Visit of Prof Mario Rajchenberg to FABI

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I met Prof Mario Rajchenberg in 1997 during the Root and Butt Rot Conference in France. Little did I know that our paths would cross again many years later. This happened as a result of a bilateral agreement between South Africa and Argentina where funding was provided for work on a research project focussing on the forest tree pathogens that are important to both countries. As part of the agreement, researchers from Argentina visit South Africa and *vice versa* with the aim of collecting fungal samples from infected trees or to conduct work in our laboratories at FABI. This year Prof Rajchenberg together with his wife Viviana visited us from 1 June to 7 August for a short sabbatical during which he conducted research, mentored students and presented a course on wood-rotting fungi.

Prof Rajchenberg is a principal investigator associated with the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas - CONICET) in Argentina. He has established his research group in Esquel (Chubut, Patagonia) where he is a principal investigator in the Research and Extension Center for Andean Patagonian Forests (Centro de Investigación y Extensión Forestal Andino Patagónico - CIEFAP). He is also is an extraordinary professor in forest pathology.

Prof Rajchenberg has a strong interest in wood rot fungi, foliar diseases in ornamental native Proteaceae, the use of root symbiotic fungi (mycorrhiza) in forest production, edible fungi of native and introduced native and plantation forests of the northern Patagonia, and the study of the 'blue spot' of the woods. He is well known for his work on the taxonomy and systematics of the polypores and wood rotting fungi. His interest has led to the publication of more than 100 scientific articles in high impact ISI rated journals, dealing mostly with the taxonomy of the polypores in Argentina and other countries. In recognition for his contribution to mycology, a new species in the genus *Hericium* was named after Prof Rajchenberg in a paper that appeared this year (2013) in Mycological progress. The particular species is referred to as *Hericium rajchenbergii*.

As part of his visit, Prof Rajchenberg and his wife joined us for a field trip to the Garden Route. The objective of this trip was to familiarise him and a new CTHB PhD student, Michel Totchet, with some of our indigenous woody ecosystems and diseases that are affecting indigenous trees. In addition it provided an opportunity for Prof Rajchenberg to share his invaluable ideas and experience regarding wood rotting fungi with us. During the field trip he trained Michel in recognising wood rot on felled trees and isolating the fungi that cause wood rot.

During his visit, Prof Rajchenberg presented a short course on wood rotting fungi entitled “Systematics and Biology of Aphyllophoroid Fungi”. The Aphyllophoroid fungi comprise a variable group of organisms that play major roles in nature, such as wood degradation and mycorrhizal associations, and are related to major wood-rotting diseases of standing trees worldwide. The aims of the workshop were to provide students and researchers with introductory knowledge regarding the biology, morphology and phylogeny of Aphyllophorales, experience in working with and identifying these fungi and information pertaining to their biology and pathogenicity. The workshop was attended by seven students and researchers in the CTHB and three researchers from the ARC.

It was a great privilege to host Prof Rajchenberg and Viviana. His visit cemented future collaboration between his research group and the CTHB, and establishes new friendships between students and a great mentor. We are grateful to the NRF and the Argentinian government for funding this very exciting project.