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## SAIF Council meeting feedback

By Hannel Ham

Changes are evident in everyday life. In order to stay relevant, the SAIF needs to adopt timely to change and constantly revise membership benefits. Therefore, the strategic plan was updated and will be implemented.

We are experiencing a steady decline in membership numbers. This can be attributed to the fact that most of our members are older than 50 years or retiring. A bigger concern is the members that are in arrears and ignoring various emails from Corine. I want to stress the importance to members of please updating your membership details and follow up on payments in a timely manner. The SAIF recently became a member of the Dendrology Society. Newsletters will be distributed as we receive them.

As a member you receive the following benefits: hard copy (four issues a year) of the scientific journal (Southern Forests); monthly Wood SA & Timber Times magazine (hard copy); reduced prices on practical publications (history of forestry, fire and forestry handbooks); annual calendar; monthly newsletter; annual photo competition prizes for best photos; coordination with SACNASP (South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions); national and branch events; bursaries; webpage and increased social media exposure. The council is working hard to keep these membership benefits up to date and interesting for all age groups. However, any suggestions are welcome.

Future benefits that council is currently investigating are:

- A Continuous Professional Leadership (CPL) system to assist with SACNASP registrations, international accreditation, etc. The CPL is in its final stages and will be rolled out early 2018. A pilot phase will commence late 2017.
- Social media warriors: modern communication channels such as twitter, facebook etc. will be used for general communication. Social media shy members will still be kept up to date.
- Increase awareness of Forestry as a career and to general public as a friendly and green partner.
- Web-based interactive membership database to assist with generating of electronic membership certificates, invoices, notices etc. Members would also be able to update details online.

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- New handbooks: Silviculture handbook to be released in 2018 and Timber transport handbook to be released in 2019.
- Extra pages (print) in the Southern Forests Journal and a higher impact number. The online system is also being implemented in the background. Details will follow.
- Register Forest and Wood Sciences as a separate field with SACNASP. Details to follow as soon as we receive feedback from SACNASP.
- An international forestry frame work to improve interaction, bursaries and exchange programs with international forestry associations (Australia, NZ, Canada, USA, Europe etc.). This will also assist with international accreditation.
- But certainly the biggest calendar event that council is planning is the celebration of our 50th birthday on 17 May 2018.

I want to thank all the members for their loyal support without which the SAIF will not survive. Remember the SAIF is for the members by the members. A special word of thanks to all the council members, branch committees, Corine Viljoen and Andrew Morris for continuous support and keeping the SAIF operating.”

## SAIF National AGM

By Hannel Ham

The national AGM was held on Monday 17 July at Ascot Inn, Pietermaritzburg, and attended by 45 SAIF members. The guest speaker was Izak van der Merwe on the interesting topic of trees and the heritage of forestry in South Africa. Izak delivered an insightful presentation on the champion tree project. Trees are rated according to size and age. For more information, please visit: <http://www.nda.agric.za/doaDev/sideMenu/ForestryWeb/webapp/docs/FINAL%20CHAMPION%20TREES%20OF%20SA%202016.pdf> and

<http://www.daff.gov.za/daffweb3/Branches/Forestry-Natural-Resources-Management/Forestry-Regulation-Oversight/Sustainable-Forestry/Champion-Trees>.

On 31 March 2017 we had a total of 395 members. The members per branch are: 169 KZN; 59 Mpumalanga; 52 Western Cape; 47 Gauteng; 39 Southern Cape; 4 Eastern Cape; and 13 overseas. Membership according to categories are: 300 full; 35 student; 28 honorary; 22 retired; and 10 overseas. As the SAIF is a Non Government Organisation (NGO) and Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) but VAT registered, we cannot make a profit according to SARS regulations. However, our finances are in good order and we received a clean audit. The SAIF also belongs to the following societies:

- Habitat Council: Dr Diek van der Zel is the President
- CFA: Commonwealth Forestry Association
- SACNASP: South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions – representative is Hannél Ham
- NSTF: National Science and Technology Forum, which has one of its subgroups SETAG – the Scientific, Engineering and Technological Societies and Allied Professions Group of South Africa – Prof Teresa Countinho is our representative
- ISTF: International Society of Tropical Foresters
- NMMU Advisory Committee – Rob Thompson is the representative

