Radioactivity sparks brain breakthrough

The mushroom cloud from an atomic explosion is the last one you would expect to have a silver lining.

But the spike in levels of the radioactive carbon isotope 14 (C14) created by nuclear tests in the 1950s has been put to good use in extraordinary research by a UWA graduate.

Professor Kirsty Spalding joined the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm after completing her PhD with Winthrop Professor Alan Harvey in Anatomy, Physiology and Human Biology 11 years ago.

Her work with Jonas Frisén on neurogenesis (a process by which new neurons are generated in the brain) has generated three papers in *Nature* and two in *Cell*, the world’s most prestigious science publications.

It has implications for the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases associated with dementia, including Alzheimer’s.

Run Forrest, Run

Max Bergman could be just another student out for a run with his dog.

But he’s a pretty special student, out running for more than just exercise, with a dog who is more than simply a pet.

Turn to page 3 to read about Max and his dog Forrest.
Radioactivity sparks brain breakthrough continued from page 1

In the 1960s, scientists began to believe that the adult mammal brain could generate new neurons. It took until the 1990s for the discipline to accept that neurogenesis did in fact occur.

But it was not until June this year that Professor Spalding’s decade of research was published in Cell, providing long-awaited proof. She and her colleagues used an ingenious approach, exploiting the fallout from the nuclear bomb tests between 1945 and 1963 as a yardstick.

Since 1963, above-ground nuclear testing has been banned and the amount of C14 in the atmosphere has declined. When a cell divides, it requires carbon which is ultimately taken from the atmosphere. Plants absorb C14 during photosynthesis and animals that eat them also take in radioactive carbon. When we eat the plants or the animals or drink their milk, we are absorbing it too. So the level of C14 in the cells of our bodies reflects that of the atmosphere.

Professor Spalding and her colleagues were able to birth-date cells from post-mortem tissue by measuring the amount of C14 in their DNA. The proportion of radioactive carbon in cells has been decreasing since 1963 and their work means the process can now be used to work out when cells were born. It was used to prove that new cells are born in the hippocampus (the part of the human brain that plays an important role in learning and memory) throughout the life of a human being.

“This is one of the most important papers I have read in years,” Professor Harvey said. “Kirsty and her co-authors raise the tantalising possibility that reduced neurogenesis in the human brain may be a factor in psychiatric diseases. The possibility of therapeutic manipulation of neurogenesis to aid in the treatment of neurodegenerative diseases associated with dementia also has more substance now,” he said.

Professor Harvey said Professor Spalding had gained a useful developmental biology background while working on her PhD at UWA. She examined factors that ensured the survival of neurons during maturation of the visual system. “Her work has always been related to nerve cells and what keeps them alive,” he said.

His own work now concentrates on the central nervous system and developing therapies to promote regenerative responses of injured neurons in the adult brain and spinal cord.

He explained that neurogenesis supports greater plasticity of the brain, which it needs to be adaptable and to allow us to layer new memories on top of old ones.

“One of the surprises of Kirsty’s research is that the new neurons born in our brains might not be exactly the same throughout our lives. There is a distinct possibility that the nature of the genes expressed in the cells may change over time.”

There are also suggestions that continued neurogenesis may play a role in human behaviour.

“It certainly does in all the other mammalian species,” Professor Harvey said. “This research opens up so many possibilities.”

Professor Spalding has now changed the focus of her research and is employing the C14 dating system with fat cells. She published ground-breaking work in this field in Nature in 2011. If fat cells, like brain cells, are constantly dying then being replenished, the process can hopefully be proved with C14 measurements. If a therapy could be developed that could make the body destroy more fat cells than it creates, weight loss might be easier.

Professor Spalding persevered for a decade with her neurogenesis research. If anybody can find the key to weight loss, it could be her.

Flashback: Alan Harvey and Kirsty Spalding at a conference when she was his PhD student

Kirsty Spalding in the lab at the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm
Max Bergman is a PhD candidate and an international middle distance runner.

He is also blind and Forrest is his guide dog. He helps Max navigate his way around UWA while he studies for his doctorate in agricultural science.

But Forrest knows his way around more cities than just Perth. He has travelled with Max to international conferences and to and from his birthplace in Germany, where he is conducting some of his PhD experiments.

And the running? Max is a Paralympian, with two Olympic Games as a middle distance runner to his name and aiming to compete in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

While Forrest usually sits and watches Max train, the pair will often run together during Max’s warm-up.

Max has a UWA Sports scholarship and next weekend, on Open Day, he will be helping to man the UWA Sport and Recreation stall as well as spending time at the Guide DogsWA stand in the Centenary pavilion in the Undercroft. (The Association for the Blind and UWA have a shared history, including the same Centenary year.)

He has been blind since the age of eight, due to a genetic condition. He has some peripheral vision which enables him to run without a sighted partner.

He and his older brother began the German equivalent of Little Athletics around the time Max began to lose his sight.

“I focused on running from the age of 12 and my brother and I are both middle-distance runners,” Max said.

He is very close to his brother Hannes, a vet, who is also doing his PhD in Australia, at the ANU, in immunology. Max has a degree in agricultural science from the University of Göttingen, as well as Masters degrees in agriculture and management.

The brothers hope to set up a farming consultancy together when they have completed their studies.

In the meantime, Max divides his time and energy between academic research and running training.

“A lot of people at this level of sport just train, or they study sport science or physiotherapy, something related to their sport,” he said.

“People expect you to give 100 per cent to your sport, but I live two lives where I also have supervisors who expect 100 per cent concentration on my research.”

His UWA supervisors, Dr Ken Flower, Winthrop Professor Kadambot Siddique, Assistant Professor Andrew Guzzomi and Dr Craig Scanlan are joined by two supervising academics at Göttingen where Max spends a few months each year.

When he’s not travelling for his research, he’s on the road with his running. Over the past few years he has competed in New Zealand, Brazil, Finland, the Netherlands and Greece. His best result was a bronze medal in the 2007 World Championships in Sao Paulo.

He competed for his native Germany in the Greece and Beijing Paralympics and is hoping to compete for Australia in Rio in 2016.

