



NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR PLANT PATHOLOGY



December 2011

Council 2011-2014:

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Happy Holidays!!!

Council's activities

One of our primary objectives since taking over from the previous Council has been to try and streamline the administrative functioning of the Society so that when a new Council is appointed the handing over is less confusing. Determining who is and is not a member of the Society, and whether or not they are paid up members has been a challenge. We have achieved this goal by having one database which is now linked to our website which any council member can access and update. We have appointed a part-time financial administrator, Ms. Rene Serfontein, to assist us with keeping track of membership and following up on payment of membership fees. We have also now registered the Society as a non-profit organization as required by SARS. We were not aware of this requirement until we appointed an auditor to review our financial statements.

After much debate at Council meetings we decided to have the Society's webpages redesigned. There were various reasons for this decision. We wanted it modernized, to open on a page that inspires the reader to delve deeper and to include specific functions which could be easily managed. The features now include a discussion forum which allows members to voice an opinion on any issues related to plant pathology, news of interest to members, job opportunities which include postgraduate study opportunities, and a voting system. The first issue we would like dealt with is whether or not it is going to be possible to make changes to the Constitution via an online system. A two-year period is too long, in our opinion, to ratify any proposed change. If members are in agreement that such a system can be used, we will then list the proposed changes with the option of agreeing or disagreeing. Another change we have included is an online registration system for the 2013 Congress.

2013 Congress

The Congress will take place from the 20th to the 23rd of January 2013 at the ATKV Buffelspoort resort close to Hartebeespoort Dam. The resort offers a wide range of accommodation options – from camping to tented chalets and luxury housing. The Congress is now being organized by the Council with assistance from members of the Northern Branch and we would like to try something different... We are extending the Congress by an afternoon with the gala dinner taking place on the Wednesday evening. This would require that you to book an additional night's accommodation. In addition, we are planning a field trip to a citrus farm and to the local cut flower farmers in the area. This event will probably take place on the Tuesday afternoon. On the Sunday afternoon we plan to host two concurrent workshops – one on planning and implementing field trials/inoculations and analyses thereof and the second on new technologies in plant pathology. If you

are interested in offering your expertise in either area and are prepared to present a lecture, please let us know. Also, if you are in a financial position to invite a prominent plant pathologist from overseas to present a keynote address at the Congress, please contact Jolanda Roux.

Plant Pathology on Wheels

One of the objectives of the ISPP (International Society for Plant Pathology) is to affect changes in public policy and opinions on global food security. The University of Pretoria was selected to address this objective by improving awareness of the impact and importance of plant disease. This was accomplished through a project that focused on spreading the message of food security and raising awareness about Plant Pathology in countries in Africa. The University of Pretoria was proposed due to its central position in terms of transport networks, academic standing and its number of students (being the biggest residential University in Africa and having the largest Agricultural School on the continent). The University of Pretoria also employs the largest number of plant pathologists in Africa. Funding from ICPP was used to establish Plant Pathology on Wheels, a mobile lab for school and public awareness campaigns within sub Saharan Africa.

A group of plant pathology scientists and undergraduate students from the University of Pretoria (UP) went on a Southern African Development Community (SADC) tour to share a “Basket full of knowledge” of “Food Security challenges in Africa”. The group paid a visit to commercial farms, informal markets and food enterprises as well as small scale farmers in South Africa, Swaziland and Mozambique. The group visited rural villages and schools to share knowledge on how to reduce postharvest losses, to discuss the importance of food safety and hygiene, to assess sustainable water resource management, crop production and - protection practices and other challenges.



Taking the food security and “plant pathology as a career” message to the schools in Swaziland (Etimphisini Central High School and Mayiwane High School)

The overarching purpose of this tour was to share knowledge and experience at different levels and within several themes of the International Society for Plant Pathology’s (ISPP) Food Security programme. Two vehicles travelled through SADC with a mobile laboratory that was used to illustrate to farmers, school children and local communities the concept of “Microbes are everywhere; see them in action”. The lab was used to demonstrate simple water, plant and food tests that can be used by teachers and farmers to address food security challenges or to share knowledge.



**Plant Pathologists in action in Swaziland - solving root disease problems (L)
Preparing the display in the mobile laboratory (right)**

The SADC food security and knowledge sharing project is part of a global initiative of the ISPP to educate young people, rural communities and small scale farmers about food security issues. The ISPP Task Force on Global Food Security has funded this project i.e. “Changing Public Policy and Opinions on Global Food Security”. This tour formed part of this initiative “Taking science to the community” and represents one of the project deliverables.

