

## OBITUARY


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# In memory of Judith Masters and Fabien Génin

On October 3, 2022, the primatological community was tragically deprived of two of its most thought-provoking minds when Drs. Judith Masters and Fabien Génin were found killed after a break-in at their home in Hogsback, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

## 1 | JUDITH C. MASTERS (1955–2022)

Judith Masters was a native of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. She studied Biological Sciences at Natal University in Durban (B.Sc., 1976) and then she moved to the University of the Witwatersrand for her post-graduate studies. She received her Ph.D. from Wits University in 1985 under the supervision of Professor Hugh Paterson, who inspired Judith's research on species and speciation processes. Paterson's Mate-Recognition Concept for defining sexually reproducing species became a predominant paradigm in Judith's career. During her time at Wits University, she also started to study bushbabies or galagos, that eventually would become one of her study groups. After receiving her Ph.D., she obtained a 2-year post-doctoral fellowship at Harvard University in the United States under the supervision of Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin, and multiple short-term research contracts in Italy (Florence and Turin) and France (Strasbourg), as well as a visiting Assistant Professorship at the University of Stony Brook, New York.

In 1998, she returned to South Africa where she served as Assistant Director of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum until January 2007. At the KwaZulu-Natal Museum, Judith had a critical role in mentoring and supervising students and young scholars. She taught at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and contributed to the museum's educational activities. One of her contributions during her time at the museum was to develop a public gallery dedicated to primates and human evolution, the first of its kind at the museum. Additionally, she was involved in training environmental educators and she even provided scientific advice for the children's book *Bushbaby Night* by Jeremy Grimsdell. Judith moved to Fort Hare University, Alice Campus in 2007 where she was a professor of Zoology at the University of Fort Hare until she retired in 2021. Here she also co-founded, together

with her partner Dr. Fabien Génin, the African Primate Initiative for Ecology and Speciation (APIES), and with the South African geologist Maarten de Wit, the Africa Earth Observation Network (EON), a multidisciplinary expert group based at the University of Cape Town.

Judith was one of the few B-rated scientists<sup>1</sup> at Fort Hare and she was internationally recognized for her work on species concepts, speciation, biogeography and morphology, with a focus on the evolution of tooth-combed (Strepsirhini) primates: lemurs, lorises, and galagos. Her dedication to investigate the evolution of this primate group took her to most museums around the world where she integrated morphometric, genetic and behavioral data under the theoretical framework of Paterson's specific-mate recognition species concept. It is not uncommon for researchers to find notes written by Judith aimed at clarifying the taxonomy of specimens stored in museum collections. More recently, Judith's work focused on understanding how lemurs, and other mammals, colonized the island of Madagascar. Her 40 years of work on bushbaby and lemurs represented a critical contribution to primate systematics and included the description of a new species (*Galagoides kumbirensis*) and a new genus for the eastern dwarf galagos (*Paragalago* spp.).

In addition to her outstanding contributions to the primate systematics and evolution, Judith was an extraordinary mentor for students not only at Fort Hare but all around the world. She was an active member of many international societies including the International Primatological Society and the International Biogeography Society, and she was an Associate Editor for the Journal of Biogeography. Her dedication to science went beyond her research on speciation and biogeography; Judith was also committed to a more inclusive and fairer academic world. Her work as a scientist, teacher, and mentor was dedicated to expanding the role of African scientists and students in the field of primatology. With her friend and colleague, Trudy Turner, she co-founded and co-chaired PEGG (Primate Ecology and Genetics Group), the South African Primatology Society. The group has met for 20 years and is open to researchers, students, and all people interested in primates in Southern Africa. PEGG is an affiliate of the International Primatological Society. In 2007, she organized together with Fabien the International Conference on Prosimians held

[Correction added on 17th December 2022, after first online publication: Online Open copyright line and legal statement have been added.]

<sup>1</sup>Category B: "Researchers who enjoy considerable international recognition by their peers for the high quality and impact of their recent research outputs" according to the National Research Foundation (NRF) in South Africa.

