

INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES TAKE OVER THE OKAVANGO DELTA

Have you ever looked at a beautiful plant in awe and admired how it flourished? Have you ever spotted a plant and wondered how you had never seen it in the past years, or what plant species it is? Plants specialists Alison and Rodger Heath, who studied plants of Northern Botswana for the past sixteen years were at Cresta President Hotel on the evening of February 16th to make a presentation to a diverse crowd of scholars, government departmental heads, private sector companies, Non-Governmental Organisations, the media and private individuals. The presentation was aimed at alerting the attendees about the Invasive Alien Species (IAS) plants and the effect, with emphasis on the Okavango Delta.



The Seminar audience attentively listening to the presentation.

From their presentation, Rodger said that Invasive Alien Species are the second biggest threat to biodiversity and are a major cost to the economic well-being of the planet. They cause enormous and often irreversible harm to biodiversity around the world by displacing native and useful species and changing ecosystems.

IAS plants in the Okavango Delta have been introduced directly or indirectly by human activity outside or within the Delta, either carried through trucks or boats, Rodger highlighted. The invasive species are of little nutritional value compared with the indigenous plants. They may be distasteful and even harmful. Some of the indigenous plants are at a risk of extinction due to these invasive alien plants. This causes a huge concern as this will have a ripple effect on Botswana's economy, especially on tourism.

Humans travel and introduce species to new locations for food, social or economic purposes as an intentional act. Many more species have, however been accidentally transported around the world as a by-product of human activities such as trade, travel and transport which is referred to as unintentional introduction. Invasive alien species are responsible for the extinction or decline of many species and continue to pose a huge threat to many more. Australia is spending billions of dollars every year in lost production, control and mitigation efforts, loss of ecosystem services and many other ways brought about by



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invasive alien species.

For her part, Alison said alien species enter countries through both legal and illegal routes, and introductions can be both intentional and unintentional, the impacts of other environmental problems like fire or pollution tend to diminish over time. She said Botswana is so diverse that is why they choose to concentrate on the delta.

After such a captivating presentation, the audience were pregnant with questions and comments. Most commended the presenters for their great job and decried awareness as the first crucial step in tackling the problem of invasive alien species, especially those of plants.

In closing, the Environmental Education and Community Liaison Committee Member and KCS Board member, Mr. Ruud Jansen thanked the public for their never-ending interest and their support. He said partnerships between government, private sectors and the NGOs play a pivotal role in sharing of information – which this seminar is a notable example. He said KCS will keep the interaction with the public and local communities concerned about the environmental issues, promote dialogue and action.

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