



In Memoriam: Nicolaas Johannes Marie (Niek) Gremmen (July 13, 1948–August 11, 2019)

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On Sunday August 11th, 2019, well-known sub-Antarctic botanical ecologist, Niek Gremmen, lost the battle against an aggressive brain tumor, which gradually impaired most of his physical and mental functions. He died in his home in Diever, The Netherlands.

Niek studied biology at the University of Nijmegen (the Netherlands) and specialized in vegetation science. For his Ph.D. research he studied the vegetation of the sub-Antarctic islands Marion and Prince Edward. His Ph.D. was awarded in 1981, transforming knowledge of vegetation structure and dynamics in the sub-Antarctic forever. His published thesis remains a classic. During his fieldwork he worked at the University of Orange Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa, establishing a lifelong connection to the country alongside his enduring love for the sub-Antarctic Prince Edward Islands.

Following his Ph.D., and together with his colleague Onno van Tongeren, Niek started a commercial advisory service, producing vegetation maps, making botanical inventories, advising on conservation strategies, and doing similar work. He maintained this consultancy work for his entire life. But as soon as there was an opportunity to travel to Marion, Niek was on his way.

A few times, the Netherlands Polar Programme employed Niek for a field season, and he contributed knowledge to current understanding of the botany of the Antarctic Peninsula. His most significant contributions, however, were to the botany of the Marion and Prince Edward Islands, including knowledge of the impacts of both climate change and biological invasions. His prescience in setting up more than 40 long-term plots was extraordinary, especially at a time when

support for long-term work was very difficult to achieve. While the South African National Antarctic Programme (SANAP) supported Niek's work via logistics and accommodation at the island, and via grants to his South African colleagues, Niek provided all the support for the work to be done off site.

Niek's work, reflected in classic papers such as the impact of *Agrostis stolonifera* on sub-Antarctic island biodiversity, and those on the region's mosses and their associated biota, has made a huge contribution to understanding of the region. South Africa understood the value of his work. SANAP employed him several times to advise on eradication of non-native species on, and on management of the Prince Edward Islands. In collaborations with the U.K., he provided similar advice for Gough Island and for Tristan da Cunha.

Over the years, vegetation science has made increasing use of statistical and mathematical methods for the explanation of vegetation patterns and vegetation development. Niek excelled in these techniques and his published work reflects this. An Antarctica-wide study on the invasion of non-native species would not have been authoritative had Niek not led the analyses, and contributed most of the identifications of the seeds of the non-native species, for the work.

On expeditions and in the field, Niek was a fantastic colleague. He was always ready with advice, but in the most modest and gentle way. His dry sense of humor, broad knowledge, and talent with a guitar were great value on long ocean voyages.

We have lost with Niek's passing a talented botanist, admired colleague, and dependable friend.

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