

CROCODILE SPECIALIST GROUP EVENT PUTS SOUTH AFRICA AND UNIVERSITY'S VET FACULTY ON THE WORLD MAP

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Mpho Ramoshaba (dti), Dr Rob Davies (Minister of Trade & Industry), Sfevan van As (Le Croc and chairman of ELSA), and Robert Schäfer (Cape Cobra and ELSA) at the Expo during the CSG Working Meeting. Photograph: African Leather

CROCODILE SPECIALIST GROUP EVENT PUTS SOUTH AFRICA AND UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA'S EXOTIC LEATHER RESEARCH CENTRE ON THE WORLD MAP

A 'huge success for the University of Pretoria and the Faculty of Veterinary Science and judged as one of the best Crocodile Specialist Group (CSG) working meetings held thus far'. This is how the Director of the OP Faculty of Veterinary Science's Exotic Leather Research Centre (ELRC), Prof Gerry Swan describes the 24th working meeting of the IUCN CSG that was held in Skukuza at the end of May 2016. More than 340 delegates from 42 countries attended this prestigious event of the IUCN/SSC/CSG Workgroup at Skukuza which returned to South Africa after 43 years with the 2nd working meeting having been held at Ndumu Game Reserve in 1973. The theme for this year's event was "*Crocodiles, Communities and Livelihoods*" which highlighted the complex relationship between Africa's top aquatic predator, the Nile crocodile, and the communities who often share the same scarce aquatic resources with these ancient reptiles.

Besides being a scientific congress, this event also presented for the first time a trade expo where producers and various service providers to the exotic leather trade profiled products and services. According to Prof Swan this Expo and exhibition to which the ELRC extensively contributed was of an exceptional standard. More than 21 businesses took the opportunity to profile their products and services to international delegates. The last day of the congress was a highlight, dedicated to "trade" with the Honorable Minister of Trade and Industry, Dr Rob Davies, who delivered the key note address.

This event also served to provide the platform for the launch of Exotic Leather South Africa as one of the cluster initiatives funded by the Department of Trade and Industry (dti). Even more important was that the

newly formed South African Crocodile Industry Association (SACIA) also held its first annual general meeting and the Faculty's Exotic Leather Research Centre was able to present itself to a wide international audience.

In his keynote address, Minister Rob Davies appreciated the theme "Crocodiles, Communities and Livelihoods" of the CSG meeting and its importance in creating economic opportunities based on conservation. "I commend the work done by the University of Pretoria, Exotic Leather South Africa and the South African Crocodile Industry Association in cooperating to compete and exhibit the capacity of the South African leather value chain at this event", the Minister said.

Among other board members and manufacturers, Minister Davies specifically acknowledged the efforts and work of Prof Gerry Swan, Director of the OP Faculty's Exotic Leather Research Centre (ELRC), and Prof Jan Myburgh, a member of the ELRC and Chair in Crocodile Health and Welfare at the Onderstepoort Campus of the Faculty of Veterinary Science.

According to Prof Swan the ELRC, together with its partners, has received exceptional international acclaim and exposure during this event. "The Exotic Leather Cluster model together with the institutional partnership with the University of Pretoria and its mission and goals as well as the research already performed, was acknowledged as a unique and exemplary model for the crocodile industry globally. This has immediately placed the ELRC on the world stage", Prof Swan said.

Note: An amount of R95 500 raised at the charity auction at this event has been earmarked to further assist crocodile scientists in addressing the Oipphant's project in the Kruger National Park.



Author CvB
Last edited by Christoffel van Blerk