

New SANParks science leadership facility launches

The South African National Parks (SANParks), in partnership with the Organisation for Tropical Studies (OTS) and Nsasani Trust launched a science leadership facility at Skukuza on Thursday, 21 September 2017.



L - R: Danie Pienaar, Karen Vickers, Glenn Phillips, Drs Luthando Dziba and Laurence Kruger.

The resource centre is aimed at delivering science training and leadership programs and enhancing exchange between local and international science students, scientists and researchers; as well as experiential learning opportunities involving local communities bordering the National Parks, in particular the Kruger National Park (KNP).

In addition to the lecture theatre, the science centre facility includes a library and laboratory. The facility, built on what was previously the My Acre of Africa site (a fundraising company which operated in the Park and has since closed), also includes plans for a kitchen/dining hall, as well as student and staff accommodation. The facility's "green" roof, which keeps the centre cool in summer, will be used for botanical experiments.

Funding for the building of the facility came through the US National Science Foundation, Infrastructure Development Programme and Ruggle Trust as well as SANParks.

"We are grateful to OTS and Nsasani Trust for the partnership in the creation of this outstanding facility and believe it will provide opportunities for scientists and students to collaborate in producing the important research findings for the management of protected areas and conservation of biodiversity in general," said Dr Luthando Dziba, Managing Executive – Conservation Services, SANParks.

Since 2004, OTS has been running field based experiential training courses in higher education, in and around the Park, in

partnership with SANParks Scientific Services. In 2013, SANParks signed a memorandum of understanding with the Nsasani Trust, whose focus of which is providing human capital development programs for the South African biodiversity sector. Together, the three entities i.e. OTS, Nsasani Trust and SANParks Scientific Services collaborated to establish the Skukuza Science Leadership Initiative at the new science leadership campus.

Dr Laurence Kruger who is OTS' Director: SA Programmes, said on behalf of OTS and Nsasani Trust that "This leadership in science approach will ensure not only the training of local students, but also foster mutually beneficial partnerships between local students or scientists and the neighbouring communities, to ensure a transfer of skills and a sustainability ethos. Further, the facility is also aimed at demonstrating the potential for minimizing environmental impact by showcasing the ways in which design and materials can reduce the environmental footprint in all aspects of daily living."

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