

# Southern African Institute of Forestry



Delivering a professional service to forestry

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SAIF Calendar : July 2023 : Escarpment Aloes by photographer, Philip Fischer from Mpumalanga Branch

## From the President's Desk Southern African Institute of Forestry : Quo Vadis ?

The Southern African Institute of Forestry (SAIF) has been existence for more than 50 years. Forestry professionals had the vision to establish this Institute in 1968.

It is therefore perhaps an appropriate time or even the right moment to do introspection and stock-take of where we are, where we are going and what lies ahead.

This is certainly not the first time that the Institute has gone through testing times but at the moment we experience a particularly challenging period with dwindling membership numbers, tough financial times and difficulty to get people willing to serve on the Council. The positions of Branch Chair for Mpumalanga Branch and Vice- President have been vacant for quite some time. Even current serving Council members who try their level best, are faced with challenges like limited time available to fulfil their duties and limited interest expressed by current SAIF members to participate in / attend events. There are admittedly still very dedicated and committed SAIF members for which the SAIF is very grateful. The SAIF has kept membership fees fixed for more than two years while costs were rising. The SAIF has not held a face-to-face Council meeting for the past 3 to 4 years. Thanks to the available technology and function of virtual or on-line meetings, the Institute was able to function and hold regular meetings. It does however seem that enthusiasm is also decreasing amongst current members and Council representatives.

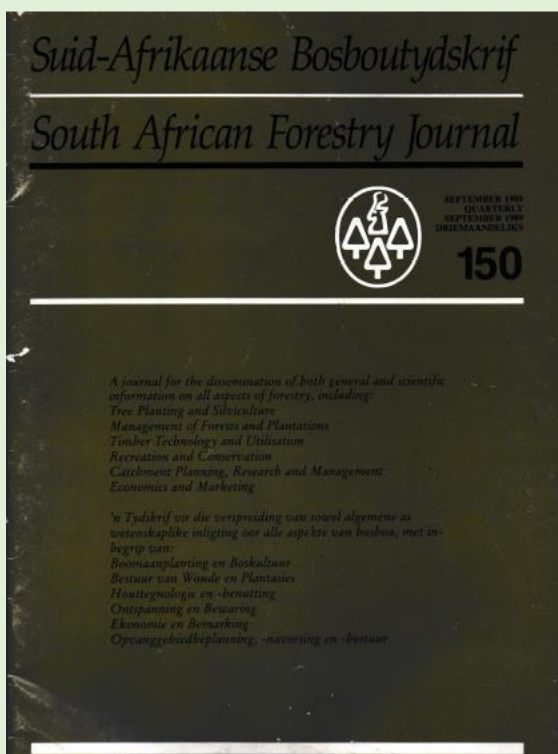


The SAIF Annual General Meeting (AGM) for 2023 had to be postponed and will be held soon.

The current status of the SAIF and the largely undesirable current situation inevitably lead to a situation where we have to ask some serious and probing questions. One question would be the very uncomfortable question namely “ Is the SAIF still relevant today in 2023?” and “Will anybody notice if the SAIF ceases to exist ?” These and other questions also lead to other questions like “What has to change to make the SAIF relevant and attract new members to the Institute ?”.

The SAIF can certainly pride itself over the wonderful legacy created by its founder members as well as dedicated and highly professional stalwart members who have contributed and still do, so much to the Southern African Forestry Industry over the past few decades.

Unfortunately times have changed as we can witness from the change of the old flagship, the South African Forestry Journal (SAFJ) which was regularly published in Hard copy format, sent by normal mail to its members. Even today, many persons quote from articles , written a few decades ago and published in the faithful old SAFJ Many of us still fondly remember the SAFJ with its familiar dark green cover.(see example shown below)



The SAIF took the bold decision a few years ago not to continue with the hard copy of the Southern Forests Journal (its flagship) which replaced the former SAFJ, but to only offer an on-line (electronic) copy of the Southern Forests Journal to its full members.

For the past few years already, the SAIF experienced an annual so-called “Net Loss” of members as a result of more members leaving than new members joining. Some resigned, others sadly passed away and some unfortunately had to be scrapped due to non-payment of membership fees over a prolonged period. This was sadly necessitated despite numerous attempts through reminders and requests when they finally had to be removed from the membership list.

The growth in student numbers have also been disappointing. Some students join as “student members” at the reduced rate but then let their membership lapse as soon as they enter the workplace. Question : How do we attract more students and retain their membership ?