“I didn’t compete in London because I was in the throes of changing my citizenship from German to Australian,” he said.

Max trains nine times a week, often up to two hours at a time. He has recently joined UWA graduate, triple Olympian and Commonwealth silver medallist Sarah Jamieson’s Perth Running Club for weekly interval training.

While he has competed at the highest level in 5000m, 1500m and 800m, Max now concentrates on the 800 – as well as the role of potassium in increasing drought tolerance in canola.

Meet Max and Forrest on Open Day, Sunday 11 August.
Welcome to our new students – from WA and beyond

On July 22 and 23 I had the pleasure of welcoming 800 new undergraduate and 200 new postgraduate students to our University.

I hope they're settling in well to their studies and becoming part of the campus community.

Among the postgraduate students are 191 international students from 44 different countries around the world. They continue a long tradition at UWA where, since the Colombo Plan of the 1950s, we have welcomed students from all over the world.

One of the most notable alumni of the Colombo Plan is the Vice-President of Indonesia, Professor Dr Boediono, who graduated more than 40 years ago. In 2011, we acknowledged his contribution to global affairs by awarding him an Honorary Doctorate in Economics. When he received the award, Professor Dr Boediono said he was proud and humbled by the honour, observing that his time at UWA had made a ‘profound mark’ on his thinking.

He said: “What impressed me most (at UWA) was the ambience of intellectual inquiry. With my UWA experience and credentials new doors of opportunity suddenly opened up to me.”

His comments reflect the enormous impact that a good education can have on the direction of a student’s life and future career.

We hope that new doors will open for all of our students, whether they come from WA or from overseas. And we know that by ensuring that our campus is multicultural, our students – and our staff – reap the benefits.

As an international university based in Perth, UWA shares many of the attributes of the world’s top universities, among them a strong focus on the student experience. We know the value of ensuring that students receive the highest standard of education and are exposed to globally significant research. At the same time, we recognise the importance of broader personal growth, and encourage our students to become involved in the varied social and cultural offerings of campus life.

The internationalisation of universities is in the nation’s interest because educating international students produces geopolitical, cultural and economic benefits for Australia and broadens the experience of local students.

And, in being part of an international university, UWA students and staff are also enriched by the many partnerships we have with carefully selected universities overseas. These partnerships enable, for example, student exchanges and intellectual property alliances.

I hope our new students will make the most of the unique UWA experience, and that those who have settled into our new University Hall will enjoy living on campus.

UWA staff, including teachers, researchers and everyone who deals with our students – and of course our 100-year-old UWA Student Guild – help ensure that our students are supported in every way as they work towards their undergraduate and higher degrees.

Paul Johnson
Vice-Chancellor

Designing for the worst that nature coughs up

A leading researcher whose work has helped make offshore oil and gas platforms more stable and safer has been awarded Australia’s most prestigious research fellowship.

Winthrop Professor Mark Cassidy, Director of the Centre for Offshore Foundation Systems (COFS), has accepted one of 17 Australian Laureate Fellowships.

He is the only researcher in WA to be made a 2013 Australian Laureate. His Fellowship – worth more than $3 million – is for his project New frontiers in offshore geotechnics: securing Australia’s energy future.

The inaugural Australian Research Council Future Fellow is also Deputy Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Geotechnical and Science Engineering and in 2011 was appointed as a member of the ARC College.

“Offshore gas lies at the heart of Australia’s prosperity with $120 billion of infrastructure under construction,” Professor Cassidy said.

“But the future of offshore gas requires new technology to safely build offshore foundations in our weak and problematic soils. This project will provide engineers with science-based tools to unlock the natural gas stranded in our deep oceans.”

Professor Cassidy’s research interests are in offshore geotechnics and engineering, predominantly developing wave-structure-soil interaction models for the analysis of oil and gas platforms, mobile drilling rigs and pipelines.

In 2006 he received the Premier’s Early Career Achievement Award for excellence in science education, research and achievement in helping raise the profile of science and technology endeavours in Western Australia.

Professor Cassidy’s has secured millions of dollars in research grants for devising novel foundation solutions in WA’s soil conditions.
Like our born-again Prime Minister, UWA’s new Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) is fluent in the most important language of the 21st century.

Iain Watt has lived and worked in China and Taiwan for 14 years and he and his wife and two sons speak Mandarin about half the time at home.

“But my long experience and connections with Asia won’t meant that I will be only focusing on this area in my new role,” Mr Watt said.

“Much of the best research is still done in Europe and the US, so we will continue to engage with universities and institutions there as UWA builds its global reputation.

“But the vast majority of our international students, and more and more quality research comes from Asia, so obviously our Asian partners are still a very important part of our global positioning.”

Born in Scotland, Mr Watt came to Australia with his family as a teenager and studied pure mathematics, statistics and econometrics at ANU. After 10 years in Government departments in Canberra (the last seven in Education), he decided to learn Chinese.

“China was the home of emerging opportunities,” he said. “And I was ready for another challenge, something that would take me out of my comfort zone.”

Armed with the language, he then lived and worked in Taiwan for three years for a market research company. He met his wife Paohsiu there and they returned to Australia, with Mr Watt returning to the Department of Education.

He helped set up Australian Education International in the mid-90s and became director of the Taiwan office for three years. Then followed eight years in the Australian Embassy in Beijing (interspersed with work at ANU, establishing the International Alliance of Research Universities).

He worked as an Education Counsellor and later Minister-Counsellor before another stint at the ANU as Director of international operations and student recruitment.

“Everything I’ve done has prepared me for this job,” Mr Watt said. “It’s a wonderful time to come to UWA, in a new role, with a new executive (except for Robyn Owens), all people I respect highly.

“The University is going through a time of great transition, moving from a somewhat old-fashioned and predominantly undergraduate university catering to Perth, to a modern postgraduate university catering to the world.

“It’s not an easy transition. You can’t leave everything behind. We need to hang on to what UWA does very well.”

