



Delivering a professional service to forestry

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Editorial

A Time for reflection

The year has already entered its last quarter, and we are fast approaching the so-called silly or crazy season and most of us feel tired and have mixed emotions about the previous nine to ten months of 2025. Matric pupils have already started writing their year-end examinations and so will students who are studying at tertiary institutions.

It is also no wonder why this month is also the time of year when we in South Africa commemorate *Mental Health Awareness month* as many people experience stress and anxiety for various reasons. It is recommended by the S.A. Department of Health that some ways to improve your health could include to connect with others, stay physically active, learn new things , be mindful of the present moment and take care of your physical health through sleep and diet.

Unfortunately, in reality it is not possible due to the pressure associated with this time of year. I would like to suggest that we also use this opportunity to celebrate what we have achieved and also to honour those who went before us. A former colleague of mine often reminded us that we should consider “on whose shoulders do we stand”. Most of us who work in the forestry and associated industry, can witness regarding the critical role played by one or more mentors whom we worked with or under earlier in our careers. We would like to honour those people for their contribution and impact not only on our careers but also do develop us as human beings in order to make a difference where we work and live.

All that remains for me to say, is that we should persevere and push on till the end this year to end on a good note. As we would say in Afrikaans : “Vasbyt”!



Peat Bog High Conservation Value Forest at PG Bison Ruigtevlei Plantation



Southern Forests: a Journal of Forest Science

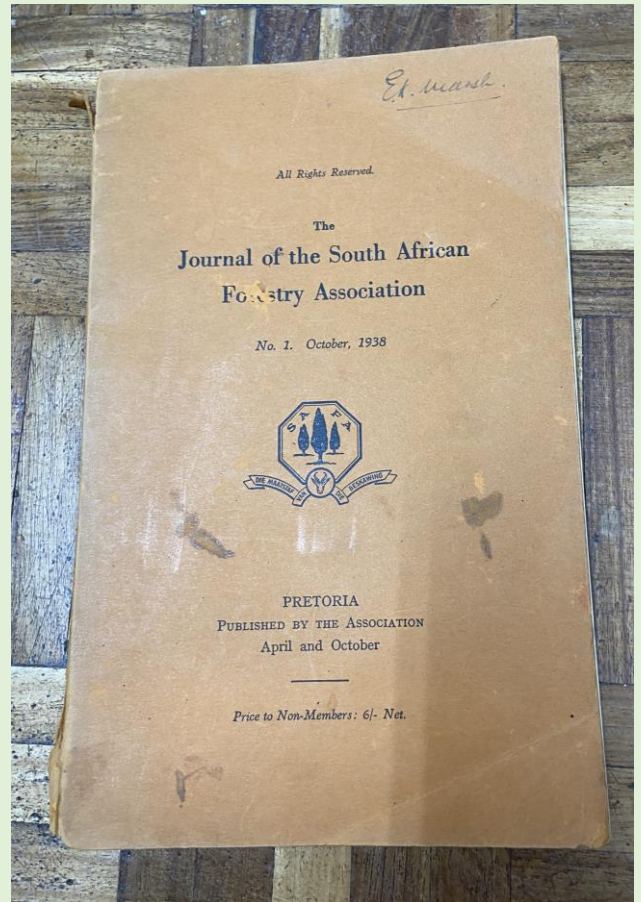
By Bruce Talbot (President of the SAIF)

Over the past number of months, this contribution to our newsletter has reflected – to some degree at least – on the value that we as an organization might offer our members. One of the more tangible of these has been that membership provides access – in varying degrees – to our journal, *Southern Forests: A Journal of Forest Science*.

The publication of a scientific journal relies on quite an unusual and complicated business model. The model is commercial yet highly dependent on the extensive voluntary (gratuitous) services of reviewers, who don't necessarily even benefit by way of access to the final output (formatted article). This is something similar to donating blood, where the donor must suffice with a cup of tea and a biscuit while the commercial gains lie elsewhere.

Multiple reviewers (2-3) are generally needed to scrutinize each manuscript, where their inputs are essential in ensuring that publications achieve satisfactory scientific rigour. This includes safeguarding other elements such as ensuring that the authors address a recognized problem or research gap, and in so doing, move the field forward in terms of understanding and quantifying underlying cause and effect.