The SAIF has had a good relationship with several organisations including the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) which positioned itself as the legislated regulatory body for natural science practitioners in South Africa. Most SAIF members would prefer to only be a member of one professional organisation. It is however true that SACNASP membership does offer some opportunities to members including foresters who do consulting work. Under the competent guidance of one of our former SAIF Presidents Andrew McEwan, a Continual Professional Development(CPD) model was designed and will be tested in the Southern Cape as an alternative to SACNASP. This has been well accepted by the Southern Cape members and will now be in the form of a pilot study for the next few months before rolling it out to all SAIF members.

Many members look forward to the monthly Newsletter and in particular to the excellent and thought-provoking articles written by Rob Thompson. The SAIF also treasure its good relationship with Forestry South Africa and other organisations.

Despite all the positives mentioned above, the SAIF does find itself at the crossroads and need member’s advice on the way forward. We would therefore please welcome the comments and inputs from you.



## **Choose your own rabbit hole!**

**by Rob Thompson**

Given our overall penchant for social media, one often hears of people complaining about becoming trapped in an “echo chamber”. This echo chamber reference originates from various social media algorithms picking up on your interests and theme searches and then suggesting links to sites coupled to that liking or theme.

Eventually one finds oneself moving from one echoey rabbit hole to the next, all much of a likeness, and continually feeding your specific interest. Eventually it seems as if nothing else exists other than information and developments around that topic. So the person in the rabbit hole resonating with echoes of cats coughing up fur balls on the front seats of electric sport cars (don't mock it, it's real people) are totally astounded when they glance at the phone screen of their co-worker and find to their surprise, evidence that suggests that cats may not necessarily be the center of the universe despite the cat filled universe that Facebook and Instagram have been consistently presenting.

As an interesting aside, I read the other day of just how ironic it is that mankind has in its hands, a tool that that can answer literally any question about anything, and we use it to share pictures of our lunch. Go figure!

It's not only internet linked electronic media users that are susceptible to falling foul of echo chambers. Join me as I take you through the rather dark rabbit hole that is our every-day life experience. The gloomy recess of this arguably treacherous hole is inundated with regular stimuli that carve perceptions deep into our psyche.

Your power goes off anything from once to five times a day. Sometimes it goes off ...and stays off...for days! If you stay in Joburg then your water goes off as well for days. If you stay in Pretoria your mayor goes off every week. If you stay in Pietermaritzburg your municipality goes off, and stays off, for years. If you stay in the center of Joburg, then your road explodes for apparently no reason and if you are a taxi owner, your vehicle becomes a flying object with poor landing ability.

Whilst on the topic of taxis, on your daily drive to

work on the remaining ground based taxis doing everything possible to defy the laws of the road, the laws of physics, the laws of nature and any other laws ever thought of.

If you have the nerve to remove your hand from its death grip on the wheel and activate the radio, the news reports update you on the latest offerings by our illustrious politicians. Our President tells us that Russia will definitely nuke us if we arrest Putin so best we wine and dine him at the BRICS reunion in ZAR. Our electricity minister assures us that power generation and distribution via the grid is most definitely on the mend and that the stage 6 to 8 loadshedding being implemented currently is merely a precaution.

You miss a lot of the news broadcast given the need to focus on avoiding the convoy of coal bearing side tippers most likely owned by poverty-stricken politicians desperately trying to eke out a living. Carnage averted; you zone in again in time for the sports news only to hear once again of the solid pounding that the All Blacks administered to the Bokke. You reach out to change over to a music channel just as a blue light convoy screams past on a mission to beat up pedestrians and deliver a very important politician to an even more important breakfast before the bacon gets too cold.

Entering the suburbs, muscle memory automatically directs you around the familiar potholes in the semi-tarred roads and you greet the street beggars on every corner by name given that you have established a good rapport with them over the last 10 years.

You arrive at work and shoot the breeze with your colleagues around the coffee machine. Here you pick up on all of the latest anecdotes regarding recent burglaries, neighbourhood watch skirmishes, rising costs of food and other essentials (read beverages) and the devastating decision to end the Sewende Laan series on TV.

An escape to the office is needed where you hope to find peace and solitude amidst all of this mayhem. It's not to be. Your e-mail stream is full of chain of custody concerns along the timber supply chain, timber theft and land claims and perhaps an arson fire or two. Community unrest is placing pressure on a plantation and the battery has mysteriously disappeared out of the fire tender. A few incidents of farm invasions provide light relief.

Given your (my) advancing years you phone the HR office just to check on your (my) official designation lest you (I) am experiencing early onset dementia and have forgotten that you (I) am employed as a special security envoy. Yip, the records show that you (I) remain a professional forester. You (I) have not slipped inadvertently through a time portal into a parallel and treacherous universe and major brain decay can be ruled out (at least for now).