During 2016, a total of 116 manuscripts were submitted for possible publication to the Southern Forest Journal of which 40 were accepted for publication, 40 were rejected at associate editor stage, five rejected after peer review and four withdrawn. Approximately 2 300 institutes (including Universities) have access to the Southern Forest

Journal, while about 9 300 articles were downloaded during 2016. The top 10 downloading institutes were: Stellenbosch University, NMMU, University of KZN, University of Pretoria, University of Calcutta, Gadjah Mada University, University of California (San Diego), University of Florida, University of Tasmania and University of Melbourne. The top ten institutes only account for 29% of the downloads while the South African institutes accounts for 18% of downloads. The impact factor is currently 0.85.

The office bearers for 2017/2018 will be:

- President Hannél Ham
- Past President Andrew McEwan
- Vice-President Sally Upfold
- National Secretary Corine Viljoen
- Branch chairs:
 

Gauteng	Brett Hurley
KZN	Wayne Jones
Mpumalanga	Schalk Jacobs
Western Cape	Dave Drew
Southern Cape	Braam du Preez
- DAFF representative Tendani Mariba
- Editor of Southern Forests Journal Andrew Morris

We would love to hear from our members. For any feedback/suggestions/questions, please contact Corine Viljoen ([saif@mweb.co.za](mailto:saif@mweb.co.za)).



## The Great Knysna (Southern Cape) Fires of 2017

By Braam du Preez

This item has been in the news and probably everybody in South Africa has taken notice of the disastrous fires which struck the Southern and South-Eastern Cape in June 2017. The period leading up to the disastrous fires has been characterised by extremely hot and dry weather with several people expecting problems due to the abnormally low rainfall and frequent berg winds drying out the vegetation and soil over a period of months.

Special warnings were issued from as early as the 3rd of June 2017 and in particular on Tuesday the 6th of June when a severe weather warning was issued and the Western Cape Provincial Education Department responded by closing all public schools across the province for the following day namely the 7th of June 2017. The emphasis was however on very strong winds, very cold conditions with heavy rains expected over the western parts i.e Cape Peninsula and adjacent interior. Foresters and other people in the fire fraternity based in the Southern and SE-cape however realised that the frontal system will be preceded by strong off-shore winds, very low relative humidity and high temperatures which added to the already very dry conditions and low moisture content of the soil and vegetation including the indigenous forest would to quote Greg Forsyth from the CSIR “create a deadly cocktail” as it indeed later turned out to be.

As nobody really knows where it would occur or strike, several fires started (or re-ignited) during the early hours of the morning of 7th of June 2017 and later the same day between Sedgefield and Port Elizabeth causing havoc and with the highest profile fire being the fire which damaged or destroyed more than 1,000 homes in the Knysna municipal area. There were however some near misses with fires near George being stopped while still small by dedicated land-owners and local authorities. On Saturday the 10th of June 2017, the already stretched fire fighters dealing with already long fire flanks exceeding 40km between Sedgefield and Knysna as well as between Knysna and Plettenberg Bay as well as Longmore to the west of Port Elizabeth, faced their next stern test when gale force westerly winds with gusts exceeding 120km/hr once again occurred. It not only played havoc with existing fire lines but also resulted in two new fires starting north of Knysna at Kransbos and at Witelsbos near Storms River doing major damage. The fire near Thornhill crossed the N2 and created havoc when it burnt down several properties including part of the Woodridge Private school near the Van Stadens bridge.

When studying the video footage, photos and eyewitness reports of those affected by the fire, one stands amazed that despite the tragic loss of lives both in the Southern and SE Cape, so few people were injured or died during the disastrous fires especially when compared with the fire in Portugal one week later which claimed the lives of 62 people under similar conditions.

More than 10,000 ha of plantation and a sawmill perished during the fires affecting commercial forestry companies between Sedgefield and Port Elizabeth as well as several dwellings burnt down. So many people were affected by the fires.