He said Perth’s student population was not big enough to support a world class university. “It is inevitable that the other universities in Perth will become more competitive, and already universities in the eastern states are recruiting students from over here. So we must look for our students from around the world and all over Australia, which means we have to be relevant to these students.”

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The women’s movement in Australia in the 1970s has been documented with books, academic papers and video clips from television news bulletins.

Like most histories, it is text-based, augmented with images and voice recordings.

But what really stimulates the emotions and memories of a time of great change are the objects of that time: what Alison Bartlett calls objects of social change.

Some of the objects she chose that signify the changes to women’s lives in the 1970s are bras, overalls, tampons, protest placards, the gestetner machine, a film-makers’ clapperboard and various badges, vinyl records and book covers.

Professor Bartlett is Discipline Chair of Gender Studies in the School of Humanities. She and co-editor Margaret Henderson have just launched their new book Things That Liberate: An Australian Feminist Wunderkammer.

“Objects are not generally looked at by historians,” Professor Bartlett said. “It is more the field of anthropologists. But we shouldn’t overlook material culture and the power of objects to evoke the emotions and politics of their time.”

The bra – and its mythical burning – became a symbol of the women’s movement; overalls were often the clothing of choice, as they represented both resistance and freedom, but then when women entered bureaucratic jobs as ‘femocrats’ power dressing was the thing; the gestetner was a desk-top copier which was invaluable for printing pamphlets; many women took to film-making in the 1970s as a medium for their politics, hence the clapperboard is one of the featured objects; and specific badges, placards, music and literature all arouse memories of particular political campaigns, protests, defining moments and enlightening knowledge.

The book had its roots in a consultation Alison Bartlett and Margaret Henderson did for the National Museum of Australia. They were asked to gather information to propose a collection of objects from the women’s movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

“We talked about material culture and the stories embedded in these things; things that are disappearing as the women who owned them are downsizing their homes or even dying, with their possessions being dispersed,” Professor Bartlett said.

“Sadly, the Museum’s exhibition didn’t get off the ground, but it inspired us to look for our own collection of objects and call for essays about things that represented the women’s movement.”

The authors have collected and edited the essays, many of which are written as memoirs while others are scholarly social histories.

Professor Bartlett has contributed a piece on bras, particularly apt as she has done a lot of research on breastfeeding and its place in society.

“I also took part in a Reclaim the Night march in Brisbane in the 90s where women took off their tops and marched bare-breasted,” she said. “The bra, in all its guises, has a very important place in this history.”

Material culture provides a novel form of understanding social history and Professor Bartlett will present a fascinating collection of things that changed Australian women’s lives in a lecture, Objects of Social Change: the women’s movement and things that liberate, on Tuesday 20 August in the Webb Lecture Theatre at 6pm.

The lecture is presented by the Institute of Advanced Studies and is free but please book your seat at ias.uwa.edu.au/lectures/bartlett
Three Brothers working in the fields together: a charming pastoral scene. But Three Brothers is also the name for a valuable international agriculture collaboration with universities in China.

The UWA Institute of Agriculture has signed an agreement with long-time research partner Zhejiang University and new partner Tarim University, under the umbrella of the Three Brothers initiative, for research in dryland agri-horticulture, water-saving irrigation technologies and other techniques for profitable crop production in a sustainable system.

The Three Brothers program was founded by the Ministry of Education in China in 2005 with the aim of supporting tripartite relationships between high-performing foreign universities, elite Chinese universities and emerging Chinese universities based in the Western Provinces of China. There are already two projects under way with universities in New Zealand. UWA is the first Australian university to sign a Three Brothers agreement with China.

“This program will provide opportunities for joint research and publications, high-level staff exchanges, joint training and the exchange of PhD and Master’s students,” said Hackett Professor Kadambot Siddique, Director of The UWA Institute of Agriculture.

He said the biggest issues in China were food security; improved feed for animals to support a diet with increased meat; safe production of fruit and vegetables; food safety; and agricultural systems that protect the environment.

The field research will take place at Tarim University in its unique location in Southern Xinjiang. Xinjiang Province has a typical desert arid oasis agriculture. Tarim University (TU) also focuses on resource conservation: breeding of new varieties such as Chinese date, pear and walnut; fruit and vegetable cultivation; and a National Science and Technology Support Project funded by the Chinese government.

UWA hosted academics from Zhejiang and Tarim universities in November last year and Professor Siddique recently visited the partners with Associate Professor Guijun Yan and Assistant Professor Mick Considine. All three will be working on specific projects in the Tarim Basin.

“We have identified three key areas of research for the benefit of TU development that also match the skills and aspirations of UWA,” Professor Siddique said.

“The first is the endemic poplar (Populus spp.) ecotypes in the Tarim Basin which are of great ecological and conservation value to China. Professor Considine has great interest and expertise in phenology, so this is one of the Three Brothers’ priority areas.

“Jujube (Ziziphus spp.) or Chinese date is a major cash crop for the Tarim Basin. There is much interest in the diversity and breeding of Jujube. This is an area of expertise of Professor Yan, and the second priority area we have identified.

“The third priority is improved water use efficiency and dryland agri-horticultural systems, an area of interest for my group,” he said.

Under the project, high quality MSc students from TU will do up to 18 months research project training at UWA.

Early next year, an early career researcher from TU, plant scientist Ms Peipei Jiao will work at UWA (with support from the China Scholarship Council) with Professors Considine, Yan and Siddique for 12 months on technology that can be transferred to the study of the endemic poplar in the Tarim Basin.

The three partners will present together at the 2014 International Horticulture Science Conference in Brisbane, strengthening their collaboration.

“We were impressed by the investment of TU in English language lecturers,” Professor Siddique said. “We hope to help them expand in that area with the assistance of UWA’s Centre for English Language Teaching.”
At Everest base camp, most trekkers are focused on the upward climb.

But Facilities Management technical officer Kevin Johnson was concentrating on the downward run during his few days at the camp in the Himalayas in May.

Kevin is one of about 120 marathon runners from all over the world who competed in the tenth annual Everest Marathon to mark the anniversary of the first successful summit by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay.

