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Waterberg News, Happenings and Events August 2021
Special Edition

Important Research Project for the Waterberg

Prof Nigel Barker of Pretoria University and his team have been awarded R4,5 million to conduct research on biodiversity in the Waterberg.

WNC EXCO member Marilize Greyling has been appointed to manage the project.

Here Marilize explains what the project is and how you can become involved.

Waterberg Biodiversity Research programme.

Prof Nigel Barker (Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, University of Pretoria) and a large multidisciplinary team have been awarded R4.5 million over a period of three years to conduct research on the biodiversity of the Waterberg Mountain Complex. The funding is provided by the FBIP (Foundational Biodiversity Information program). The FBIP is funded by the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) and jointly managed by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

The team led by Prof. Barker thus includes researchers and postgraduate students from seven Universities (University of Pretoria, Rhodes University, University of Mpumalanga, University of Venda, University of Limpopo, UKZN and WITS) and four research organisations (SANBI, SAIAB, Ditsong Museum and Bayworld museum).

The overall aims and objectives of the project are:

1. To liaise and collaborate with the various stakeholders and organisations dedicated to the conservation and management of biodiversity of the Waterberg Mountain Complex in order to determine biodiversity assessment and conservation priorities.
2. To undertake baseline biodiversity surveys in areas and/or habitats recognised by the stakeholders as being important or priority. This will include botanical, entomological, mammalian, avian, fish, and herpetological assessments. These baseline surveys will provide a massive amount of biological specimens and material collected for future DNA studies and augment various databases on the national biodiversity of these taxa. Based on a preliminary assessment of what is known about the biodiversity of the region, as well as possible future environmental threats, several priority areas have been identified for intensive biodiversity surveying (see map).
3. To undertake multiyear surveys in selected reserves in the Waterberg region such as Marakele National Park, designed in a manner to provide biodiversity data that is specific to their needs (for example, sampling altitudinal and rainfall gradients).
4. To assess species and habitats of special concern in terms of their continued conservation and management. This will include an assessment of among other things invasive species, and the recovery of old lands and other disturbed areas.
5. To undertake DNA barcoding on samples collected of over 1000 samples of specific taxa, including fish, aquatic macroinvertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, birds, bats, rodents, beetles and other selected arthropod taxa.
6. To provide data and information to all stakeholders so that regional and provincial conservation plans can be improved or nuanced
7. Community engagement activities. One of the most important components of this project is the planned involvement of the local Waterberg communities, in particular school teachers and learners. There are several environmental education organisations in the Waterberg with whom we will collaborate. A citizen science component focussing on the use of biodiversity apps such as “iNaturalist” and “BirdLasser” will also be launched, as well as training in the art and science of collecting plants and insects. An iNaturalist project for the region has

been created (see <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/waterberg-biodiversity>), and all stakeholders are welcome to participate. See <https://www.inaturalist.org/home> for details on this, and the app can be downloaded for smartphones (Apple and Android).

This project will commence in the spring of 2021, and currently the team is planning their research projects and preparing for the field season.

Waterberg resident and enthusiast, Marilize Greyling, has been appointed by the University of Pretoria to manage the project. If you wish to participate in the project or if your property falls within the priority areas identified (and you would like to propose your property to be included in the study) please contact Marilize at info@waterbergresearch.org.za / 079 457 8644 (WhatsApp only).

We are looking forward to launching this very exciting project in the Waterberg!

Watch this space for more information.

Prof. Nigel Barker and Marilize Greyling

Next WNC Meeting September 9th -- full Covid 19 protocols

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