# The Ecology Research Group at Canterbury Christ Church University – a potted history.

The *Ecology Research Group* (ERG) was originally set up in the 1980s by a group of academics from Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) and the University of Kent, and led to the formation of the *Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology* (DICE) in 1989. By agreement, the name ‘Ecology Research Group’ devolved to CCCU and it is now housed within the *School of Human and Life Sciences*. The ERG currently comprises a group of academics, technicians and researchers operating mainly from the Laud laboratories at the Canterbury Campus, North Holmes Road.

Two CCCU academics, Professor Georges Dussart and Dr Mike Nicholls, began research in the ERG as it devolved from DICE in 1989 and by the middle of the 1990s, it had become a recognised brand. As new staff arrived, its early focus on freshwater and estuarine ecology, malacology and birds of prey expanded to include soil science, agricultural ecology, fisheries research, disease vector ecology land reclamation and the ecology of invasive species. Today, its work also includes population genetics, chemical ecology, coastal ecology, phytoremediation and interactions between people and wildlife.

Initially, the research was carried out from the teaching laboratories at North Holmes Road but in 1992 the University acquired the Mount hospital at Stodmarsh and part of the complex was converted to research laboratories specifically for the ERG. In 2004, the Mount was sold and the ERG moved to a rented suite of laboratories in the Russell Building at Imperial College’s Wye Campus where it remained until a purpose-built suite of laboratories were provided in the Laud Building at the CCCU North Holmes Road campus in October 2009.

Whereas DICE now focuses largely on the conservation of biodiversity in developing countries, the ERG currently brings together multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise to specialise in three key areas of research and knowledge transfer in the UK and in developing countries, *viz.**Natural Resource Management*, *Agricultural Ecology and Resource Management*and *Animal Ecology, Behaviour and Conservation***.** Its mission is to focus on high quality scientific research in areas of environmental management and monitoring, and applied ecology to provide expertise to the wider community, while developing a strong research and learning environment within the university. There is a strong emphasis on research informed teaching and undergraduate involvement in research and KE

The ERG conducts high quality scientific research, knowledge transfer and consultancy, funded and supported by a range of commercial, public, private and charitable organisations. Outputs range from publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals, textbooks and PhD theses to conference presentations, private reports and media broadcasts. The work of the ERG has been presented at conferences in North and South America, Asia, Australia, Africa and Europe.

During its 25 year history, the ERG has accumulated more than £1.5 million of external funding and has involved the activity of more than 60 researchers. Twenty postgraduate researchers have been awarded PhDs for their work with the ERG and a further 3 were awarded MPhils.

Today, its hub consists of 9 full time staff, 4 PhD students, 8 visiting research fellows and many, many collaborators (local government, industrial, educational, environmental, agricultural and horticultural) as well as numerous volunteers and undergraduates.