There are more questions than answers following the fires and as many theories and people saying “I warned you and told you so...” but very few have answers to all the probing questions on why did it happen, could it have been prevented, what did we do wrong, what can and should we do better etc. The exclusion of fire for decades in certain areas certainly contributed to the intensity of the fire and so did the alien and invasive vegetation but even the evergreen indigenous forest which is not known as a fire dependent and fire prone biome, was badly damaged by the fire in some areas. **Cont. on page 4.**



Photo taken by F. van Zyl at Longmore plantation on 7 June 2017



Witelsbos Plantation after fire on 10 June 2017 (Photographer unknown)

## Knysna Fires 2017 cont.

(Cont. from page 3) It resulted in several people remembering from their forestry studies when they were told of the Big Fire of 1869 which burnt over a distance of more than 400km for several weeks and destroyed livestock, structure and other valuable property as well as several human lives in very much the same area affected by all these fires. Most people agreed that this was an extraordinary event and the so-called perfect storm.

As well-known amongst foresters and other people familiar with fires, the only component of the fire triangle which can be treated / controlled, is the fuel component. It became evident that where fuel loads were treated prior to the fire by prescribed burning either natural vegetation or in plantations by slash burning or under canopy burning, the fire intensity decreased and gave fire fighters at least a slim chance of getting closer to the fire flanks. The head of the fire in the case of each fire, moved so rapidly that it would have been suicidal for anybody to get in the way of the fire due to the rapid movement and very high intensity of the fires.



“Trees have legs after all” – roots totally exposed by high intensity fire at Kruisfontein (Photo by C.Smit)



Indigenous forest in the Harkerville area damaged by the Knysna fire (Photographer unknown)

## Prof. Mike Wingfield received the Distinguished Leadership Award

FABI Director, Prof. Mike Wingfield received the Distinguished Leadership Award for Internationals from his alma mater, the University of Minnesota where he completed a PhD in plant pathology in 1983. The award was presented in a ceremony held on the campus of the University of Minnesota on Friday 2 June.

In naming Prof. Wingfield as a recipient of the award, the University's selection committee cited the depth and breadth of his research in the field of tree pests and pathogens over the past 30 years. As one of the nominators commented, “he has been amongst the most productive scientists of his generation, and possibly ever in the field of forest health. He is an extraordinary scholar, but also an extraordinary leader, mentor, and friend to many scientists around the world.” The Awards ceremony was led by the Provost of the University of Minnesota Prof. Karen Hanson, the President of the University Alumni Association, the Dean of the College for Natural Resources Prof. Brian Buhr, the Head of the Department of Plant Pathology Prof. James Bradeen, and Mike's Ph.D. supervisor Prof. Robert Blanchette.

After the ceremony and a lecture on global tree health trends presented by Mike, he was able to spend time with many friends, including most of his Ph.D. advisors and many past fellow graduate students. He was also able to visit the recently completed statue of Prof. Norman Borlaug, a past faculty member of the Department in which Mike studied, the only Plant Pathologist to receive the Nobel Prize and an academic that Mike had the privilege to know. There is an emerging tradition that rubbing the right foot of the statue will bring good luck. Source:

<http://www.fabinet.up.ac.za/index.php/news-item?id=547>

## SAIF and other upcoming events

- **An Introduction to Modern Tree Breeding Course.** 28 August – 1 September 2017. Pretoria. Contact [SVerryn@CreationBreeding.co.za](mailto:SVerryn@CreationBreeding.co.za)
- **IUFRO 125th Anniversary Congress.** 18–22 September 2017, Freiburg, Germany. <http://iufro2017.com/registration/>
- **SE Asia Tree Health Conference 2017.** 1 – 2 November 2017, Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. [2017SEATH@gmail.com](mailto:2017SEATH@gmail.com).

## It's time to share our alternative realities

By Rob Thompson

South Africa has a population of close on 56 million people, comprising a multi-ethnic society, speaking 11 languages, residing across an area totalling around 1.22 million km<sup>2</sup>. From a biodiversity perspective, the country ranks sixth out of the world's 17 identified megadiverse countries, bearing testimony, to the abundant natural resources available. A temperate climate, further provides an ideal living environment and adds further to the opportunities available for development and economic growth.

