

A Tick-et to Global Science: My Journey as a WAAVP Foundation Awardee

Alicia Pillay

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the WAAVP Foundation and African Network for the travel scholarship that allowed me to attend the 29th Conference of the World Association for the Advancement of Veterinary Parasitology in Chennai, India. This experience was an academic milestone and a journey that expanded my horizons as an early career researcher in the field of ticks and tick-borne diseases. Coming home to South Africa, it was clear that my experience had yielded more than just a certificate. I returned with a notebook full of innovative thoughts and a refreshed sense of dedication to my research.

One of the highlights of the conference was presenting my research paper titled "Low genetic diversity and population structuring of *Amblyomma hebraeum* and *Rickettsia africae* from coastal and inland regions in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa." The constructive feedback and engaging questions from the audience and experts in the field was invaluable. It was an honour to share insights from my corner of the world with an international community of scientists.

The keynote sessions were another highlight. Each talk was a masterclass in itself, especially the ones that dived into new molecular techniques. The variety of topics covered ensured that there was something for everyone. But the conference wasn't all charts and graphs, the social events, like the fun run were delightful! There was such a warm, inclusive vibe that networking didn't feel like work at all. It felt like catching up with old friends and making some new ones along the way.

Being a first-timer both in international travel and at a global conference, this whole experience felt like stepping into a new world for me. I can't thank the WAAVP Foundation and African Network enough for giving me this chance. It's opened my eyes to what the global scientific community is all about, and I'm super excited about what comes next.

*A special shoutout to Prof. Rosina Krecek for her warm communications and support throughout this journey. Your kindness made all the difference.

