

Hans Hoheisen Wildlife Research Station hosts international EpiSTIS meetings

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During the week of 22 to 25 March 2011, Hans Hoheisen Wildlife Research Station (HHWRS), managed by the Faculty of Veterinary Science, hosted various international meetings of the EpiSTIS project in its recently upgraded auditorium and boardroom/library. These meetings included an Open Science Day, a training workshop as well as the Project's final review meeting.

The EpiSTIS project was made possible through a "STEREO II" grant of the Belgian Science Policy Office and started in 2007. The project consisted of two major themes, namely Bluetongue (BT) in Europe (Italy, France and Belgium) and Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in South Africa. For both these themes, multi-disciplinary teams from various South African, Belgian and Italian academic and research institutions looked at ways to integrate remotely sensed imagery of varying resolutions into disease risk and spread models - in South Africa this pertained specifically to the wildlife-livestock interface of the Kruger National Park. Expertise included veterinarians, epidemiologists, modellers, statisticians, geneticists and engineers.



The aim of the Open Science Day was to disseminate some of the knowledge gained during the project to the public. Guests and speakers included about forty people from academia, veterinary regulatory services, conservation, military, NGOs and research institutions. Even though the BT session during the morning was based on the recent European outbreaks, the audience's keen interest was evident in the stimulating discussions that followed the presentations, which was also the case for the FMD session in the afternoon. The final session of the day included a demonstration of the Space-Time Information System (STIS) that was created during the project. The STIS enables semi-automated upload of field information by regulatory services as well as satellite imagery by advanced users. The outputs of the STIS provide information aimed at supporting disease control decision making, such as fence maintenance and vaccination. Various components of the STIS, as well as a large amount of pre-processed satellite imagery, were made available to the audience on DVD.

The workshop held on the following day was aimed at teaching various stakeholders in the STIS how to use its various components, and was attended by twelve invited guests from academia, regulatory services and NGO's.



The EpiSTIS project's final annual review meeting was held on 25 March, and was attended by representatives of the various project partners, the sponsor, a local end-user as well as some independent subject experts from France and Germany. The outputs of the project were favourably received by the reviewing panel and as many as eleven peer-reviewed papers have been identified for publication from the project.

Apart from the success of the scientific component of the meetings, it was also a success for the HHWRS, being the first major event hosted by the Station since its refurbishment. More than adequate accommodation, modern audio-visual equipment, wireless internet and excellent catering (by the Southern African Wildlife College) as well as the unique location, proved that this venue could host many such events in future.

[See more photos in HHWRS Photo Gallery](#)