The rabbit hole you are in appears therefore to be the reality of the day. It's a long hole with no light visible from the direction in which you envisage the end to be.

On your way home from a fun filled day at work, you reminisce on those far distant days when you could actually catch a bus to work (I kid you not), you could catch an overnight passenger train to the coast, and you never saw a container on the road. Road signs used to be in place and smooth roads were marked with white lines. Security companies had something to do with financial investments and never anything to do about security. Family members used to generally stay in the same country and a matriculant could read. Alarms were something to set before going to bed and designed to wake you up in the morning and never about infrared beams and panic buttons.

Back home behind extended precast walls and a fence alarm, one can sit back relax and watch some TV. We have so many choices of uplifting programmes to indulge in. The local or global news all reporting on various acts of violence, or you have murder movies, or crime movies or very woke movies. Alternatively, there are reality shows of people trying to outwit or outlie one another in many creative ways. If you don't fancy TV, then you can always turn to your electronic device and indulge in the latest social media offerings.

And so, the rabbit hole deepens. We begin to live the screen shot of a broken and decrepit South Africa. We believe that nothing works. The Bokke will definitely never win again, and that guy being reported by the neighbourhood watch is definitely gonna attack me when I take the dogs for a walk. The lights are going to keep going off and at some stage they are never going to come back on again.

Unless however, you get to glance at another screen and realise from that observation, that your particular rabbit hole does not necessarily comprise reality.

I would urgently encourage you to actively seek out alternative screens. There are many out there ... you just need to find them. Seeing another screen will convince you that we all can make active choices as to which rabbit holes to use, or not.

The alternative screen that I recently encountered was from a brewer that I met in the dark recesses of the Bloemfontein industrial area of all places. Amongst the decrepit surroundings, here was a man, a qualified and world travelled chef, who had actively chosen the area for its quirkiness and in which to build a successful brewery, tap room and restaurant. He explained to me that his wife had bought him a beer making kit (in a bucket) many years ago. He had done a home brew or two, enjoyed the hobby and decided to expand. He currently sits with a very big brewing facility in which he brews beverages for the commercial trade, and he even pairs his brews with meals that he creates and cooks himself for extremely popular beer / food tastings.

A more positive man you will not find. He told me that he was not fazed by load shedding as he has become nocturnal and draws most of his electricity by night to avoid the daily loadshedding. Solar is his friend. He has employed local people and partnered with them in the enterprise he has developed. He embraces South African culture and makes it work for him making this country his chosen and favourite venue.

“OK”, you may argue “How long will it last?”

I have no real answer to that but would suggest that an answer to that question is not all that important. What is important is that this man provides an alternative and positive rabbit hole. A hole with far more positives than the ones which we tend to inadvertently occupy. He offers a different screenshot of life and the human condition in South Africa. He forces us to take stock of our own reality and realise that there are always alternatives.

We will always have a choice of hole.

Which particular rabbit hole are you going to choose?

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## Upcoming Events



# FOCUS ON FORESTRY 2023

The theme of the conference is:  
**The Value of Forestry  
in a Greening Economy**

**07 to 09 November**

**Karkloof Country Club**

(Near Howick in the KZN Midlands, South Africa)

**Keynote speaker:**

**Dr Ole Sand**

(Managing Partner – CAP – Criterion African Partners)

For inquiries about the conference contact:  
[focus@cmogroup.io](mailto:focus@cmogroup.io)

**CMO**  
Supply Chain Integrity

NELSON MANDELA  
UNIVERSITY

FORESTRY SOUTH AFRICA



## WORKING ON FIRE 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fire Symposium

**8-10 Nov  
2023**

Skukuza Conference Centre in  
**Kruger National Park**



Official Media Partner  
**FIRE RESCUE  
INTERNATIONAL**

**SA Forestry**  
ONLINE



**5<sup>a</sup> expo 2023**  
**FOREST**  
Feira Florestal Brasileira

**AUGUST 09 TO 11, 2023**

REGION OF RIBEIRÃO PRETO | SÃO PAULO | BRAZIL

**The largest dynamic forestry  
fair in the world!**

**Expoforest 2023**

**The world's largest dynamic forestry fair reaches  
its fifth edition**

Brazil has almost 10 million hectares of forests planted for commercial purposes. The vast majority is formed by two main genres, eucalyptus, and pine. The planted forests in the country are the most productive in the world and supply pulp and paper industries, reconstituted panels, steel, mechanically processed wood products and many others. In the last few years, this entire industry has attracted significant international investment to the sector. Forestry-based companies that already operate in Brazil have also announced expansions of their industries and forests. New possibilities for the use of wood derivatives give rise, every day, to bioproducts originating from cultivated forests.