Agricultural Career Fair

The Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Pretoria (UP) in conjunction with the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Foundation for Industry Talent launched a Horticultural/Agricultural Career and Bursary Fair. This was an initiative of the PMA in South Africa as their mission is to attract, develop and retain talent for the fresh produce and broader agricultural industry.

The Department of Microbiology and Plant Pathology was one of the participant exhibitors in UP's Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences and set up a lovely exhibition stand where marketing material was handed out to passers-by and where Plant Pathology in action was demonstrated.

The Fair with the theme "Sustainable Food for Life" was held on Thursday 22 September 2011 at the UP Conference Centre. The target group was mainly first-year BSc students (there are more than 1200 of these students), many of whom have not yet decided on an area of specialisation from their second year onwards. However, agricultural students currently registered at both the undergraduate and post graduate level also attended this Fair, and a limited number of scholars that have a specific interest in agriculture were also invited. Companies and organisations had the opportunity to showcase their products, services, career opportunities including internships, and bursary schemes to a very receptive audience.



Marketing Plant Pathology/food security at the Agricultural Career Fair (left)
Marketing Plant Pathology through a board game (right)

Plant scientists visit USA

In June 2011 three staff members of the department of Plant Sciences at UFS attended the 3rd Technical Workshop of the Borlaug Global Rust Initiative in St. Paul, Minnesota. Prof. Zakkie Pretorius, Dr. Renée Prins (affiliated) and Cornel Bender authored or co-authored five presentations on topics such as wheat stem rust resistance phenotyping, QTL detection for stripe rust resistance, stem rust race analysis and global surveillance systems for monitoring movement of rust diseases. In addition to formal proceedings the 4-day conference included a field visit and workshops on race nomenclature and pre-breeding for resistance to stem rust race Ug99. The meeting was attended by more than 200 wheat scientists from all over the world. Prior to the meeting Prof. Pretorius assisted Dr Yue Jin of the USDA Cereal Disease Laboratory in St Paul in surveying for barberry plants, the alternate host of *Puccinia graminis*. They also visited the University of Minnesota arboretum in Chaska, MN, the site where Dr Jin recently found the aecial stage of *Puccinia striiformis* on *Berberis chinensis* and *B. koreana* for the first time in history.

Barley scientists visit South Africa

In November 2011 Dr Brian Steffenson (barley pathologist) and Dr Kevin Stevens (barley breeder), both from the University of Minnesota, visited South Africa for evaluating barley germplasm for response to race Ug99 of *Puccinia graminis* f. sp. *tritici*. Their trials were planted with the assistance of Dr Rikus Kloppers at the Pannar Research Station in Greytown, KZN.

Plant Disease Clinic Director on sabbatical at UP

Dr Melodie Putnam who is Director of the Plant Disease Clinic at Oregon State University will spend part of her sabbatical at the University of Pretoria (from 1st November to the 21st January). She will spend time in the FABI Diagnostic Centre as well as conduct research on *Rhodococcus fascians* (= *Corynebacterium fascians*). This bacterium is a phytopathogen that causes leafy gall disease and its host range includes both dicotyledonous and monocotyledonous hosts. If you wish to contact Melodie her email address is putnamm@science.oregonstate.edu.

Congratulation to recent graduates

MSc

Charles Wairuri *cum laude* (UP)

Johan van der Linde *cum laude* (UP)

Lisa-Danielle de Wet (UP)

David Read (UP)

Louis van Jaarsveld (UP)

Evan Michael Brauteseth (UKZN)

Konis Elungi (UKZN)

Jacques Davy Ibaba (UKZN)

Prabashnie Vengetsamy Ramouthar *cum laude* (UKZN)

PhD

Gilbert Kamgan Nkuekam (UP)

Abraha Okbasillasie Abraham (UKZN)

Nicolette Du Rand (UKZN)

Celestin Mutimura Gatarayiha (UKZN)

Adré Minnaar-Ontong (UFS)

International Organization of Citrus Virologists Conference 2013.

28 July - 2 August, 2013.

Skukuza Camp, Kruger National Park, South Africa



Enquires: Gerhard Pietersen (gerhard.pietersen@up.ac.za); Glynnis Cook (gc@cri.co.za); Hennie le Roux (hlr@cri.co.za) or Fanie van Vuuren (Faniev@cri.co.za)