

# Profs Aliza le Roux and Peter Taylor's path to academic innovation

By Igno van Niekerk

For the first time, the Department of Zoology and Entomology on the Qwaqwa Campus has two full professors: Profs Peter Taylor and Aliza le Roux. As full professors, they bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table. But this is not where it ends – they are also future-fit leaders, having learnt the power of sharing not only knowledge, but also connections, information, and insights to bolster opportunities and expand horizons. In this process, they act as leaders, guides and mentors to each other, fellow staff members, and students.

## An environment of openness that fosters growth and learning

In a *Teams* conversation she was able to manage between meetings, classes, research, and other duties, Prof Le Roux noted that their cooperation – despite different backgrounds – created an environment of openness that fosters growth and learning. Not only do they learn from each other, but also share resources from their respective networks built over the span of their careers.

As an example, she mentions how Prof Taylor, a renowned expert in small mammal research, has tapped into his network of global connections – both academic and non-academic – to create unexpected opportunities and enrich the university's academic landscape. His openness to learning and a keen eye for synchronicities also turned him into an ideal mentor to emerging scholars, ensuring that his legacy of expertise endures beyond his tenure. The adage, *it is not only what you know, it is also who you*

*know* can seemingly be altered to: *it is not only what you know and who you know, but also who your colleagues know* that can create opportunities to expand horizons beyond the confines of academia, creating synergies with the private sector as well as international partnerships.

As the faculty on the Qwaqwa Campus matures by building its own cohort of senior researchers, both students and staff members benefit from having sharp minds across the spectrum – from professional officers and newly minted PhD holders to full professors with decades of experience and connections. The modern professor is not the insular Einstein we may have expected in the past: a successful full professor embraces the spirit of enquiry, remains open to learning and changing, and forges connections that transcend geographical boundaries. According to Prof Le Roux, part of the joy that growing networks bring is the power of seeing the possibilities in what seem to be random encounters and then connecting dots that others may not even be aware of. And what a great feeling it is – to then see a student, a colleague, or a fellow academic shining. It is the joy of sharing that makes all this worthwhile.

## The whole is much bigger than the sum of the parts

In the Department of Zoology and Entomology, it is becoming clear that systems thinking can be transformative when you bring together varied skills, backgrounds, and strengths in the spirit of connection. Experience has taught these two professors that the whole is much bigger than the sum of the parts. Pondering this, Prof Le Roux agrees, "Yes, it's emergent properties, and we are grateful that the nature of our system results in positive consequences".



Photo: Sonia Small

Prof Aliza le Roux.

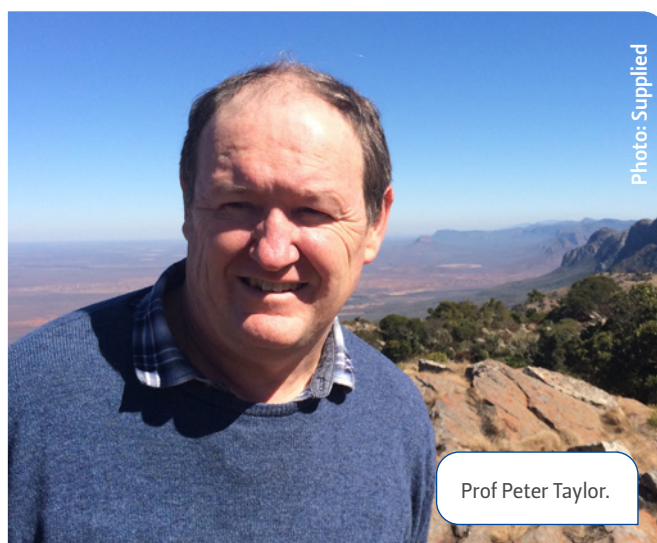


Photo: Supplied

Prof Peter Taylor.