

MSc opportunity

Topic: Evaluating the effect of feather harvesting practices on ostrich welfare and productivity

With the increased global focus on animal welfare and humane practices, current ostrich feather management practices need to be revisited. While plucking of live birds is prohibited in most countries, it is generally accepted that feathers can be obtained from birds in a humane fashion, without causing excessive pain. However, the method and timing of feather removal is very important. Since ostrich feathers are a very important by-product of the ostrich industry, it is vital that feather gathering is done in a humane and sustainable manner to maximize welfare while ensuring continued market access. The objective of this study is therefore to determine the effect of different feather gathering practices on bird welfare, product output and quality, in order to find the best sustainable practices for the ostrich industry. The project will be done in the rural area of Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape, in collaboration with a smallholder cooperative.

The project is approved for funding by the National Research Foundation, with Dr Anel Engelbrecht as Grant Holder. Dr Maud Bonato and Prof Schalk Cloete from the Department of Animal Sciences of Stellenbosch University are co-investigators.

We are seeking a suitable candidate to undertake this exciting research for an MSc degree from 2022. Research activities will consist of:

- Evaluation of the effect of different feather harvesting practices on ostrich production, product quality and stress responses
- Investigating methods of evaluating pain in ostriches in order to find a suitable pain biomarker that can be used to determine whether pain is associated with feather-harvesting practices.

Conditions:

The student will be based at the Oudtshoorn Research Farm, just outside of Oudtshoorn.

A living stipend of 100 000 ZAR/year will be provided during the 2-year duration of the MSc.

Accommodation and a vehicle is available for use at the premises of the Oudtshoorn Research Farm.

Training will be provided in aspects of immunology, ostrich husbandry and product quality.

The project also requires good laboratory facilities and advanced statistical methods for completion, involving close collaboration with people involved in laboratory techniques.

The candidate will have to apply and link to the project on the NRF Online Submission System.

Requirements:

- A degree in animal sciences or biological sciences (honours needed for a 3-year-degree)
- A valid driver's license.
- Previous experience with ostriches or large livestock will be a recommendation.
- Basic knowledge in statistical analyses using SAS, Genstat, SPSS or another software package will serve as a recommendation.
- The successful candidate needs to spend at least 8-10 months/year on site at Oudtshoorn.

Applicants should provide their CV as well as the attached letter of interest to Dr Anel Engelbrecht, Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Oudtshoorn Research Farm. Email: AnelE@elsenburg.com

Deadline: Monday 26 July 2021

Letter of interest

Please complete all the questions below:

1. a) Describe the biggest challenge you have overcome.

- b) How did you overcome it?

2. Name an achievement that you feel particularly proud of during your academic career?

3. Explain why you believe that you will be able to successfully complete this degree?

4. What do you enjoy about research?

5. Reflecting on your academic & personal life, complete the following sentences (NB: There is no right or wrong answer):

❖ I feel strong when

❖ I feel limited when

❖ I value

❖ Life is

❖ People should

6. Highlight the career goals that you are hoping to achieve

a) Within the next year

b) Within 3 years
