

## **SA Academic Wins CIC Thesis Award**

A young, local stewardship officer who came up with a unique approach of looking at how attitudes and beliefs about hunting can be used as a basis for strategies to improve the social legitimacy of hunting, has been recognized with a prestigious, international thesis award. Dr Wentzel Coetzer was awarded the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation's (CIC) Young Opinion Research Award for 2016 at the CIC's 63rd General Assembly in Brussels, Belgium.

The Young Opinion (YO) Working Group of the CIC focuses on creating a global network of young scientists by supporting those whose research projects contribute to the sustainable use of wildlife for the benefit of natural heritage conservation. To qualify for the award, students of masters or doctoral programs had to submit a summary of their research project, explaining the aim, methods and conclusions of the project. "The quality of this year's submissions was outstanding and addressed the three pillars of sustainable wildlife management", said CIC YO Vice-President Denis Slobodyan during the award ceremony.

Coetzer's thesis formed part of his doctorate at the Department of Agriculture and Game Management at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in 2015. Coetzer, who had worked at NMMU as a contract lecturer for five years, said he is honored and overjoyed by this prestigious award. He is currently the Biodiversity Stewardship Facilitator for the Greater Kromme Stewardship (GKS) initiative that is managed by Conservation Outcomes. The initiative offers private landowners in the area the opportunity to play an important role in the conservation of the region's natural heritage.

According to Coetzer, who grew up on a farm near Thornhill, conservation formed part of his daily life from a very young age and is embedded in his DNA. "Having to decide what to study after matric, was a toss-up between mathematics and conservation. When I heard that the only career with a degree in mathematics is that of a statistician, the choice was easy - conservation it was," said Coetzer.