Southern Forests: a Journal of Forest Science is a well-known journal appreciated by many of us. The very first issue was published as the *Journal of the South African Forestry Association* was in October 1938 (see figures), and each one since then include fascinating articles in forest science and management of fast-growing, planted or natural forests in the Southern Hemisphere and the tropics. Papers are further encouraged on related disciplines such as environmental aspects of forestry, social forestry, agroforestry, forest engineering and management as well as the goods and services that are derived from forests as a whole. Articles published by the journal are of value to foresters, resource managers and society at large.



The very first issue of the *Journal of the South African Forestry Association* published in October 1938

Geographically, the journal encourages contributions from South America, Africa and tropical/subtropical Australasia and Asia, and accepts only about 30% of the manuscripts submitted.

Having said that, comparable journals such as *Australian Forestry* operate in the same territory and through the same publisher (Taylor and Francis) yet currently outcompete us on most journal metrics, where e.g. their 5 year impact factor is double what ours is, including a growing number of South African authored papers. While there is space for multiple journals in our hemisphere, this is a reminder that we operate in a competitive environment, and sentimentality bares a price.

Publication of *Southern Forests* is supported by the Southern African Institute of Forestry (which ultimately means you), as well as through a contribution from Forestry South Africa (FSA).



The fact that you all support the existence of the journal through our membership fees means that your opinion is important in deciding the future of the journal. The question is not around its continued existence, but rather, whether it is feasible to explore other ways of decoupling membership fees, access to articles, and editorial responsibility, in search of a more sustainable configuration that might attract more contributors and readers alike.

In the remaining part of the year, we are going to be sending out a short online questionnaire to our members to gauge your impressions of some of the alternatives on the table. Your response to that questionnaire is important in determining the future success of the journal, and indirectly, of our institute.

Thank you in advance for your efforts. In the meantime, please explore the latest articles here <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/tsfs20>



From Taylor and Francis website

Southern Forests: a Journal of Forest Science is one of the leading forestry journals in the Southern Hemisphere. The journal publishes scientific articles in forest science and management of fast-growing, planted or natural forests in the Southern Hemisphere and the tropics. Papers are also encouraged on related disciplines such as environmental aspects of forestry, social forestry, agroforestry, forest engineering and management as well as the goods and services that are derived from forests as a whole. Articles published by the journal are of value to foresters, resource managers and society at large. The journal particularly encourages contributions from South America, Africa and tropical/subtropical Australasia and Asia. Publication of the journal is supported by the Southern African Institute of Forestry.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/tsfs16>



Precision Forestry Takes a Flight : Drone Applications in Silviculture and Research

Join the Timber Industry Pesticide Working Group (TIPWG), under Forestry South Africa (FSA), on **Wednesday 12 November 2025** for an exciting online Drone Workshop delving into the latest innovations transforming silviculture and forestry research. Make sure you register for this online webinar – button at the bottom.

This interactive session will demonstrate how drone technology is reshaping forest management from precision pesticide applications to data driven environmental monitoring. Attendees will gain valuable insights into how Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are enhancing sustainability, improving accuracy and supporting research across the Forestry Sector.

Expert Speakers and Topics

Leading experts will share their experience from both local and international perspectives:

TIPWG DRONE WEBINAR silvicultural & research applications
ONLINE Wednesday 12 November 09h00–12h00
 Register Now!
 S Prof. **Ilaria Germishuizen** ICFR
 Unmanned Aerial Systems for Enhanced Forestry Research: Insights from ICFR
 P Prof. **Dave Drew** University of Stellenbosch
 Pixels to Plots: Linking Remote Sensing with Ground Truth at the IMPACT OAL and beyond
 A Dr **Sam van Holsbeeck** University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia
 K Spraying Smarter: Opportunities and Challenges of Drone-Based Pesticide Application in Australian Plantations
 E Mr **Greg Fuller** ICFR
 The long road to becoming a legally compliant drone unit in South Africa: The ICFR's journey
 R Mr **Craig Fisher and Mr Jaco Nel** Hummingbird Technologies
 S UAV Operations and Standards

Together, these sessions will offer a close look at how Drone or UAV technology is shaping the future of sustainable forestry in South Africa and around the globe – bringing innovation from canopy to ground! **So make sure you have registered!**



New frontiers

By Rob Thompson

Stories of the pioneers of old, traversing terrain less travelled and encountering new discoveries at every turn, certainly make for fascinating reads.

They do however make one wonder as to what there is left to discover in this modern world. Are pioneers still a thing? Are our kids going to experience new frontiers, or have we reached a discovery pinnacle?

