



Detection of blood parasites in montane reptiles and birds

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The newly established haemoparasite biology research group on the QwaQwa campus are mainly focussed on finding and describing blood parasites in reptile and avian hosts from afro-montane habitats in Free State and Kwa-Zulu Natal provinces. Work from this research group has already contributed towards the biodiversity of apicomplexan parasites with the discovery of two new afro-montane haemogregarine species that have been described in the blood of a high altitude lizard *Pseudocordylus langi* at the top of the Drakensberg (see Van As et al., 2013). The new discovery of a complete life cycle as well as the description of another new blood parasite species from the blood of *Pseudocordylus melanotus* and *Pseudocordylus subviridis* lizards from afro-montane Free State (see Van As et al., 2015). Most recently a new malaria species (*Plasmodium intabazwe*) was discovered and described in the blood of these afro-montane cordylids (Van As et al, 2016 in press). This project now also utilise novel host detection method for surveying reptile hosts by using a handheld thermal imaging device, striving for a more comprehensive collection method of cryptic and camouflaged reptile hosts.

One of the new projects is the investigation of blood protozoa in afro-montane birds, and we have already discovered two new species of malaria in the eagle spotted owl. This project will document the blood parasites in Afro-montane raptorial birds.

For more information: Refer to Dr van As's profile listed under Researchers/Project leaders