

## Exploring vulnerable African alpine ecosystems for continued conservation

African alpine ecosystems are found in small, isolated patches, mainly in the eastern and southern regions of the continent, covering a total area of 16 500 km<sup>2</sup>. Prof Peter Taylor, Professor-in-Residence of the Afromontane Research Unit in the Department of Zoology and Entomology on the Qwaqwa Campus, along with a group of plant and animal specialists, is conducting research to uncover the biological richness of one of these at-risk Afrotropical alpine hotspots. In the region bordering Lesotho, the Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Witsieshoek Community Conservation Area, they documented 930 plant and animal species across 15 taxon groups through a combination of ecotourism-driven citizen science, biodiversity specialist knowledge, and BioBlitz surveys. This inventory spans an elevation range from the mountain foothills at 1 760 m to the summit at 3 100 m. Additionally, they conducted comparative tests between alpine and subalpine ecosystems in 10 of the taxon groups. The data serves as the basis for continuous conservation assessments and future monitoring efforts.

