Arid Zone Ecology – Calperum Station SA video transcript 25/7/12

Narrator:

Calperum Station is a 242,800-hectare pastoral lease located in eastern South Australia. The station lies near the transition from semi-arid to arid zone. It supports extensive areas of mallee, some chenopod shrub lands and riparian woodlands, and ephemeral wetlands.

Dr Grant Whitman:

Calperum Station is a long established pastoral lease in the river land of South Australia. After about 150 years of grazing it was actually purchased with private philanthropic funds and Commonwealth Government money, de-stocked and since the mid 90’s its been used really as a landscape management training area, a place where communities can try new things about managing landscapes and getting involved and more importantly a place for education and training and capacity building.

Narrator:

The station is also the perfect backdrop where students from La Trobe’s Albury-Wodonga and Melbourne campuses are introduced to the ecology of the Australian arid zone. Arid zone ecology is one of two new field trip based subjects offered by the Department of Environmental Management and Ecology at La Trobe Albury-Wodonga. Students undertake ecological research in the field, reinforcing and extending their capacity in this area.

Hugh Sinclair:

We are out here looking at erosion, which has affected this area over the last 20 or 30 years. I think its got pretty bad, not sure the extent at the moment because no tests have really been done.

Narrator:

For eight days at Calperum Station undergraduate students study organisms and ecosystems through daytime excursions, team-based research projects, and through daily discussions and lectures.

Dr Peter Pridmore:

This subject came about because some of us have a great deal of enthusiasm for arid Australia and after all 70% of Australia is arid, its an important part of the geography of Australia, and we wanted to take some students out and let them have a bit of a look at least a little bit of this as well as develop their field techniques.

Jirana Bootanjai:

What we’re doing is trying out an application, seeing how we can use this iPad in the field and make use of it. So what I’m using for now is taking photo’s, using the 8 megapixel camera, taking videos, taking notes on it and at the end of the camp I’m able to then transfer it onto the internet and give it to all my team members.

Narrator:

In both subjects students are split up into approximately 8 groups and look at different components of these ecosystems.

Ebony Bullock:

Some groups are working on soils, analysing the properties of those, some groups are looking at vegetation, we have two groups looking at macro-invertebrates, one at terrestrial and one at aquatic, we have a group looking at mammals and we have a group looking at waterbirds. So they’re all going to come together at the end of this subject and combine all of the knowledge they have gained about these different components of the ecosystem and gain a basic understanding of the whole of the arid zone.

Dr Peter Pridmore:

We’re running a subject that has some on-line components, so they don’t came out here ignorant, they have read up a bit before it and then we come out and run some research projects. We’re running 7 research projects with 5 students per group, that means they can get together, have a fairly good interaction with the staff members and a good interaction with the other people they’re working with.

Olivier Nougher:

I just found it really interesting, and I like the hands on environment that the University has, because we have lots of practical classes and it just helps with the lectures, so its more understandable and you get more value out of the course.

Dr Peter Pridmore:

It’s important that they have hands on experience with the techniques that they might have to use in their future careers. Many of them perhaps won’t become research scientists but they need to understand how research scientists work and the limitations and the strengths of the kind of data that research scientists get.

Narrator:

Earlier this year close to 40 students took part in a similar subject conducted in alpine and sub-alpine eco-systems at the Bogong High Plains near Falls Creek. These subjects can potentially be an important part of many science courses as both the arid-zone ecology and alpine ecology provide new methods to learn in these fields.

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