

Lecturer from the Faculty of Veterinary Science joins the Zululand Nile Crocodile Research Programme and assists with postgraduate mentoring

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L-R: Xander Combrink, Hannes Botha (Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency), Jonathan Warner (postgraduate student), Dr Jan Myburgh and Mark Robertson after the first transmitter was attached to a Lake St. Lucia crocodile

Dr Jan Myburgh of the Department of Paraclinical Sciences at the Faculty recently joined a team of scientists from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife to, among other things, assist with the attachment of transmitters to crocodiles from Lake St. Lucia.

Dr Myburgh will be directly involved with some of the KwaZulu-Natal crocodile projects, especially those focusing on the effects of aquatic pollution (e.g. lead) while he is also serving as a member of the advisory team of the Nile Crocodile Research programme of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is furthermore acting as co-promoter for a PhD student, Jonathan Warner of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Four postgraduate students are part of the KZN University's Nile Crocodile research programme.

The northern KwaZulu-Natal crocodile research programme focuses on crocodile conservation (crocodile numbers, tracking of movement by using transmitters, reproduction and nest ecology, number of hatchings born per nest, nutrition, external threats, aquatic pollution, etc). Northern KwaZulu-Natal is a most appropriate area to "re-start" the Nile crocodile research, because this is where Tony Pooley started his crocodile research about 50 years ago. Tony is internationally recognised for his groundbreaking work on crocodile biology and behaviour. Most of his findings were published in a book called "Discoveries of a Crocodile Man".

Aquatic ecosystems are severely threatened. Freshwater fish, invertebrates and crocodylians are among the most endangered animals on the planet! The recent mortalities of Nile crocodiles (due to pansteatitis) in the Kruger National Park and Loskop Dam Nature Reserve highlighted the vulnerability of aquatic predators. The two largest populations of Nile crocodiles in South Africa occur in the Kruger National Park and in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

The St. Lucia estuary is very rich in biodiversity and has been granted World Heritage Status. It forms part of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park (formerly known as the Greater St. Lucia Wetland Park). The Nile crocodile is a flagship species for iSimangaliso.



Dr Jan Myburgh is helping Mark Robertson from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (with the floppy hat) to pull out a crocodile from a small freshwater pond close to the Lake