The first event was held to mark the 50th anniversary of the victorious ascent. Kevin and his co-runners set off on their marathon run down the mountain from base camp on 29 May, the 60th anniversary.

A New Zealander by birth, Kevin felt especially proud to be marking the anniversary of his famous countryman’s achievement.

“We flew to Kathmandu and spent a few days there before flying in a tiny plane to Lukla, which is listed as the most extreme airport runway in the world,” Kevin said. “It’s at 2,800 metres above sea level and the runway is carved out of the side of a mountain, with a sheer drop at the end of it.”

After acclimatising in Lukla, the runners began the 10-day trek to base camp. The climbing was interspersed with three days of staying at the same altitude to avoid altitude sickness.

“We spent a few days at base camp at 5,365 m (about 3,500 m below the peak of Everest) and took a hike of just over five kilometres one day to a lookout where we could see Everest,” Kevin said. “You can’t actually see it from base camp. It’s hidden behind other mountains.”

The runners set off at 7am on 29 May and the first part of their marathon was run over glacial ice. “It was pretty treacherous, but I was wearing good trail shoes. After the ice, it became very rocky and we had to keep looking down at the ground. I only fell over once!”

Kevin took eight hours 48 minutes to run 42 kilometres – much longer than a marathon would take on flat land.

“I’ve run about 30 marathons over 15 years, all over Australia and some overseas, including the Comrades Ultra Marathon of 90km in South Africa. But I’ve never done one at altitude before.”

Kevin and his friends from the WA Marathon Club trained for the Everest event in the Perth hills. “But 300m above sea level doesn’t really prepare you for the Himalayas,” he said. “It just got us used to running downhill.”

He said he didn’t suffer from altitude sickness and attributed it to keeping hydrated. “I don’t think it’s got anything to do with how fit you are. I think it’s just matter of body chemistry,” he said.

Kevin backed up for his 11th Perth Marathon just two weeks after arriving home from Nepal.

The man who runs roughly the equivalent of a marathon each week said he would recommend the Everest race.

“It just takes a long time to get to the starting line!” he said.
Visual artist Glen Stewart may be experimenting with verdigris one day, then advising students about a Masters course the next.

While he would one day love to earn his living through his art, Glen says working in the post-graduate Admissions Centre helps to keep him balanced.

“It’s really the perfect job for me,” he said. “I began my PhD in art history in 2006 but I’m taking a break from study at the moment. When I talk to students about doing postgraduate study, I can talk to them with real, current experience.”

Glen recently showed his fifth annual exhibition. It was a collection of works in ink, textured paint and egg tempera, designed to evoke an emotional response to colour and texture.

“I try something new every year, working with different media,” he said.

He keeps his creative edge sharp by teaching art at the Fremantle Arts Centre on the weekends. “Sometimes it gets exhausting, working all week then teaching on the weekend, especially when I’m putting an exhibition together, but teaching forces me to keep trying new ideas for my students. And often more new ideas come out of the classes.”

He is currently running a drawing and music class, to get students to respond to music through their art. He has a cellist in the classroom, playing music including Bach’s cello suites. “Interestingly, some of the responses are universal,” he said.

Glen worked with the same cellist in performance. He created film images which were projected onto a wall, then reflected in a shallow pond, in which the cellist (from the School of Music) sat playing music that inspired and complemented the visual images.

“I like collaborating with artists in different areas, which is another reason I like working at UWA, where you can meet and work with so many different people,” he said.

He studied Fine Art in the School of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Art, completing his degree in 2002. He has been working in administration at the University since 1999, including stints, both paid and voluntary, at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery.

His PhD (originally supervised by Ian McLean, who has now left UWA), is looking at historical techniques used in 17th century art and architecture. “The art of that period provided a particularly sensory experience,” he said. “And some of their techniques are still used in contemporary art.”

In 2008, Glen spent two months in Italy, focusing on Baroque painting, as part of his research.

“I’m so lucky to work here because I am able to take leave to concentrate on my art when I need to,” he said. “I work with a great bunch of people.”

To see more of Glen’s work please see: www.glenstewart.carbonmade.com
By Porcia Maley

Australian anthems such as Waltzing Matilda would have us believe that our farmers share a unique bond with their sheep.

But looking at the statistics we could be forgiven for thinking otherwise. Every year an estimated 15 – 35 per cent of Australian lambs die within a week of birth – a figure unchanged in 30 years. That’s around two million lambs in Western Australia alone, or a veritable mountain of roasts, chops and shanks.

Programs are available to farmers which detail strategies to combat problems such as lamb mortality. However, despite widespread awareness of the programs, few farmers participate – just 17 per cent according to a survey by Meat and Livestock Australia. Furthermore, only 11 per cent implemented the recommended strategies following these programs.

Focused feeding, providing shelter and selecting ewes for calm temperament are all strategies recommended to promote lamb survival and, combined, can reduce mortality by up to 50 per cent – potentially enough to impact prices for everyday consumers, according to Assistant Professor Joanne Elliott.

A/Professor Elliott and her colleagues from the Schools of Animal Biology and Business at UWA investigated the driving factors behind the farmers’ decision-making processes, in the hope of seeing greater implementation rates throughout the industry.

“It programs tended to focus on changing farmers’ attitudes towards certain strategies,” A/Professor Elliott said. “We thought that providing the facts would convince them to take up these strategies,”

But they have discovered they may have been on the wrong track.

The study found that farmers’ perceptions of control and social influences, along with profit, were key factors in their decision-making. The study also highlighted the benefits of presenting arguments to farmers on a personal level, relevant to each individual’s social, emotional and financial situation.

Previous studies had found that farmers were inclined to ‘follow the flock’, being both more likely to adopt practices after their neighbours implemented them, and to act on information from other farmers than from researchers.

“The fact that farming is a lifestyle rather than just an occupation means there are a lot of factors which play a role,” A/Professor Elliott said.

Her study, which used focus groups to identify the attitudes, beliefs and intentions influencing farmers’ behaviour, showed that they held positive attitudes toward improving lamb survival, but had mixed attitudes to the strategies themselves.