From recent personal experience, I think that I can safely conclude that discoveries and new frontiers are definitely still out there for the taking.

The pivot point on which I make this conclusion, centered around the need to create a last-minute poster for an animal welfare charity fund raising event, that the hobby brewing club, of which I am a member, was participating in.

With limited time at my disposal, I sat down armed with a gallery of images, PowerPoint, some really dull ideas and heaps of frustration, in the face of the seemingly insurmountable task that lay ahead. My first attempts were chaotic and best destined for the delete button. It was then that, just as the journeys of the pioneers of old had often commenced from obscure and unplanned stimuli, my journey began on the back of a random comment, made by a colleague, whilst shooting the breeze and interrupting my creative implosion. He mentioned that he had recently asked AI to proofread some minutes that he had scribed of a long and important meeting. The results apparently were incredibly impressive, and his contention was that AI had irrevocably reserved a place in his array of professional tools.

He left my office not knowing of the torment that he had caused in a head that, to date, had firmly resisted any form of AI intervention.

So, what if...?

I found myself reluctantly opening the ChatGPT app and logging in. The next challenge was to ignore the arrogance of this AI monster whose opening statement, on our very first meeting, was "Ask me anything!" Having gone so far, I convinced myself that now was the opportunity to prove, once and for all, the fallibility

of this AI concept, and enable me, with the strength of firsthand experience, to spread the word of warning to all those who were tempted to dabble. My approach was to confuse it with a detailed and humanly logical request that no binary computer simulation would easily adapt to.

And so, my first journey into a new, deep, enticing, and fascinating world began... It was an incredibly quick journey!

I asked AI to:-

- Create an A4 print ready poster for me (it would never cope with that request...too many permutations)
- Include appropriate images of the beverage we were presenting at the event, which I described in detail, along with the tasting notes and style components (this would blow its electronic synapses totally!)
- Choose an appropriate font to match the festive occasion (it's electronic after all and doesn't have human empathy...an impossible task for it)
- Include the date and time of the event which I named, but provided no further detail (ok, a dirty trick but my tactic was for the ultimate good of all who ever felt tempted to engage with AI)
- Ensure that the poster was family friendly and "in tune" with the ethos of an animal welfare charity event (this would probably break it totally given a distinct lack of human or animal insight and instinct)
- Include the names of the brewers which I provided, in a tasteful position on the poster (tasteful? For AI? Impossible!)

My finger hovered over the OK button for a while as I savoured the expectation of an AI meltdown and my declaration to my colleague that his positive observations of AI were fleeting occurrences in a damaged and wanting cyber eco-system.

I hit the Button

- A twirling circle appeared.
- I celebrated my victory as AI was clearly confused.

A download appeared 3 seconds later



- I activated it in order to read AI's surrender note.
- The download was a perfect and extremely well laid out poster, as per specification and more.
- Not one error or misplacement!

My excitement about the final product exceeded the deflation of my failure to confuzzle AI.

It was in that moment that I realized that AI presents amazing frontiers for us to explore and that my journey into its depths had only just begun.

(Oh, and as an aside...more astute readers may have realized by now that I was making posters during work time. Busted! That said, by way of mitigation, AI saved me tonnes of time, and my private diversion amounted to mere minutes. Win-win).

My AI journey has continued in many ways since that first foray. It has assisted me in data searches through complicated data bases, explained technical terminology, provided summaries of lengthy documentation, and provided humorous intervention on occasions. It has also been incredibly annoying with some of the junk that it has produced, the incorrect conclusions made, the bad calculations presented, and lack of understanding displayed.