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in Ithala, South Africa that brought over 100 scientists from all over the world to South Africa. She also tried twice to host an IPS congress in South Africa, an unachieved dream of hers. One of the most outstanding examples of her commitment to equality and justice in science is a letter to *Nature* in 1986 stating that South African scientists should be “forced to show their true colours, so to speak, rather than being able to fall back on the excuse that the rest of the world is fighting apartheid with a system that is just as discriminatory.” (Master et al. 1986, p. 480).<sup>2</sup> In this letter Judith and her coauthors argued that South African scientists should be allowed to submit manuscripts to international journals or to participate in international conferences only after an explicit declaration of their rejection of academic and social inequalities and discriminatory practices based on race, sex, or religion.

In addition to her passion for science, evolution, systematics and bushbabies, Judith was an avid traveler, a wine lover, an Italian opera enthusiast and a devoted friend. Her creative and unique scientific research, her supportive mentorship and her love for nature and life will be deeply missed by the scientific community, her students, her friends and family.

## 2 | FABIEN GÉNIN (1971–2022)

Fabien Génin was born in Toulouse, France, in 1971. In his childhood, Fabien was highly influenced by his mother, a literature teacher, who introduced him to world of books, making him an avid reader. He was also passionate about nature and spent most of his free time climbing trees or tracking birds with his binoculars. Ornithology soon became one of his true, lifelong passions. He studied biology at the University of Poitiers, France, where he developed a particular interest toward physiology. During one of the courses that he followed as a Masters student, he had to work on a paper that resonated deeply with him. The article was written by Judith Masters.

Fabien started his Ph.D. in the CNRS/MNHN Laboratory of Brunoy, France, focusing his research on ecophysiology in mouse lemurs under the supervision of Martine Perret. During this period, he met two of his mentors, Pierre Charles-Dominique and Alain Schilling. Pierre Charles-Dominique intrigued Fabien with field adventures from Madagascar. Alain Schilling, who was working on the olfactory communication among mouse lemurs, and Fabien became friends. Alain's scientific creativity remained a constant source of inspiration for Fabien.

When he received his Ph.D. in 2002, Fabien decided to study the mouse lemurs in their natural environment. Fabien spent several years in the region of Tôlanaro (Fort Dauphin) and especially in the Berenty Reserve. His goal was to investigate the role of sensory drive in speciation. In the southern xerophytic thickets of Madagascar, he grew into an indefatigable fieldwork expert and used his live-trapping and radio-tracking skills to study birds, frogs and small nocturnal primates both

in Madagascar and Africa. Working in the field prompted him to expand and shift his research focus to more ecological questions, in particular the role of highly seasonal and unpredictable environments on life history.

Fabien moved to South Africa in 2006, where he worked first at the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg and 2 years later as an assistant professor at the University of Fort Hare. In Pietermaritzburg he met Judith Masters and their communion of ideas, enthusiasm, and dedication, interweaved into an extraordinary personal and scientific path.

Fabien's research expanded to address the complex link between macro- and micro-evolution and the relationships between habitat preference and specific-mate recognition systems, with an emphasis on acoustic communication. More recently, he was the heart of an international interdisciplinary project aimed to understand how vertebrates had managed to colonize his beloved island of Madagascar.

He was a member of three primatological societies (Primate Ecology and Genetics Group, South Africa; African Primatological Society and International Primatological Society) and co-founder of the African Primate Initiative for Ecology and Speciation (APIES). He was involved in community conservation projects both in Madagascar and in the Hogsback village, where he actively contributed to local conservation of primates, amphibians, and birds. Fabien was also a very committed teacher, eager to pass on his knowledge to the next generation with uncompromised dedication. He was highly regarded by both his national and international students whom he supervised and guided to reach different levels of qualification.

Fabien was curious, passionate, an excellent naturalist and a scientist with vast knowledge and experience. His many interests included musicology, especially ethnomusicology. He was not afraid to think outside the box and was always challenging ideas, especially his own. With his sudden, unfair demise the primatological community has lost a very fine mind, and the mouse lemurs of Berenty, as well as the dwarf galagos of Tshanini, have lost a devoted admirer.

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