

Zoos link up with Flinders

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Biodiversity conservation in South Australia will benefit from a new agreement between Flinders University and Zoos South Australia, which runs both Adelaide and Monarto zoos.

At the signing of the memorandum of understanding, Vice-Chancellor Professor Anne Edwards also announced the appointment of Zoos South Australia chief executive Dr Chris West as Professor of Biodiversity Conservation at the University.

Professor Edwards said the agreement and appointment would facilitate current and future collaborative projects in areas such as biodiversity research, community engagement in the conservation of threatened native and exotic wildlife species, and would contribute to further development at Monarto, one of the State's major ecotourism sites.

"Biodiversity conservation researchers at Flinders have a long-standing commitment to multidisciplinary research on Australia's biodiversity and landscapes, working with industry and research partners such as the Zoos to understand and interpret the diversity of the ecology, behaviour and evolution of our native biota, and the impact of human interactions in the environment," she said.

Professor Edwards said Dr West's appointment would ensure that Flinders students would benefit from his local and international experience, while the formal agreement would create opportunities for co-operation not only in research but in areas such as facilities, appointments, strategic planning, marketing and postgraduate supervision.

"Our research experience in this area already spans ecology and conservation biology, landscape ecology, cultural tourism, earth sciences, aquaculture, geography, GIS, environmental interpretation, education and screen studies (Flinders is one of three institutions in the world offering a course in natural history film-making)," she said.

Dr West, a former Zoological Director of the Zoological Society of London Zoo, recently arrived in Australia to take up his position with Zoos South Australia.

He said the effect of threatened and actual species losses, along with climate change, drought and water resource shortages and carbon emissions on human society and our economies is increasingly hitting the headlines.

Dr West said that as a conservationist who worked through the zoos, he sees his challenge as motivating visitors not only to think about what is happening, but also to respond in a positive and constructive way.

"I want South Australians to be more and informed about and understand the value of our natural heritage, and what we can do to conserve it for future generations," he said.

"Flinders researchers have the same objective."