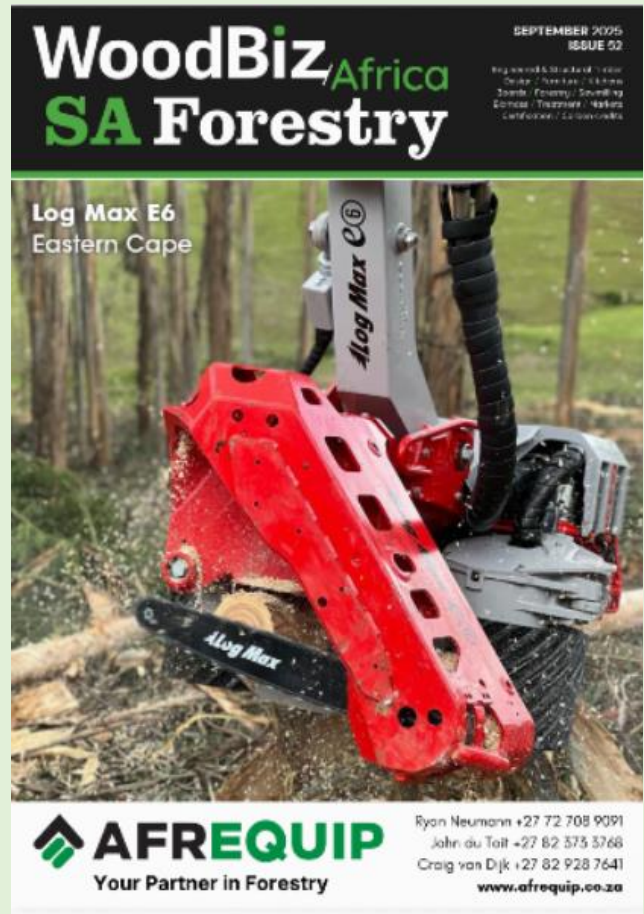
As per any pioneering journey, one experiences both the good and the bad, leaving the explorer to determine the difference between the two.

A safe looking canyon may be full of danger and despair whilst a dark and gloomy cave entrance may contain the richest of treasures within.

It is up to the explorer to determine his or her path and to carefully consider, and to accept or not, the revelations of the journey being embarked upon.



Newsletter 52 , September 2025



[September 2025](#) | [Issue 52](#) • [WoodBiz Africa / SA Forestry](#)

Logging On



<https://www.loggingon.net/>



Is Paulownia wood a viable alternative for pine plantations in SA ? (Part 1)

Several people have suggested in the recent past that planting *Paulownia* might be an alternative to planting pine in South Africa for the production of high quality wood

What is Paulownia ?

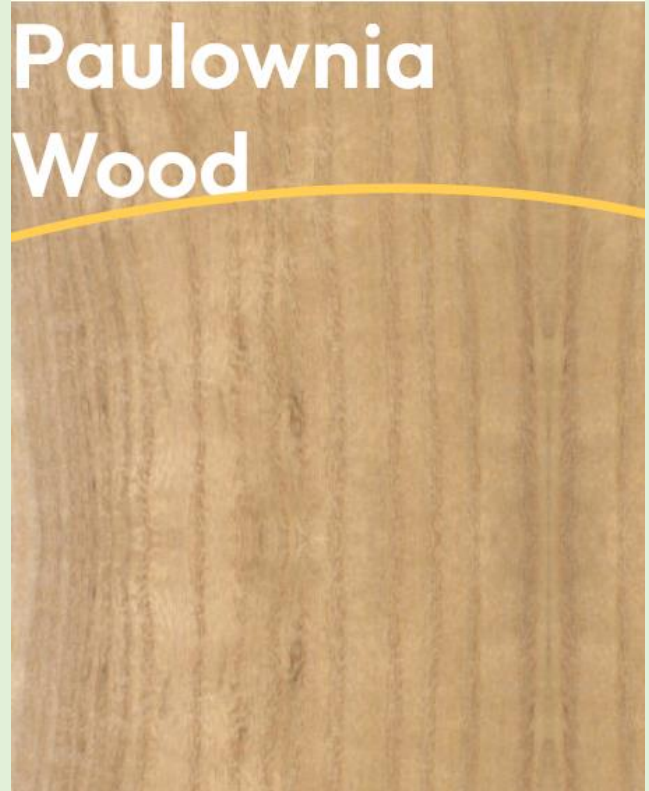
Paulownia is a genus of seven to 17 species of hardwood trees (depending on taxonomic authority) in the family Paulowniaceae, the order Lamiales. The genus and family are native to east Asia and are widespread across China.^[1] The genus, originally *Pavlovnia* but now usually spelled *Paulownia*, was named in honour of Anna Pavlovna, queen consort of The Netherlands (1795–1865), daughter of Tsar Paul I of Russia. It is also called "princess tree" for the same reason.^[2]

Paulownia is a genus of angiosperm trees, and one of the fastest-growing trees in the world.^[12] *Paulownia tomentosa* can grow over 30 metres tall and has large heart shaped leaves ranging from 10–20 centimetres wide and 15–30 centimetres long with a 10–20 centimetres-long petiole. and is considered a sustainable option because the trees grow quickly and can even regenerate from their roots.



