# Castle Lager, Mark Boucher and the Veterinary Genetics Lab put rhinos in safe hands

By Louise de Bruin

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*Dr Cindy Harper with a representative from the Castle Lager Boucher Legacy and Mark Boucher*

Cricket icon Mark Boucher is not only a champion sportsman, but also someone who is committed to playing his part to protect rhinos from extinction. After retiring from cricket, he partnered with Castle Lager to set up the Castle Lager Boucher Legacy – Rhino in Safe Hands. Boucher chose to specifically support UP's Veterinary Genetics Laboratory (VGL) and aims to raise enough money to register all South Africa's rhinos onto the DNA database of the VGL, known as RhODIS.

Boucher also uses his voice to promote the importance of DNA profiling which can greatly assist law enforcement in rhino poaching prosecutions.

RhODIS, or the Rhino DNA Index System, was developed by the VGL and launched in June 2010. The VGL collects DNA samples of rhinos across Africa to create a database using the unique DNA profile of each individual animal. This database offers sound evidence in cases of rhino poaching and has contributed to several prosecutions. RhODIS has also been included in South African legislation which requires that all rhinos that are darted are sampled and added to the DNA database.

Boucher and Castle Lager have recently made this important work of the VGL much more efficient by donating a 3500 Genetic Analyser, valued at R2,5 million, to the laboratory. This machine enables the laboratory to do the DNA profiling of the rhinos much more rapidly. With more than 13 000 samples on the RhODIS database already and more being added, Dr Harper explains this is an ongoing process and efficiency is key to keeping up with the increasing numbers.

The Blue Bulls rugby team has also recently joined Mark Boucher's Rhino in Safe Hands programme and will assist in raising funds, growing awareness of the plight of the rhino and ensuring that the DNA of all South Africa's rhino is added to the RhODIS database.