Effectively, South Africans have everything going for themselves and yet in reality we are not yet fully united in creating a burgeoning and successful nation, which is an utter shame. More disappointing is the fact that we just don't seem to realise, or recognise, on a collective basis, the opportunities being lost.

Could it be, that as a result of the vast majority of South Africans, not being exposed to alternative realities, we simply do not have a reference to alternative opportunities and goals and remain unaware of the treasures we do have?

Travel should be a mandatory part of South African education. How sad it is that the majority of our people live out their lives within a few hundred kilometres (at best) of where they were born. That small area becomes their reality and reference. Being able to travel however, provides one the opportunity to see one's own reality through the fresh and unencumbered eyes of a visitor.

I was recently privileged to spend some time on the French Island of Réunion and given the breath-taking landscape and cultural dynamics on such a diminutive island, it struck me again how important it is to be able to witness, experience and live alternative realities and measure such against one's own ingrained references.

Réunion is tiny. It is 63 kilometres long and 45 kilometres wide and houses a population of 850 000 people. Hailing from volcanic origins, the island's landscape is rugged and steep, consistent with ancient collapsed and eroded calderas and canyons. Some areas are, to this day, still only accessible by foot or helicopter.

A live shield volcano, the Piton de la Fournaise, at the eastern end of Réunion Island, rises more than 2,631 metres above sea level and is sometimes considered a sister to the Hawaiian volcanoes given similar characteristics. It has erupted more than 100 times since 1640. In April 2007, the lava flow from an eruption, estimated at 3,000,000 cubic metres per day, flowed over a main arterial road into the sea almost as if to remind the islanders of its continual fearsome presence.

What really made a huge impression on me was the cohesive population comprising people of African, Indian, European, Malagasy and Chinese origin. Having intermingled for generations, this mixed race population has created a unique and united Creole culture. Individuals, with distinctly different features and origins, mix happily and without so much as a second glance at the physical variations.

Biodiversity is extremely limited on the island. Fauna and flora currently present would have to have been carried to the once

barren larva island either by sea currents or via sea faring vessels over the millennia. Soil derived from the basalt larva mother rock, now sustains vast areas of sugar cane and some subsistence vegetable and vanilla farms.

With support from France, Réunion comprises a first world entity. Highways and roads are well maintained and laid out efficiently. Buildings and infrastructure that I encountered would not be out of place in the most modern city anywhere in the world. Serviced by an international airport and a trade port, Réunion, despite being surrounded by the Indian Ocean, is certainly a world player in its own right.

What then stops South Africa from emulating this cohesive success story? With our abundance of resources, diverse cultures and array of biomes and wide biodiversity we have literally everything going for us, in fact potentially far more so than Réunion Island.

Whilst on the island, we got talking, in broken French, to a friendly guide who had led us through a warren of larva tunnels. He was delighted to hear that we were from South Africa and told us that one of his most treasured memories was that of showing his two young sons lion and elephant whilst visiting here. Here was a man living on a paradise island enraptured by what South Africa had to offer.

Perhaps we need to actively strive to break down our self-focus and expand our experiential horizons? Imagine if more people from our rural communities were afforded the opportunity to visit a far-away destination and experience another reality. How wonderful it would be if schools arranged tours, as part of the school curriculum, and exposed receptive youngsters to other cultures and landscapes. Universities offering robust student exchange programmes would certainly benefit from the cross pollination of experiences thus obtained.

I understand that my sentiments are unlikely to be achieved on a large scale however, many of us in the forestry industry are privileged to be exposed from time to time, to interesting local and global destinations. I believe that it is our obligation to create opportunities to share our travel experiences with those unable to reach those alternative realities.

We need to educate people as to the experiences of others in alternative situations in order to draw comparisons and lessons. Most importantly we have to promulgate a culture of respect for that abundance that we have available here and often take so much for granted. We have to learn to appreciate and look after what we have.

Unfounded prejudice and reservation prevents better unity between the diverse array of South African cultures. Taking the bold step towards initiating regular discussion in order to share experiences would be a huge step towards creating a unified South African culture. We already have a wonderfully diverse culture within the forestry industry. We need to actively spread this further. Make your travel experience count. Think about the relevance of what you experienced in relation to life here and importantly, share those lessons learnt actively. Start small. At least it's a start and will ultimately grow if fed with enough enthusiasm.