Paulownia tomentosa (Princess Tree)

Properties of Paulownia wood



Lightweight and strong : It is one of the lightest commercial hardwoods but has a high strength-to-weight ratio, meaning it is very durable despite its low density. Density is low at 290kg/m³

Workability: Paulownia wood is relatively soft ,easy to cut, shape, and sand. It holds nails and screws well without splitting and takes glue and finishes smoothly. The tensile strength is moderate making its fine grain makes it easy to work with, and it accepts stains and finishes well . *Paulownia* is a genus of angiosperm trees, and one of the fastest-growing trees in the world.^[12] *Paulownia tomentosa* can grow over 30 metres (98 ft) tall and has large heart shaped leaves ranging from 10–20 centimetres (4–8 in) wide and 15–30 centimetres (6–12 in) long with a 10–20 centimetres (4–8 in)-long petiole.

Durability: It is naturally resistant to water, rot, and decay, making it suitable for both indoor and outdoor use.

Flexibility : High flexibility , allowing for creative designs and woodcrafting It is also resistant to warping, rot, and splitting,



Sustainable: Paulownia is a fast-growing tree, and its ability to regenerate from its root system makes it a renewable resource.

Aesthetics: It has a fine, straight grain and a pale blonde appearance that can be stained, painted, or left natural.

In China, *Paulownia* is popular for roadside planting and as an ornamental tree. *Paulownia* needs much light and does not like high water tables.

As a forestry crop, *Paulownia* are exacting in their requirements, performing well only in very well drained soil, with summer rainfall or availability of irrigation water¹ *Paulownia* is extremely fast growing, increasing in height by up to 6 metres in one year when young. Some species of plantation *Paulownia* can be harvested for sawn timber in as little as five years. Once the trees are harvested, they regenerate from their existing root systems i.e. coppicing), earning them the name of the "Phoenix tree¹ (that name is alternatively attributed to the belief that it is the only tree within which the phoenix will roost.)

Paulownia is also used in Chinese agroforestry systems because it grows quickly, its wood is light but strong, its flowers are rich in nectar, its leaves make good fodder for farm animals, it is deep-rooting, and it is late-leaving, and its canopy is sparse enough to allow crops below it get enough light to grow while being sheltered from the wind.

As indicated above, there are several species in the genus *Paulownia*. Tested and confirmed species are as follows: *Paulownia kawakamii*, *Paulownia tomentosa*, *Paulownia catalpifolia*, *Paulownia x taiwaniana*, *Paulownia elongata*, *Paulownia fargesii*, *Paulownia fortunei* known as the dragon tree.

Part 2 will follow in the next SAIF Newsletter

Sources:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulownia>

<https://www.yibamboo.com/paulownia-wood-material/#:~:text=Material%20Description,often%20used%20in%20reforestation%20projects.>

News from Forestry South Africa

<https://www.forestrysouthafrica.co.za/forestry-explained/>



FSA is pleased to report that we had an extensive (and encouraging) engagement on 1 and 2 September with Minister Dion George and Deputy Minister Narend Singh of the DFFE.

Members will recall that we reported on the previous meeting which Mr Duane Roothman (FSA Chairperson) and Mr Buhle Msweli (FSA SSG Chairperson) had with the Minister in February, in which they invited him to make this visit to the Industry.

The meeting was kindly hosted by SAPPI who provided an excellent programme of events ranging from state-of-the-art Forestry nurseries at Tweedie and Clan, a visit to a Small-scale timber growing operation (kindly hosted by Mr Buhle Msweli), a visit to the KZN Fire Hawk incident command centre (hosted by Mr Trevor Wilson), an engagement with the KZN Umbrella FPA (led by Mr Simon Thomas), an aerial and ground fire-fighting display, a tree-planting ceremony at the Shaw nursery in Tweedie, in which Minister George planted a *Euclea crispa* sapling (a favourite browsing species of the Black Rhino and recently posted by the Minister on his social media platforms) and a visit to the state-of-the-art SAPPI SAICCOR dissolving wood pulp mill at Umkomaas.

