Meet the scientist

Name: Professor Mike Davies-Coleman

Place of Birth: Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Where is your place of work? University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa

Job titles: Dean of Natural Sciences and Professor of Chemistry

Who do you work for? The University of the Western Cape and the Faculty of Natural Sciences.

What do you do? Research is an important component of an academic Dean and university professor's job. I spent most of my academic career running a research laboratory investigating the interesting chemistry produced by marine organisms such as sponges and seaweeds. I was fortunate to have had the opportunity, for the past seven years, to also investigate the impact which these marine chemicals might have on climate change, particularly those we know are volatile and have one or more of chlorine, bromine and iodine atoms in their chemical structures (known as halocarbons). The team I work with has made the first important measurements of marine halocarbons in the atmosphere above the Southern Ocean, just south of where I now live and work.

What skills do you have to use in your job? The ability to work with others, a good academic background in chemistry, hands on experience of the scientific method, an appreciation of science in all its forms and an enthusiasm for the public understanding of science. As chemists, we also need to be driven to know more about the fundamental chemistry of the world around us.

Why do you like your job? No two days are ever the same. I love teaching and I never get tired of the thrill of making new discoveries, however long they take to discover, and sharing these discoveries with others. Most importantly, I get to work and interact with incredibly interesting scientists, both young and old, from around the world.

What inspired you to choose a career in science? I grew up in an incredible country in Southern Africa where we had wildlife and an amazing biodiversity all around us. I was given a scientific microscope when I was seven and a chemistry set when I was ten and have never looked back ever since. This early enthusiasm for biology and chemistry was accelerated by excellent O and A level science teachers at school, and an organic chemistry professor at university whom I admired and whose "hands on" approach to, and enthusiasm for chemistry research, is something I have tried to emulate in my own academic career.