

Anuran diversity and habitat utilisation in the Vhembe biosphere

The Vhembe Biosphere Reserve that includes the Soutpansberg is known as a biodiverse area; however, several taxonomic groups including the amphibians are poorly studied and a very small portion of this vast area is officially protected within provincial or national reserves. The proposed study is a full collaboration between the North-West University and the University of Venda, and aims to study the amphibian biodiversity along three North-South transects to document frog diversity, seasonal activity and habitat utilization. Several students from UNIVEN and the NWU will receive training and the opportunity to conduct research projects. As the area is also culturally diverse the study also plans to investigate the relationship between people's cultures and biodiversity relating to amphibians in order to increase social inclusion in biodiversity matters. This study will make a meaningful contribution by barcoding representatives of as many frog species as possible to expand the genetic reference database and flag taxonomic species complexes. Furthermore the study will comply with the National Biodiversity Act along with multiple other national and international sustainability strategies; sensitise the public on the plight of amphibians; understanding local naming and classification systems that will be used to produce a poster with photographs of all the frogs in the area and with the common names of each frog in all the local languages used in the area; and train students in the field of taxonomy, ecology and molecular techniques.