FSA's Chairperson, Mr Duane Roothman (who is also Vice-President of SAPPI Forests) welcomed the delegation, thanked them for making so much time (two full days) available to us and introduced the Industry representatives to the Minister and Deputy Minister. The CEO of SAPPI Southern Africa (Mr Graeme Wild), then delivered an impactful presentation in which all of the outstanding DFFE undertakings in the Forestry Masterplan were highlighted, along with an excellent overview of SAPPI's Southern African and global operations. He reflected on the ongoing failures by the DFFE to crowd in the private sector to recapitalise the State's category B and C plantations, across most companies.





In the initial responses made by the Minister and Deputy Minister, they expressed regret that it had taken so long to engage with our Sector and explained the unusually complex challenges of trying to oversee three important Sectors like Forestry, Environmental affairs and Fisheries. The Minister stated (as FSA has also done for the last twenty years), that in most other countries, important and complex sectors like Forestry, often have their own Ministries. That being said, he stated that he has familiarised himself with the Forestry Masterplan and was deeply concerned by the many lapses, especially those pertaining to his department. He advised that he would be making changes to the allocation of the Forestry Masterplan within the Department and that we could expect a major improvement in delivery from the DFFE.

He made special note of the four key DFFE failures described above, which we again raised over the two days, as each site we visited provided the opportunity to show in practical terms, how these DFFE lapses were negatively affecting the Sector. The Minister undertook further to engage with the Minister of Transport and the President on the outstanding rail challenges. Deputy Minister Singh also undertook to engage with the Deputy Minister of Transport and President on the as-yet still unresolved, South Coast rail line challenge. Mr Roothman sent them a video excerpt from the President's address in 2022, in which he had said that he wanted the Illovo bridge to be repaired before April 2023.

We were struck by the level of genuine interest and engagement which Minister George demonstrated throughout the very-full two-day programme. He asked many insightful questions and offered his own insights about how our issues linked to those of other Sectors and to the broader historic governance challenges in our country.

He said that by working more closely with the Industry, it would in turn assist him and the DFFE in some of their other portfolios. He was particularly struck by the extent of our Sector's development and deployment of 4IR technologies, throughout the value chains, our cutting-edge research in tree-breeding and pest and disease management, our understanding of current and predicted climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation mechanisms and our fire-detection and response capabilities.

We have sent the Minister a brief summary of the key issues from the engagement (which we will circulate to members by e-mail) and we hope that the interventions which he and DM Singh are able to make, will finally get the DFFE to drastically improve their performance for our Sector.



Tree Planting ceremony with Min. George pictured on left

We would like to again thank our members who participated in the visit, including our Gencom and Exco members, the CEO of Merensky Timbers, Dr Johan De Graaf, Ms Jane Molony of PAMSA, who was instrumental in setting up the first meeting with the Minister in February, our colleagues from SSA and SAWPA, who helped us to develop the messaging and Mr Buhle Msweli for the visit to his family timber farming operation. We are particularly grateful to the senior leadership team and the entire Staff of SAPPI, who put together such an outstanding exposé of our Sector, giving so generously of their time for the greater good of the Sector and for the excellent hosting and event planning.

<https://www.forestrysouthafrica.co.za/2025/09/04/minister-george-and-deputy-minister-singh-visit-the-forestry-industry/>



News from FABI



The DSI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Plant Health Biotechnology (CPHB, previously the CTHB) promotes the health of plants and trees. Research conducted under the umbrella of this Centre address some of the burning national challenges (particularly in terms of food security, sustainable use of natural resources, and economic growth), while at the same time building human capacity in these important arenas. The vision of the Centre is to utilize world-class scientific research and biotechnology for (i) promoting the long-term health and sustainable use of socioeconomically important plants, including trees and (ii) facilitating inclusive postgraduate education. In doing so, the CPHB would contribute to the protection of food and plant resources in South Africa (and to some extent Africa), as well as develop human capacity in this important field.

The CPHB is intimately linked to the **Tree Protection Cooperative Programme (TPCP)**, a research programme that has a track record of more than two decades in dealing with the pests and diseases of commercially important forestry species.

The CPHB is structured as a virtual Centre of Excellence that conducts scientific research via a collaborative network, with the node of the network represented by researchers at UP. In addition to the UP group, this network involves researchers and their postgraduate students from other Higher Education Institutions in South Africa.

