Copeland reading out the identification keys

The students learnt how to set up a Malaise trap, which was used to catch flying insects for identification (Figures 3 and 4). Most of the insects caught were from the orders Hymenoptera, Diptera, Hemiptera, Odonata, Orthoptera and Coleoptera. The insect samples were then sorted according to order, and then identified to family level. Interestingly, the commonly used identification keys at ICIPE are from the book “Insects of Southern Africa” by Clarke Scholtz and Eric Holm, the same book the students are using at the University of Venda.



Figure 3 (Left): Mr. J. Bukhebi and Mr. I Mmbengeni. Figure 4 (Right): Mr. J Gitau and Mr. R. Ramavhale

During the two-week stay at ICIPE, the students took a tour around the research centre accompanied by two friendly lab technicians; Mr Joseph Gitau and Mr Josephat Bukhebi. The visit to the African Reference Laboratory for Bee Health was among the most fascinating experiences. Taken through the laboratory, it was interesting to see the diversity of bees and the honey they produce (Fig. 6) as well as using the instrumentation to measure bee wing sizes.



Figure 5 (Left): Laboratory for Bee Health. Figure 6 (Right): The white honey

A visit to the Kenya Museum followed in the second week. The invertebrate section was the only part of the museum we visited where there were displays of insects collected from different parts of Africa. Inevitably, the butterfly collection was the most colourful and the most beautiful. A board with diverse pinned insects aligned within a drawn Kenyan map and collected in Kenya was displayed and labelled “Harmony in Diversity” (Fig. 7).



Figure 7 (Left): at the museum. Figure 8 (Right): Butterfly collection

After the training, the two taxonomists-in-the-making were awarded certificates of attendance. It was indeed an enjoyable and educationally rewarding trip to the ICIPE.



Figure 9 (Left): Isaac receiving his certificate from Cr Copeland. Figure 10: Rollet receiving his certificate from Dr Copeland