

## The 9th International Mycological Congress (IMC 9) 1-6 August, Edinburgh, Scotland

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FABI delegates at the International Mycological Congress.

The International Mycological Congress (IMC) held under the auspices of the International Mycological Association (IMA) is the largest gathering of researchers from all kind of affiliations and backgrounds working with fungi. Once every four years tree pathologists, crop scientists, geneticists, medical mycologists, mushroom growers, taxonomists, phylogeneticists, and many more from all over the world gather for a week and share their research ideas and results with one another. This year the venue was the historic city of Edinburgh, capital of Scotland, and more than 1700 scientists from more than 80 countries attended presenting 457 talks and more than 1500 posters. Among these were 11 Fabians and several ex-Fabians (Ph.D. students from past years).

The conference theme was Fungal Biology, a broad topic that was divided into 45 themed symposia. FABI contributions were in the fields of tree pathogens, endophytes, fungal taxonomy and phylogenetics, genomics, fungal interactions with other organisms, biodiversity, and population biology. The congress thus served to showcase the research of FABI research programmes including the Tree Protection Co-operative Programme (TPCP) and the Centre of Excellence (DST-CTHB). At the same time the event gave FABI researchers the opportunity to benchmark the quality of their research against that of the rest of world. No one would argue that the team is considered leaders in many fields and growing in the right directions. Genome sequencing is, for example, at present considered state-of-the-art, and the FABI group have already sequenced the genomes of two major fungal pathogens of trees (the pitch canker pathogen and the *Ceratocystis* wilt pathogen), and is part of a consortium

doing a third genome sequence (that of the *Amylostereum areolatum* symbiont to *Sirex noctilio*).

Congresses such as the IMC allow FABI researches to observe and learn about new technologies that can be used in our quest to produce healthier trees, as well as novel methods to analyse and interpret research results. Listening and talking to peers serve as a valuable breeding ground for fresh ideas and cross-fertilization of existing expertise. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of conferences such as this one is the international contacts that are fostered and collaborations that stem from these. There are so many cases from the past where members of this dynamic team have achieved better results and published better papers in collaboration with colleagues from abroad than would have been the case without their input. After meeting people in person at conferences, many of these scientists often visit FABI, sometimes for extended periods of time, working with our students in the field and the laboratories. The opposite is also true, where many of the FABI team have been invited to lecture or work at other universities or institutes. Often times such opportunities come with financial support that builds the research programme and expands our research horizons and insights further. The value of conferences such as IMC9 cannot easily be calculated, and will most probably only be visible three to four years from now. Yet based on past experience, participating in such events brings much more than the initial investment. And this is the key to growth and success in research.