“Not all strategies suit all farming enterprises and farmers,” she said.

“Farmers do want to improve lamb survival; they are interested in doing something. It is a case of us understanding how we can best support them to make those changes.”

The following two stories have been written by UWA Science Communication students.

Baa Humbug
Farmers’ social attitudes hold the key to saving lambs

By Porcia Maley

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By Sophie Cross

For most people, the idea of a carnivorous plant belongs in science fiction.

But for some plants, carnivory is very real. Possibly the world’s most unique and least known of these, Aldrovanda vesiculosa, can be found in the remote Kimberley region.

Drawn to this mysterious species is PhD candidate Adam Cross.

Most people have probably heard of a carnivorous plant called the Venus flytrap, which captures insects between a pair of lobe-like jaws at the end of each leaf. Aldrovanda is essentially an aquatic Venus Flytrap.

“Aldrovanda is the only plant to have ever evolved underwater snap trap carnivory, and is the only surviving species in an evolutionary lineage dating back over 55 million years. It’s the only species of its kind,” said Adam who is supervised by Professor Kingsley Dixon, Dr David Merritt, Dr Shane Turner, Dr Matthew Barrett, and Assistant Professor Michael Renton.

He has uncovered some amazing results while studying the biology of Aldrovanda. “Despite being distributed across four continents, from southern Australia to north Russia, and from western France to Japan, Aldrovanda is genetically uniform; every single plant is, essentially, the same individual.”

Although found throughout the world, the survival of this species is in critical danger. Adam says that Aldrovanda could be extinct in the next 20 years if significant conservation efforts are not put in place. “Aldrovanda populations have declined by 90 per cent worldwide over the past hundred years. We’re seeing huge declines in all populations, except for those in remote and mainly inaccessible areas such as the Kimberley.”

The cause of the decline is the same as for many other species threatened with extinction: human activity. Wetlands are extremely sensitive ecosystems, and are among the first habitats to disappear following human disturbances such as agricultural development and urbanisation.

For a species only found in wetland regions, this is having a huge negative impact on Aldrovanda populations.

The species is in such a perilous condition that Adam has been successful in having it placed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List, a big step in the right direction for conservation efforts.

The Kimberley is an area of refuge for Aldrovanda being virtually pristine and untouched by humans. If the decline in habitat in the rest of the world continues, the Kimberley could hold the last remaining populations. Studies in the Kimberley are imperative to understanding, and preventing further decline of this fascinating plant.

“**Aldrovanda** is the only plant to have ever evolved underwater snap trap carnivory, and is the only surviving species in an evolutionary lineage dating back over 55 million years.”

Adam has already documented the decline and subsequent extinction of the southernmost population in Esperance. “Though this population was only discovered in 2004 after road development near the site, the species was gone only two years later.”

The University of Western Australia

**The mysterious aquatic Venus Flytrap**

Adam Cross has his hands full with his Aldrovanda studies. Photo: Sophie Cross

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The humanities, perhaps more than any other academic discipline, has its roots firmly in books.

And while there will always be a place for those print and paper treasures, the field of digital humanities is opening up possibilities for research and knowledge never before possible.

UWA is hosting an international conference, Digital Humanities Australasia 2014, and Research Professor Jenni Harrison based in iVEC@UWA, is already preparing for it. Last month she was working with Professor Paul Arthur, Professor of Digital Humanities at the University of Western Sydney, collectively to ensure UWA hosts a program to excite academics nationally and internationally.

“Digital humanities is so much more than simply ‘putting books online,’” Professor Arthur said. “It is new research, at the nexus of humanities and computing.”

Professor Harrison said that, while the University was heading the local organisation committee, Curtin and Edith Cowan Universities also had significant digital humanities research programs and all three universities were involved in the conference, with the appropriate theme, Expanding Horizons.

“The study of Indigenous languages and culture is a brilliant example of where digital humanities works well, and in fact, is a necessity,” Professor Harrison said.

“With so much of the language, history, stories, music and dance being handed down through multiple generations,” Indigenous culture presents a huge opportunity to capture, preserve and study for a greater understanding. Digital technologies can save, analyse and understand this culture that is so important in this part of the world,” she said.

Professor Arthur said one of the challenges with digitally preserving Indigenous culture was to protect it and ensure that it was only available to those who were allowed access to it.

“Just this one example shows clearly the field’s Expanding Horizons and how much can be achieved by moving beyond traditional texts,” he said.

“Digital technology can support academics to do things differently. It provides a framework where new types of non-traditional research can be undertaken,” Professor Harrison said.

“It signals a new and thriving direction in research, where academics in humanities are becoming more engaged with those in science and technology and with industry.”

UWA was a pioneer of digital humanities in Australia, in particular the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions which uses historical knowledge from Europe, 1100 – 1800, to understand the long history of emotional behaviours. This is an international humanitarian effort, led by UWA to understand the intriguing topic of emotions heritage.

The Institute of Advanced Studies has also been a strong supporter of digital humanities, and in 2011 created a Digital Humanities Hub to provide an opportunity for UWA scholars to strengthen digital humanities research and collaboration across a wide range of disciplines and topics ranging from e-research to digitalisation of art collections. (ias.uwa.edu.au/conf/digital-humanitiesuwa).

In the Digital Humanities Hub, Winthrop Professor Philip Mead was a trailblazer.

“Digital technology allows us to ask different questions, questions we wouldn’t have been able to answer before databases became available,” he said, in UWAnews last year.

“It is changing our work fundamentally, changing the questions we ask, the patterns and links we can find and enabling us to test theories that were previously impossible to test,” Professor Mead said.

But while it’s a new field in itself, Professor Harrison suspects the phrase digital humanities will eventually be phased out.

“It will simply become part and parcel of the way humanities research is conducted,” she said. “In other areas, using digital technology as a research tool is now taken for granted.”

The conference from 18-21 March 2014 is sponsored by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Robyn Owens.

More details about it, including the program, calls for participation, and a digital story-telling competition, are at: dha2014.org
More than 100 researchers from widely diverse disciplines attended the three-day conference at UWA, with about double that number taking part in live-streaming of sessions and tweeting around the world.

