



The Campus This Week

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Forestry Department's Dr Maraia successfully defends PhD thesis

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EARNING a PhD is a long and challenging journey that requires hard work, patience, and consistency, says Dr Heveakore Maraia.

Dr Maraia recently joined PNG University of Natural Resources and Environment's (PNG UNRE) Forestry Department as a Lecturer in Plant Science.

He completed his PhD studies at the University of South Bohemia in the Czech Republic and successfully defended his PhD thesis in Ecosystem Biology and Ecology online on March 10 this year, marking a historic first for PNG UNRE, as it was the first time a thesis was defended online rather than in person.

Reflecting on the experience, Dr Maraia acknowledged the difficulties of presenting online, citing internet issues, time zone differences, and the lack of direct interaction with his audience.

"Without seeing my audience, it was hard to tell if they understood my presentation. However, I was grateful to have some of our senior staff with me who provided moral support during the presentation. Their presence reassured me and helped boost my confidence. I prepared well, practiced my speech, and thought ahead about possible questions, which ultimately helped me

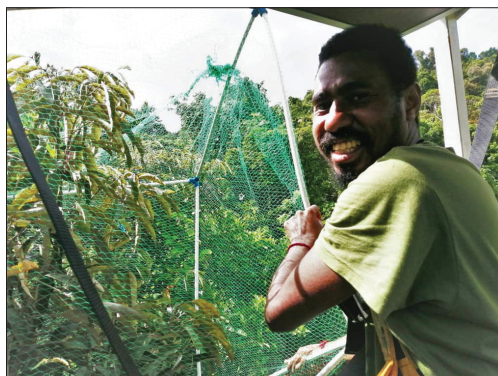
succeed," he said.

Dr Maraia's PhD journey spanned four years and involved managing a large research project, collecting field data, supervising assistants, and conducting extensive data analysis.

"I had to read and summarize numerous scientific papers, learn statistical methods, and refine my research skills independently. While my supervisor provided guidance, I had to stay focused and maintain steady progress. Success requires commitment, problem-solving, and the ability to adapt to challenges. This achievement was the result of years of dedication and passion for science," he explained.

When asked what motivated him to pursue a PhD, Dr Maraia shared his deep curiosity about tropical forests and passion for biodiversity conservation.

"Growing up in Papua New Guinea, I saw how communities depend on forests for their livelihoods. This inspired me to pursue higher education so I could



▲ Dr Maraia collecting insects over tree tops using a canopy crane at the Daintree Rainforest Observatory in Cairns, Australia.

contribute to conservation and scientific research," he said.

Dr Maraia brings a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience to PNG UNRE. As a researcher and educator, he is committed to improving education at the university.

"I plan to introduce new teaching methods, mentor students, and support research on environmental issues. Additionally, I aim to help establish a herbarium for storing plant specimens from New Britain Island. This will serve as a resource for research and conservation.

"I also want to contribute to curriculum development for forestry and the university as a whole, ensuring that students receive quality education tailored to the environmental challenges of our region," he explained.

His academic journey

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Forestry students conduct awareness at Gazelle schools for International Day of Forests

FORESTRY students celebrated the International Day of Forests (IDF) on Friday, March 21 by conducting awareness sessions at three secondary schools in Gazelle District.

The students delivered presentations on the importance of forests, their economic and subsistence uses, and the consequences of poor forest management.

Their discussions were focused on this year's IDF theme: "Forests and Foods."

Acting Head of the Forestry Department, Mr Stephen Keu, commended the students for taking the lead to commemorate the day.

"The well-articulated presentations on the theme was explained well to students in those three secondary schools; Utmei, George Brown and Kerevat School of Excellence which

generated many questions.

"Our Forestry students did extremely well in responding to tough questions being asked by both students and teachers of visited schools," he said.

Mr Keu further stated that there is already interest in the schools visited for International Day of Forest to be commemorated in future.

He is hopeful that in the coming years, forestry students will lead even bigger and better educational awareness programs.

The entire department took pride in promoting both the International Day of Forests and the University's Bachelor of Sustainable Tropical



▲ Forestry students prepare to leave campus.



▲ Utmei Secondary School students with Forestry students.

Forestry program.

The students were accompanied by Mr Keu, lecturer Dr Heveakore

Maraia, tutor Ms Theresa Aiviri, executive officer Ms Serah Jacob and other department staff.

Academic milestones mark Dr Maraia's commitment to forest and plant research

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began with a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from PNG University of Technology, followed by a Master's degree focusing on plant taxonomy and ecology.

His PhD studies at the University of South Bohemia allowed him to conduct field research, lead teams, and publish scientific papers.

Beyond academia, Dr Maraia briefly worked with PNG Forest Authority under the Policy and Planning Directorate's Inventory Section from November 2013 to February 2014. During this time, he and his colleagues helped establish National Forest Inventory plots using desktop analysis with a Google search engine tool called "CollectEarth."

In 2018, he joined the New Guinea Binatang Research Center as a botanist, combining scientific research with conservation efforts.

Dr Maraia believes that with

determination and focus, students can also achieve great success.

"To students, I encourage perseverance, curiosity, and determination. Success is not easy, but if you stay focused and passionate, you will achieve your goals. Learning is not just about books. Go into the field, ask questions, and learn from experienced people. Earning my PhD was challenging but fulfilling."

Dr Maraia hopes his story inspires



▲ Sampling insects in the understory of the forest in Madang Province.

others to work hard, seek knowledge, and make a positive impact in conservation, food security, and community development.



▲ Dr Maraia measuring leaf toughness in the molecular laboratory using an electronic penetrometer.