Director of the CPHB: [Prof Emma Steenkamp](#)
Program manager of the CPHB: [Prof Martin Coetzee](#)
CHPB Administrator: [Ms Heidi Fysh](#)
Website:

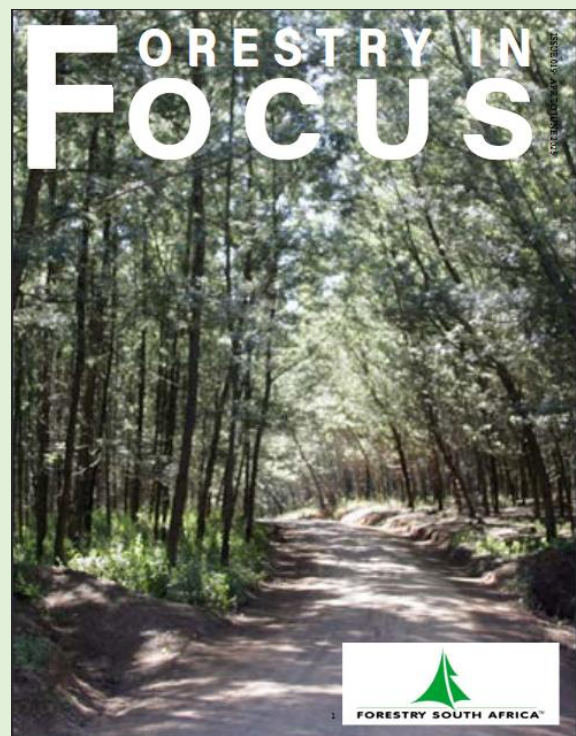
<https://www.fabinet.up.ac.za/index.php/research-groups/dst-nrf-centre-of-excellence-in-tree-health-biotechnology>

Latest Edition of TIP-Mag available on Forestry South Africa Website

<https://www.forestrysouthafrica.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/TIPWG-Mag11-FINAL.pdf>



Latest Edition of Forestry in Focus



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DFFE representative	Vacant	

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**The following SAIF members celebrate their birthdays
in October**



OCTOBER BIRTHDAYS			
02 Oct	SHAUN BIGGS	15 Oct	PILSANDE BHENTSHU
03 Oct	AXEL JOOSTE	24 Oct	HANNES VAN ZYL
08 Oct	JANNIE CONRADIE	26 Oct	ALME JONKER
08 Oct	WINSTON KAMFER	26 Oct	DUNCAN BALLANTYNE
09 Oct	VICTOR MUSALE	27 Oct	GLEN COOPER
09 Oct	PETER MULLER	28 Oct	HORST KASSIER
10 Oct	PAUL MARWICK	28 Oct	BRAAM DU PREEZ
10 Oct	LUNGA TSHANGISA	29 Oct	SIDHIKA NAIDOO
10 Oct	SBONGA MNGOMEZULU	30 Oct	MARIUS DU PLESSIS
14 Oct	STEVE VERRYIN	31 Oct	RONWA NETHONONDA



The following SAIF members will be celebrating their Birthday in November



NOVEMBER BIRTHDAYS			
04 Nov	BILL BAINBRIDGE	15 Nov	IAN HORRELL
04 Nov	RADIE LOUBSER	15 Nov	RIAAAN WEBB
05 Nov	SANDISIWE JALI	15 Nov	BUSISWA HLONGWANA
05 Nov	MANDLAKAZI MELANE	16 Nov	ABEDNIGO COLVELLE
05 Nov	ANGEL SIBISI	21 Nov	TANAY BOSE
07 Nov	TSHILIDZI MAVHUNGU	28 Nov	PAXIE CHIRWA
08 Nov	DEON VON BENEKE	29 Nov	JAYCE LANE
10 Nov	SEAN SNEYD	30 Nov	BERRIE LINDE
13 Nov	MESFIN GOSSA		

The SAIF would like to wish every member who celebrate his/ her birthday in October and November, a very Happy Birthday and congratulations with reaching another milestone. Thank you for your continued support and God bless for the next year ahead.





The Southern African Institute of Forestry

Handbook order form

The Southern African Institute of Forestry publishes three industry specific handbooks.

I would like to order:

South African Forestry Handbook

Price: SAIF members: R400

Non members: R500



Fire Manager's Handbook on Veld and Forest Fires

Price: SAIF members: R300

Non members: R400



There's Honey in the Forest

Price: SAIF members: R100

Non members: R150



International orders must contact the Secretariat for a quote due to currency and postage fluctuations.

A bulk discount of 10% applies on orders of 10 or more copies.
Price includes VAT.

An extra R50 per book will be charged if we need to courier the book to you.

I am a member non-member of the SAIF.

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