“It’s just a myth, but a very powerful one,” said musicologist Tim Carter, one of four keynote speakers at the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions’ second international conference recently.

The tale is one that highlights the conflicting emotions that music has inspired through the centuries.

“It is a fascinating melting pot, considering the pleasures, perils and dangers of music,” said Professor Carter from North Carolina University, who is also a Distinguished International Visiting Fellow in the Centre.

“Music was considered dangerous in the 17th century because it could not be processed by the brain, but through the heart. And they didn’t like that in those days. There was also the fear of emasculation. Men were not supposed to like music; they were meant to be made of sterner stuff.”

Professor Carter said that, even now, academics did not generally like talking about emotions. “As scholars, we tend to take a step back and say: ‘Let’s keep this academic.’

“But the Centre’s research and this conference force us to confront a whole set of issues and it’s very exciting.”

One of the most popular presentations at the conference was Andrew Lawrence-King’s workshop on Hamlet’s famous soliloquy. He had actors on one side of the stage and musicians on the other, comparing the emotions evoked by the different performances.

Professor Carter spoke about a 17th century clash between composers and performers of music. “For the first time, there were debates about which one commandeered the emotions: the person who wrote the music or the person who performed it,” he said.

More than 100 researchers from widely diverse disciplines attended the three-day conference at UWA, with about double that number taking part in live-streaming of sessions and tweeting around the world.

“This conference set out to cover the wide range of historical sources that tell us about emotions in the past—and it certainly delivered on its promise,” said Centre director, Winthrop Professor Philippa Maddern.

“We covered everything from 11th century runestones to 17th century sailing journals, from Shakespeare to the Bayeux Tapestry, from poetry to criminal trials; speakers elucidated emotions of greed, fear, honour, triumph, embarrassment, compassion, exaltation, despair, and many more. As plenary speaker James Amelang (Universidad Autonoma, Madrid) pointed out, even supposedly well-known sources, such as letters, have many variants, from highly-crafted state correspondence to much more down-to-earth sailors’ letters home – all with different emotional valence.”

Deputy director, Winthrop Professor Jane Davidson, said that significantly, a strong emphasis developed not on what emotions were felt, but the ways in which they were generated, expressed and conveyed.

“As Professor Sarah McNamer (Distinguished International Visitor to CHE) remarked in discussing late medieval English poetry, drama and devotional literature, we often ask ‘How did these people feel?’ But we too often answer with a statement of what emotions we think they felt, instead of concentrating on the processes of feeling, and of the emotional relationships between texts, readers and viewers,” she said.
Dylan leads by example

UWA students continue to provide leadership for young people in so many areas of the community.

Arts/Law student and Whadjuk-Ballardong community member Dylan Collard was recently named 2013 NAIDOC Perth Male Youth of the Year.

The Perth Awards run by NAIDOC (named after the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) recognise outstanding achievements by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and businesses during NAIDOC Week, celebrated last month.

Dylan was recognised for his community work, studies and reconciliation movement activities.

He began studying at UWA in 2010 after exploring tertiary study options at the annual Future Footprints Expo for Indigenous high school students.

Dylan was active in the WA Student Aboriginal Corporation, gained an internship at a major law firm and was recently elected ‘Prime Minister’ at the National Indigenous Youth Parliament.

He also co-founded ‘iAmtheOther’, a student-run organisation that aims to bridge the social divide between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people through promoting meaningful conversations and building mutually respectful relationships.

More than 200 Indigenous high school students from regional and remote WA met Dylan last month and shared his experiences at this year’s Future Footprints Expo at the UWA Business School, where he sought to inspire others to follow in his footsteps.

The visiting students, from independent boarding schools, attended the Woodside-sponsored event to learn more about study and work opportunities at universities, TAFE colleges, government departments and major companies.

Dean of the Business School, Winthrop Professor Phil Dolan, said UWA was committed to encouraging and supporting students from diverse backgrounds, and offered a big range of scholarships and programs to help them benefit from a university education.

NAIDOC week celebrates Indigenous achievements

A highlight of NAIDOC week at UWA was a reception for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) at the University Club.

AIATSIS is the world’s leading research, collecting and publishing institution in the field of Australian Indigenous studies, and the reception celebrated its work and achievements.

AIATSIS Council Member June Oscar, a Bunuba woman from Fitzroy Crossing, represented AIATSIS Chairperson Professor Mick Dodson, and was accompanied by fellow AIATSIS Council members and UWA anthropologists Adjunct Professor Sandy Toussaint and Emeritus Professor Bob Tonkinson.

Institute Principal Russell Taylor said that AIATSIS had proudly played a unique role in the field of Australian Indigenous studies since the early 60s.

“Our activities have continued to have a strong regional focus providing services such as family history, language, native title research and the return of materials to Indigenous communities and individuals in rural and remote areas,” Mr Taylor said.

“And we have led research, especially on languages and native title, and have a recognised reputation for establishing best ethical practices in Indigenous research.”

Ms Oscar, who was recognised in the recent Australian honours awards for her contribution to Indigenous communities, also highlighted some recent achievement of the Institute, including AIATSIS’ vital work in language revitalisation and maintenance through taking a leadership role in curriculum development, developing digital languages portals and recently completing the second National Australian Languages Survey of Australia.

A Land and Water Research Centre and an Aboriginal publishing house which is launching the Institute’s first mobile phone app – Aboriginal Sydney – were among other highlights.

“Our achievements highlight our stunning reputation for rigorous, independent research across the breadth of Indigenous studies and affairs,” Ms Oscar said. “Most importantly they reiterate our uniqueness.”
Get your first job before breakfast

It might have a cute name, but the UWA Careers Centre’s annual Big Brekkie means business.

For five years, the Centre (part of Student Services) has been running the breakfast for engineering and commerce students to meet people in the industries that will eventually employ them.

Careers Centre acting team leader Karen Abbott said the event had become so successful that some companies were employing soon-to-graduate students there and then, at the breakfast. And these young employees were returning to the breakfast the following year to recruit the next round of graduate employees.