Curitiba, 1977: this year, a seminar conceived by Jorge Malinovski, an enthusiast of forestry harvesting in Brazil, started a series of events that culminated in the conception of Expoforest, currently the only dynamic forestry fair in Latin America.

The fifth edition will take place next August, from 9th to 11th, in the city of Guatapar, about 40 kilometers from Ribeiro Preto, So Paulo state. Once again, the fair will be inside a eucalyptus plantation area belonging to Sylvamo, Expoforest's master partner. In addition to the fair, the Brazilian Forestry Week program includes two technical events that will take place in Ribeiro Preto: XIX Update Seminar on Wood Harvesting Systems and Forestry Transport, traditional and oldest technical event in the sector; and 5th Brazilian Forestry Meeting, co-organized by Embrapa Florestas.

Source : <https://saforestryonline.co.za/>



## **Red flag over deteriorating health of forest soils**

**Planting the same tree species over successive rotations carries a high risk of deteriorating soil health, say FABI researchers ...**

It is widely accepted in agriculture circles that practicing crop rotation is beneficial for soil health. This is because the continuous cultivation of the same plant species on the same piece of land over and over again impacts negatively on soil health, and leads to a build-up of harmful micro-organisms. There is plenty of scientific evidence to support this theory.

To address this issue, good farmers all over the world practice crop rotation, planting different crops over successive rotations, or do inter-cropping where for instance they will plant a legume in between rotations to improve soil health and biodiversity.



Planting successive rotations of the same tree species on the same piece of land over and over is likely to have a negative impact on soil health and long term productivity of the site will decline – especially when the residue from the previous harvest has been burnt off, leaving the soil unprotected from the elements, as is the case with this community forestry enterprise in Eastern Cape.

**Planting the same tree species over successive rotations carries a high risk of deteriorating soil health, say FABI researchers ...**

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So why not treat short rotation tree crops the same way – and if we don't, and we keep on planting the same species rotation after rotation, will we eventually find that soil health deteriorates to the point where the trees will no longer grow properly?

Common sense would suggest that this will be the case, but there is no 'conclusive' scientific evidence to support this theory. In any event crop rotation in forestry is not so easily done as rotation lengths are long (8 – 20 years), land available for forestry is limited (in South Africa) and only three species are widely grown – eucalypts, pine and wattle – all of which are geared to serve specific markets.

Moreover improvements in silvicultural practices and advances in tree breeding have thus far masked any impacts of deteriorating soil health on successive tree crops, thus reducing growers' appetite for experimenting with crop rotation...

But now a group of highly regarded researchers have raised a red flag and warned that deteriorating soil health is a real risk for short rotation plantation forestry, as it is practiced in South Africa and in many other parts of the world.

A team of FABI researchers including Dr Tanay Bose, Prof Bernard Slippers, Almuth Hammerbacher, Jolanda Roux and Mike Wingfield, have analysed existing data on soil microbiomes from short-rotation forestry environments around the world which, they say, provides evidence that a build-up of harmful micro-organisms, depletion of beneficial micro-organisms, and deterioration of the physical and chemical



properties of soil can result from continuous replanting of the same tree species on the same piece of land.

“Populations of unfavourable microbes can be expected to become more abundant over successive rotations,” state the FABI researchers in an article published in the journal *Current Forestry Reports*. “

This is strongly supported by data from recent soil microbiome studies involving commercially managed forests, which provide convincing evidence of an increase in pathogenic microbes in soils of continuously replanted forests.”

Building on these findings and considering similar approaches in agriculture, the team proposes a number of practical solutions that have the potential to mitigate the deterioration of soil health resulting from planting the same species over successive rotations.

- Retaining post-harvest residue on the site is likely to result in healthier soils over successive rotations. This is why many growers have stopped burning the post-harvest residues and have opted for mulching or chipping.
- Application of biochar has considerable potential to enhance soil properties, nutrients and microbes in continuously replanted forests. Biochar is a carbon-rich, stable organic product made from the pyrolysis of organic biomasses such as leaves, sawdust, animal dung and wood. During carbonization, biochar releases phosphate into the soil along with other mineral nutrients, improving its fertility. Biochar also improves the physical properties and microbial biodiversity of the soil, which could further increase soil nutrient availability and carbon storage. However more research is needed to assess the impact of biochar on plantation soils.
- Crop rotation and intercropping could alleviate the negative consequences of continuous replanting of the same species in short-rotation plantation forestry. For example, rotating between eucalypts, black wattle and pine species could prevent the accumulation of harmful soil microbes detrimental to these trees. Rotating nitrogen fixing leguminous tree species such as Acacia with eucalypts or pines has the potential to further promote both soil and tree health increasing the availability of nitrogen in the soil

and improving the quality of plant litter.

