**Citation: Duncan Butchart**

Mr Duncan Butchart personifies what it means to be an engaged intellectual and life-long learner. He is an ecologist, environmentalist, bird specialist and artist, and despite having no university training, is much in demand as a speaker, specialist guide and author. His passion for Africa’s wildlife has resulted in many sought-after publications. However, his commitment to empowering hundreds of wildlife guides to high levels of professionalism, and scholarship in their own right, is a feature of his life’s work. His generosity in sharing his specialist knowledge and skills, accumulated through informal learning driven by his own curiosity and persistence, has meant that many local communities have been enriched in their knowledge and understanding of the African environment.

Most people who work as ecologists have postgraduate degrees which have served to support them in gaining the foundational knowledge needed for their work. Mr Butchart has only one formal tertiary qualification - a diploma in Wildlife Management through the Pretoria Technical College, which he paid for by working in a bookstore, because it gave him access to information that fascinated him. When he was 12 years old, the family immigrated to South Africa from the UK, and for a boy excited by the wildlife of England, the prospect of the big game of Africa was thrilling. The bookstore provided a ready source of information, and during this time he volunteered to work for a vulture study group. This led to him becoming co-author of a definitive text on vultures, which was foundational in developing his acute powers of observation, his memory for detail, and his desire to share his knowledge with others.

Mr Butchart’s publication profile shows that he has not only mastered scientific method but also the public communication of science. He has conducted habitat surveys, developed species checklists and field maps, edited wildlife magazines, and produced many articles, paintings, and illustrated maps. His publication record is impressive, with works ranging from definitive reference books such as the ‘Vultures of Africa’ (Academic Press Inc) to numerous affordable field guides. He is an accomplished editor, having edited for seven series, with his own articles published in 15 magazines or newspapers. He is author or co-author of 29 books on birds and wildlife, published by 12 different publishers. Illustrations are vital for communicating with a minimum of jargon, and as an accomplished artist Mr Butchart has illustrated his own books, as well as being featured in 22 other books. His illustrations include paintings of birds, fish and mammals, and he has exhibited paintings in four exhibitions. He also specialises in creating illustrated maps, many of which have been commissioned at an international level. His most recent works include a book, ‘Wildlife of South Africa’ (Struik), which has been translated into Afrikaans, and a laminated guide of the most conspicuous birds of Mbombela, which is the only guide available that provides siSwati names.

One of Butchart’s most significant contributions to wildlife advocacy is his leadership of more than 200 safari guides in six African countries. These guides came almost entirely from rural areas, and although they were skilled naturalists, and had, as he put it, ‘unrivalled opportunities to witness the ever-changing panorama of African ecosystems and to gather ecological information’, they lacked reporting and writing skills. Mr Butchart’s teaching and mentoring of these guides impacted not only on the quality of their work and levels of knowledge, but resulted in a number of unique annual publications, which were compiled, edited and published by Mr Butchart. This initiative represented a pioneering project in encouraging local guides from throughout Africa to contribute to knowledge of African wildlife. The ’Ecological Journal’ and ‘Wildwatch Annual ’, initially meant for use by rangers and wildlife managers, quickly became sought after by guests staying at lodges, and subsequently have been accessioned into institutional and private libraries across the world. These journals served to convert fragmented and anecdotal information to material that is valuable to the scientific community. The significance for the wildlife guides and rangers was that their work achieved recognition beyond entertaining guests — the information they shared increased their knowledge and power to educate others and be educated themselves.

Mr Butchart actively supports national and international wildlife associations. He has developed a wildlife photo-library of over 20 000 photographs from his cosmopolitan travels. His wealth of experience has resulted in him being a sought after specialist bird guide, in South Africa and overseas. He is frequently asked to give illustrated lectures to societies, clubs, travel groups and schools. He voluntarily mentors and supports community bird and safari guides and supports projects through sourcing funding and offering guidance on data gathering and monitoring. He has been involved in community conservation in Kenya and South Africa.

It is appropriate for the University of the Witwatersrand to confer an honorary doctorate on Mr Butchart in recognition of his contributions to wildlife education, conservation and scholarship. His work epitomises the intellectual tradition that Wits stands for, in terms of his scholarly contributions, and in using one’s own knowledge to empower others.