This year’s event, the Momentum Partners Big Brekkie, was jointly hosted by Momentum Partners and the Careers Centre, supported by Rio Tinto, Technip, Hatch and Kiewit.

Rio Tinto’s involvement is part of its Education Partnerships Program with UWA. The company has participated in the breakfast with great success for the past three years.

Luke Smith and Des Yeo are two graduates who found not only their jobs, but a clear direction for their careers, at the Big Brekkie. They both attended this year to encourage and recruit the next generation of students.

Both graduates are mechanical engineers and Des also has a degree in commerce.

Luke, who works with Technip, said he was pleasantly surprised by the Big Brekkie he attended as a student.

“There were a lot of engineer reps from the companies, which gives you an opportunity to understand what the company really does (as opposed to just speaking with HR reps),” he said.

“The ratio of company reps to undergrads was much higher than the other events I’d been to. I think this ultimately led to me getting my job, because I spent about 15 minutes speaking to the person who would eventually become my engineering discipline lead.

He explained the graduate role and the company really well. I also got the opportunity to tell him about my aspirations, my work experience and hobbies and it turned out I was a perfect match for the role. I can quite easily attribute being offered this job to the Big Brekkie.

“I’m extremely happy in my position and believe I am set for a long career here.”

Des Yeo has a graduate position with Shell and echoes Luke’s sentiments about the Big Brekkie program.

“I started going to Careers Centre events because I took to heart the words of the former Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alan Robson. I heard him say many times that if we left UWA with just a degree, the University had failed us. He encouraged all students to become involved with all the other aspects of student life,” Des said.

“So I did, including running Guild clubs, going on exchange, working with UWA Motorsport and collaborating with companies on the Terrace. I learnt what no engineering text book could have taught me.

“I believe I wouldn’t be where I am today without all the extra-curricular activities and experiences. They made me who I am, which I believe helped me to get the job I have now.

“Shell is sending me to work in the Netherlands next month. It’s a fantastic opportunity and the Careers Centre, the Big Brekkie and the Career Mentor Link program were all instrumental in getting me where I am today.”

Registrations for the 2014 Big Brekkie open in October. Find out more about careers at: uwa.careerhub.com.au
Cyclists now have their own one-stop repair shop on campus.

UWA’s Transport Office (part of Sustainable Development) has installed a bike repair station on the west side of the Guild Village. Imported from the US, it is the first of its kind in WA. It provides a set of basic tools and a quality pump with a universal head to fit all valve types.

“The primary purpose of the station is to help cyclists change a tyre tube or fix a puncture,” said transport co-ordinator Ruth Balding. “The range of tools also makes possible other minor repairs, including adjusting brakes.”

A Quick Read code on the station can connect cyclists with smart phones to a comprehensive bike repair website.

“Most bike riders don’t have enough pressure in their tyres,” Ruth said. “Having the right pressure makes it much easier to ride. The station pump has a gauge showing the pressure. Just look at the wall of your tyre to see how much you should be pumping into your tyres.”

UniPrint, the University’s in-house print and design facility, recently installed a new high quality colour printer that is stirring interest with clients on- and off-campus.

UniPrint Manager Craig Mackenzie is clearly proud of the B2 Sakurai 575SD which brings the on-campus facility in line with services offered by other major printers in Perth. The new printer will handle 99 per cent of printing needs generated by the University and it replaces the Sakurai 458P that had served UniPrint well for the past seven years.

When Craig initially started at UWA in 1981 the University had a duplicating room in the basement of the Administration building. After a period of absence, in 1988 he came back as a one-man team in charge of a small off-set single-colour press, producing in-house administration work, including minutes, agendas and theses, and started UniPrint. He learned on the job, saw the unit grow exponentially and today UniPrint employs 23 staff.

UniPrint’s design office is based on campus in the Guild’s commercial building, while its main production facility is on University-owned land off leafy Brooklands Way in Mt Claremont, adjacent to McGillivray Oval. Once a bindery for the library, the facility is now greatly expanded to accommodate the large press and an extensive paper storage area.

“Uniview magazine, the University’s flagship publication, was the first major job that UniPrint produced on the new printer, and we’re very pleased with the result in terms of quality,” Craig said.

“The new printer adds extra refinements and offers a lot of efficiency gains including the ability to print four pages at once rather than two, so we can complete a job faster.”

UniPrint designer Janine Blackstock and Craig Mackenzie check out the Spring issue of Uniview as it comes off the new press.
New Alumni Annual Fund grants will have a big impact on students’ lives.

A new grant administered by Development and Alumni Relations will see donations from our generous alumni and supporters make a significant difference to the campus community.

The Alumni Annual Fund Grants support innovative, one-off projects and activities that deliver an enriched student experience. Funding is available to all areas of the University, from faculties, schools and administrative areas to the Student Guild, student clubs and societies.

Projects that may receive funding include those that meet a clearly expressed student or academic need, pilot projects or initiatives within a specific area, and student-led projects that benefit the wider community.

Applications for Alumni Annual Fund Grants opened on 29 July, and will close 12 noon, Friday 16 August.
Walk around the Oak Lawn with graduates

Three Rhodes Scholars, two graduates from the 1920s and – not a partridge in a pear tree – but a visitor from Italy were all commemorated when the third section of the Graduates Walk was opened recently.

There are now 395 pavers in the path that will eventually encircle the Oak Lawn with the names of UWA graduates.

A 1977 graduate, Ornella Tana read about the Walk in the local newspaper, the Post, when her brother took a copy to her home in Italy two years ago. That issue featured her grandson Sachin on the cover. It also ran a story about the Graduates’ Walk and Ornella decided she wanted to be part of it. She flew out from Italy to see her paver in place.

The outgoing Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Bill Louden’s father Henry features in the new section, along with Lorna Dickson and Margaret Swan, who graduated in the 1920s.

Three Members of the Order of Australia, Winthrop Professor Cheryl Praeger, Lesley Parker and Richard John Vaughan have their pavers in the same section as three Rhodes Scholars, Bernard Lochtenberg, Bronte Adams and Michael Rennie.