- Practicing agro-forestry, where different crops are inter-planted on the same piece of land, would also have a positive impact on soil health.
  - Inoculation of tree seedlings in the nursery with beneficial microbes.“Continuous replanting practised in short-rotation plantation forests is likely to be accompanied by a high risk of ‘replanting syndrome’ in plantations. While long-term monitoring programs to document the changes in soil microbiomes are still lacking and should be urgently initiated, the available evidence suggests that short-rotation forest plantation enterprises could be restrictive when successively establishing plots with the same or nearly the same genotypes,” the FABI team concluded.



*Mulching after clear felling is an expensive exercise, but many growers have opted for this approach instead of burning off post-harvest residues, in the interests of boosting soil health for the long term.*



*This Sappi compartment in Zululand has been mulched and the residue retained to cover the soil with a nutrient-rich layer that provides protection, retains moisture and gives the young trees a growth boost.*

Source: <https://saforestryonline.co.za/articles/red-flag-over-deteriorating-health-of-forest-soils/>



## Focusing on forestry's role in greening the economy

<https://saforestryonline.co.za/articles/focusing-on-forestrys-role-in-greening-the-economy/>



*Biomass collection system on show at the last Focus on Forestry field day in Mpumalanga*

**'The value of forestry in a greening economy' is the theme of the Focus on Forestry Conference & Expo taking place at the Karkloof Country Club in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands from 7-9 November 2023.**

The conference is organised by CMO, Nelson Mandela University and Forestry South Africa. It covers the full forestry value chain and is designed to inform forest landowners, managers and contractors, although tremendous benefit will be obtained by academics, researchers, consultants, training providers, governmental organisations and others participating in the sector.

The keynote address will be delivered by Dr Ole Sand, the Managing Partner of Criterion African Partners. He is a Norwegian national, residing in the US. The theme will explore the issues and opportunities surrounding the greening economy and the role that forestry plays.

With over 35 years of private equity investment experience, Dr Sand leads an investment team exclusively focused on the forestry sector in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The team invests in companies that provide economic development/impact, and climate change solutions through forestry and related technologies.

The Focus on Forestry conference covers the entire forestry value chain including nurseries, fire management, silviculture, forest engineering, wood biomass, carbon, risk management and certification.

It is relevant to small-scale growers, medium-scale commercial growers through to large-scale industrial plantations, as well as sustainably managed natural forests and related ecosystems.

Day one focuses on general forest management, nurseries, silviculture, fire and other risk management and certification. Day two focuses on forest engineering, carbon and biomass harvesting.

The panel of international presenters will provide practical and useful information for management decision making and operational improvements.

A comprehensive exhibit area will be located immediately outside the conference venue, allowing delegates to interact with forestry equipment and services suppliers in between conference sessions. Networking is also a critical component of the conference, and a braai (barbeque) will take place each evening after the conference for catching up with old friends, making new business contacts, or discussing business.

The Focus on Forestry Field Day will take place on a Sappi plantation close to the conference venue. It will include static exhibits and live demonstrations, covering the full value chain. Conference attendance gives free entrance to the field day. Attendees will have the freedom to wander the field site at their leisure.

For more info, email: [focus@cmogroup.io](mailto:focus@cmogroup.io)

Focus on Forestry Conference & Expo  
7-9 November 2023  
Karkloof Country Club, KZN midlands  
SA's premier forestry conference and expo  
Info: [andrew@cmogroup.co.za](mailto:andrew@cmogroup.co.za)



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*Happy Birthday to all our members who celebrate(d) their birthdays in July*



JULY 2023	BIRTHDAYS
STU VALINTINE	Jul-03
DIRK STAAL	Jul-08
ROB PALLETT	Jul-08
JACK HUBBLE	Jul-11
TONY WINTER	Jul-16
KAREN EATWELL	Jul-19
MIKE HOWARD	Jul-20
LUVUYO TYHODA	Jul-21
NIC DE WAAL	Jul-23
ANTON KUNNEKE	Jul-23
PHILIP McINTYRE	Jul-24
DEAN DA COSTA	Jul-25
ROB GARDNER	Jul-25
RORY MACK	Jul-31
RICHARD McARTHUR	Jul-31