## Forest insect control developments presented at the 2017 Combined Congress of the Entomological and Zoological Societies of Southern Africa

By Brett Hurley and Mesfin Gossa

The 2017 Combined Congress of the Entomological and Zoological Societies of Southern Africa took place from 3–7 July at the CSIR International Convention Centre, Pretoria, South Africa. Over 400 people attended the congress, moving between four parallel sessions covering a wide variety of thematic areas. The congress hosted plenary presentations by eminent scientists, including Prof. Daniel Simberloff (Editor of the prominent journal *Biological Invasions*). Academic staff, postdoctoral fellows and postgraduate students from the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI) of the University of Pretoria attended the congress and presented work relating to forest insect pests. A significant contribution to the meeting was made by this group with a total of 11 oral presentations and seven posters.

Presentations from the FABI group covered a wide range of topics. These included the use of DNA-based tools to understand the genetic diversity of insect pests and their biological control agents, and the influence of this diversity on the reproductive ability of these species. These tools are also used to determine whether cryptic species are present. These are species that are difficult, or impossible, to distinguish based on morphological characteristics, and thus require sequence data. One example of this is the *Gonipterus* species complex (eucalypt snout beetles), where at least three of these species have been introduced to eucalypt growing regions outside Australia where they have become serious pests. For about 100 years it was thought that these were all the same species, namely *Gonipterus scutellatus*, but only recently with the use of DNA markers has it been shown that in fact multiple species have been introduced; none of the introduced species are *G. scutellatus*. Similarly, the pine weevil *Pissodes nemorensis* was reported in South Africa in 1942, but recent research has shown that the species in South Africa is not *P. nemorensis* but an unidentified *Pissodes* species of North American origin.

A recent case of discovering cryptic insect pest species is that of the bluegum chalcid, *Leptocybe invasa*, and the pine weevil, *Pissodes* sp. FABI researchers recently detected the presence of two *Leptocybe* lineages in South Africa, potentially two different species. The second lineage / species was likely introduced from Asia where this insect is a serious pest. Cryptic species can differ in their host preference and interaction with natural enemies, which has important consequences for the use of host selection and biological control management strategies. Thus, understanding the presence, distribution and biology within these cryptic species complexes is crucial.

An exciting development is the progress that is being made to understand the influence of genetic diversity on the success of biological control agents. This understanding has been particularly developed in the *Sirex* woodwasp system, where strains of the

nematode species *Deladenus siricidicola* have been collected from different regions of the world and are being tested for their reproductive ability and virulence. Outputs from this research can be used to optimize biological control strategies to manage forest insect pests.

Other topics presented at the meeting included behavioural studies, host specificity testing, reproductive biology, thermal thresholds and insect-microbial associations.



## ICFR's 7th Forest Science Symposium – a mix of science, partnerships, research, knowledge sharing and networking

By Sidhika Naidoo

The Institute for Commercial Forestry Research (ICFR) held its 7th Forest Science Symposium from 18 to 20 July, at the One Life Church in Pietermaritzburg. The three-day event was co-hosted by the ICFR, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO), the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and other research partners. The Symposium was opened by event organiser, Sally Upfold (Knowledge Manager: ICFR), with welcome addresses from Dr Andrew Morris (Acting Director: ICFR), Ms Pumeza Nodada (Chief Director – Forestry Development and Regulations: DAFF) and Prof Mike Wingfield (President: IUFRO). With representation from 15 countries, the event was attended by over 250 researchers, forestry managers, academics, students and others working in the forestry public and private sectors. African delegates who had attended IUFRO's Special Programme for Development of Capacities (IUFRO-SPDC) pre-symposium workshop on Systematic Review as well as representatives from the International Forestry Students' Association (IFSA) were also among those who attended.