Three generations of the Casey family are represented in the newest part of the walk. The late Dr Val Casey enrolled at UWA after she had brought up her children. She graduated with a BA in 1986 and a PhD on Shakespeare’s emblems in 1996. Pavers for her sons Simon and Tim and grandson Sean are in the path next to Dr Casey’s.

The Graduates’ Walk raises money for the Centenary Trust for Women, of which Dr Casey was a loyal member.

There is still space in the path for more graduates. If you are interested, please contact Marita Gardener in the Office of Development and Alumni Relations at marita.gardener@uwa.edu.au or on 6488 4207.

Vale Robert Street

Robert Street’s career was often described as magnetic.

The former Vice-Chancellor (1978 – 1986) was a physicist who specialised in the field of magnetism. But Professor Street, who died last month at the age of 93, also had a magnetic personality.

He was a much-loved research mentor at UWA, still in demand in the magnetics labs just a few years ago. He had a building named after him in 2010 and the number of people who attended the celebration of that was testament to his popularity.

Born in Yorkshire, UK, in 1920, Professor Street was the son of a coalminer, the first in his family to go to university. He studied at the University of London and began his career during WWII working at the Air Defence Research and Development Establishment, researching absolute measurement of power. This was the subject of his PhD with which he graduated, again from the University of London, in 1948. He became a physics lecturer, working at the universities of Nottingham and Sheffield for the next 12 years.

He moved to Australia at the age of 40, with a wife and two young children and was appointed Foundation Professor of Physics at Monash University, later becoming the Director of the Research School of Physics at the Australian National University.

In 1978, he became Vice-Chancellor at UWA, a position he occupied until his retirement eight years later. But he continued his research and supervision of graduate students in magnetism through the CSIRO and UWA. It was an extraordinarily active retirement that lasted more than 20 years.

He will be missed by many people in the University community.

Robert Street has a good look at his likeness as Alan Robson unveils the portrait at the naming of the Robert Street Building

Robert Street

Robert Street has a good look at his likeness as Alan Robson unveils the portrait at the naming of the Robert Street Building

Ornella Tana admires her paver

Ornella Tana admires her paver
Get your hands on some real books

It wouldn’t be half so much fun, browsing through second-hand Kindles!

The very successful Save the Children book sale is proof that many people still love paper books.

Many thousands of them have been donated, along with CDs, DVDs and sheet music, for this year’s sale, in the Undercroft from 16 to 21 August.

The sale, run by the University Branch of Save the Children for the past 49 years, raises money for children in need in Australia and overseas.

It opens at 5pm on Friday 16 August. On Saturday morning, ABC radio 720 will broadcast from the sale, including Sabrina Hahn’s popular gardening show. The doors open on Saturday at 6am, on Sunday at 8am and the next three days at 9.30am.

Tuesday is half-price day and Wednesday, when the sale closes at 3pm, you can fill a box for just $15.

For more information, visit savethechildren.org.au or call Save the Children on 9267 3900.
Who was Salek Minc?

Alex Cohen
Clinical Adjunct Professor, Medicine and Pharmacology,
Former UWA Chancellor

Had one the temerity to pose this question some 25 years ago it would have been greeted by the raising of a carefully acquired quizzical eyebrow, and a disturbingly audible exhalation through the nostrils designed to draw attention to the frozen facial expression of incredulity reserved only for the questing of a Philistine.

This is because Salek Minc offered to a large group of people in Perth their first glimmerings of understanding in the visual arts beyond Hans Heysen’s tenderly rendered gum trees and Frederick McCubbin’s unfortunate tramp with which their drawing rooms were almost uniformly adorned.

The annual Salek Minc lecture is delivered in his honour at UWA but, sadly, so little is made of this brilliant man that most of the attendees have no idea who he was.

Salek Minc was born a Jew, in the small Russian, now Polish city Seidlic during the upheavals and purges of 1905. Ultimately he was forced to flee through White Russia and the Ukraine where he acquired his fluency in the Polish, Russian and Yiddish languages.

He studied medicine in Italy, graduating in 1925. A promising hospital career was abruptly terminated by the advent of Mussolini. In the interval however his burgeoning love of art brought him into contact with many young painters among whom was Corrado Cagli who was to become one of the nation’s most outstanding artists. Their friendship continued over the years and Salek Minc’s unique collection contained a number of the best of Cagli’s work outside Europe.

Whilst travelling in exile as a ship’s doctor he became acquainted with the Australian way of life which appealed to his Mediterranean and freedom-loving temperament. So he settled here, developing his medical skills and his indulgence in art.

He became friend and patron to many Australian artists whose talents he recognised and fostered, even during their earliest days of endeavour.

Art was an absorbing passion; friends his most treasured possessions and conversation the instrument by which he soothed or stimulated others. His excitement and joy from a work of art was only exceeded by any opportunity to share and elucidate its qualities with others. We were the beneficiaries of that bounty.

This then was the uniquely gifted citizen of the world who lived amongst us. He truly changed the lives of many, leaving them with a new mode of perception and appreciation of life and living. A good deal of his collection was offered to the University.

Is it not strange then that a University, in mounting an Annual Lecture in his name, should so casually relegate his relevance and record to a short insertion in the circulated program? This obligatory mini-obeisance is usually enveloped and suffocated by the more extensive information illuminating the attractions of the living, invited speaker, far exceeding those of the dead progenitor of the occasion of whom the speaker knows little or nothing.

Whether one admires or detests him, that arch interlocutor – Phillip Adams – never fails to briefly explore the background of the named academic institution or benefactor whence emanates the authority and expertise of his visitor. Why cannot UWA do the same by introducing their visitor’s lecture with a pithy, revealing prelude given by someone familiar with and respectful of the heritage entailed?

Several ‘named’ lectures are given across the campus each year. Would it not be reasonable to advise the visiting speaker about whom or why they have been chosen to grace and perpetuate the name or the occasion? This would permit their sensibility and good taste to react appropriately whilst consolidating the history of the Institution.

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