UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL ™
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

School of Life Sciences

Invitation to a

Public Lecture

(Hybrid Event)

TITLE

Serpentine: Evolution and Ecology of a Model System

By

Professor Nishanta Rajakaruna,
Biological Sciences Department, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, USA

WEDNESDAY, **24 MAY 2023** ■ **12h00 - 12h45**

IN PERSON VENUE: Room B208A, John Bews B Building, Pietermaritzburg Campus

FOR ONLINE ATTENDANCE, Click here TO REGISTER

SYNOPSIS: Serpentine soils have long fascinated biologists for the specialized floras they support and the challenges they pose for plant survival and growth. The talk will highlight what we have so far learned about major questions in evolution, ecology, conservation and restoration from the study of serpentine-associated plants and other biota from California to South Africa and beyond.

About the Speaker: Nishi Rajakaruna fell in love with natural history and ecology while growing up in Sri Lanka. He left Sri Lanka during the height of the country's civil war and carried out his undergraduate, graduate and postdoctoral studies in North America. Nishi received his BA in Human Ecology from College of the Atlantic, Maine and his MS and PhD in Botany from the University of British Columbia, Canada. He conducted postdoctoral research at Stanford University and was a Fulbright US Scholar in Sri Lanka/India (2016-2017). Nishi is currently in South Africa for 11 months as a Fulbright US Scholar at the School of Biological Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom.

Nishi is a geoecologist broadly interested in how 'harsh' soil conditions influence plant, lichen, and microbe diversity from species to community levels. He has taught botany for 18 years and is currently a Professor of Plant Biology at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California. His primary area of research is on the diversity, ecology, evolution, and conservation of plants and lichens of serpentine and other 'harsh' soils. He has ongoing research in California, Maine, South Africa, Russia, and Sri Lanka and is excited to explore opportunities for collaborative research in Madagascar. Nishi has published over 90 peer-reviewed papers and is the co-editor of two key treatments on plant life on serpentine soils [*Serpentine: Evolution and Ecology of a Model System and Soil and Biota of Serpentine: A World View* and a book titled *Plant Ecology and Evolution in Harsh Environments* (2014)].

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