The theme of "Research Underpinning the Sustainability of a Diverse Forestry Sector" was explored broadly with presentations covering a wide range of topics including silviculture and forestry management, productivity, risk mitigation, tree breeding, new technologies as well as social aspects that impact the forestry sector. Much value was gained from the invited speakers who shared knowledge and expertise in their respective fields; Prof Gary Hodge (CAMCORE), Prof Bruce Sithole (CSIR/UKZN), Prof Mary Scholes (Wits), Prof Mike Wingfield (FABI), Prof Francois Engelbrecht (CSIR), Prof Colin Dyer (ex-ICFR), Dr Cathy Sutherland (UKZN), Dr Andrew Morris (ICFR), Dr Gillian Petrokovsky (IUFRO-SPDC/Oxford University) and Janice Burns (IUFRO).

In addition to the regular format for papers and posters, this year's Symposium incorporated new forms of knowledge sharing in panel discussions which facilitated the sharing of expertise, and speed papers which allowed students and researchers to share their work through creative and concise informal presentations. Valuable discussion points were generated, allowing for enthusiastic interaction and the opportunity for new ideas to arise. The poster session was held in conjunction with an evening cocktail party which presented excellent opportunities for knowledge sharing, networking, catching-up with peers and some laughs. These opportunities to network and interact with others in the forestry industry form one of the greatest highlights of such events. Communication around the event also created a buzz on social media with many of those present tweeting highlights using #fss2017 and @ICFR\_SA handle.

Generous sponsorship from public and private sectors including the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), Ellepot, EziGro, Forestry South Africa (FSA), Hayfields Mica, Husqvarna, Land Resources International (LRI), Merensky, Mondi, NCT Forestry Co-operative, NTE, PG Bison, Safcol, Sappi, Sunshine Seedlings, Sutherland Seedlings, TWK Agri, UCL, World Hardwood and York Timber, ensured delegates enjoyed a high-quality event. A judging panel scored all the paper and poster contributions in terms of quality and relevance. Best paper was awarded to Mondi's Dr Kitt Payn and runner up to exciting new researcher Tatenda Mapeta from NMMU. In the speed paper sessions, the ICFR took home both first and second prizes; Dr Benice Sivparsad and Dr Kabir Peerbhaya respectively. The prize for the best poster was awarded to NMMU postgraduate student Kulle Schwegman while the ICFR's Nkosinathi Kaptein was the runner up.

The 7th Forest Science Symposium coincided with the ICFR celebrating its 70th birthday this year, with a poster exhibition showcasing the history of the ICFR's partnerships within the forestry sector and its research efforts towards addressing current and future challenges. The goals of the Forest Science Symposium were successfully achieved in bringing together forest scientists and stakeholders and stimulating interaction and discussion to strengthen research partnerships and collaboration.

The Symposium programme book containing abstracts for the papers, speed papers and posters is available on the ICFR website ([www.icfr.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.icfr.ukzn.ac.za)) along with selected presentations.



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## August 2017 birthdays

Aug 01	AROMYE T.W.A.	Aug 12	CROUS J.W.
Aug 01	SMITH (Dries) A.S.	Aug 12	MATTISON C.E.
Aug 02	DE RONDE C.	Aug 14	ESTERHUYSE C.J.
Aug 04	GOUS G.	Aug 14	MABENA K.
Aug 04	UPFOLD S.	Aug 14	SINUKA L.T.
Aug 05	DYE P.J.	Aug 15	BARNARD W.H.
Aug 05	SCHROEDER E.W.	Aug 16	HAM C.
Aug 06	HECHTER H.	Aug 19	ERASMUS N.
Aug 07	ALLPASS M.	Aug 19	MPHAHLELE M.M.
Aug 07	HEATHMAN W.Z.	Aug 19	VAN DER ZEL D.W.
Aug 07	MAKHUBELE L.	Aug 23	NGOZO N.
Aug 07	TEGEGNE A.G.	Aug 26	PRIGGE D.L.
Aug 08	PEERBHAY K.Y.	Aug 28	BLAKEWAY F.
Aug 09	BEZUIDENHOUT R.M.	Aug 28	LEISEGANG K.W.
Aug 09	IMMELMAN J.A.	Aug 29	NEWTON R.T.
Aug 10	FERREIRA E.	Aug 31	DU PLESSIS C.S.
Aug 10	HAM H.	Aug 31	HUGHES J.P.