

FOREST ENTOMOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA - SHOWCASED AT FABI

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One of the most exciting events on the South African science calendar this year was the XIII International Congress of Entomology (ICE) held from the 6th to the 12th July 2008 in Durban. This is the largest meeting of Entomologists held every five years and hosting this meeting in South Africa brought some 2 500 scientist from 102 countries. This is the first time that the meeting has been held on the African continent - a continent richly endowed with insects.

As part of the ICE, the University of Pretoria via the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI) hosted a pre-congress Forest Entomology meeting "Recent advances in Forest Insect Science" from the 1st to the 6th July. This meeting was held under the banner of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) which is a non-profit global network of forest scientists. It assembles at least 15 000 scientists from approximately 700 Member Organizations in over 110 countries across the globe. The IUFRO Forest Entomology meeting included 70 delegates from about 22 countries - the maximum number that could be accommodated for this special event.

"One of the primary motivations for hosting the pre-ICE2008 IUFRO Forest Entomology meeting is for the delegates to become accustomed with forest entomology in South Africa and to become involved in what we do. Such meetings provide the ideal platform for people to network and to establish collaborative research projects whilst being exposed to a fascinating country" says the primary organizer of the meeting, Dr Bernard Slippers from FABI at the University of Pretoria. Other organisers included Prof Mike Wingfield (Director of FABI and IUFRO Division 7 coordinator) and Dr Andrew (Sandy) Liebhold, a senior forest scientist from the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, both of whom were responsible for assembling the Forest Entomology Programme for the ICE.

The lecture component of the IUFRO Forest Entomology meeting took place between 1-3 July 2008 at the ABSA Conference Centre in Pretoria. As part of this meeting, delegates were given an exclusive tour of FABI where they were hosted to a cheese and wine gathering and the guests then participated in an authentically African "drumming session". International dignitaries reinforced their commitment to international collaboration in forest health research and described their visit and drumming session as a pleasurable *African* experience. "It was very nice. I enjoyed it a lot. All in all, everything is great and Prof Mike's tour was great," said Lorena San Roman, a delegate from Uruguay.

While leading the FABI tour and sharing its rich experience with the guests, Prof Wingfield reiterated the fact that FABI represented a broadly integrated "family" of scientists working in the field of plant health. He noted that the forest protection programme, dealing with both forest insects and diseases and the interactions between them, represented only one of numerous strong research programmes in FABI. He also made the point that the success of FABI has been strongly influenced by the cultural diversity in the Institute with at least 30 different local and international mother tongues being spoken by the FABI community.

“Diversity is very important here at FABI. We try to ‘mix’ our students. You may find a student from China sitting next to one from another continent. Even with the local students, we try to combine them because we believe that there is a lot to be learned from our diversity in unity,” says Prof Wingfield.

The IUFRO Forest Entomology meeting was planned to address all major aspects of forest insect research including: Population Ecology, Integrated Management, Forest Impacts, Biological Control, Biological Diversity, Conservation Ecology, Biological Invasions and Microbial Interactions. This meeting included a formal lecture component and an extensive field tour to view some of the unique forest plantation pest problems in South Africa. These included problems caused by native as well as introduced pests of *Eucalyptus* and *Pinus* in the region. The field tour also provided delegates with a unique opportunity to gain an overview of the forestry plantation operations in the country.

As part of the field tour, delegates had the opportunity to see the African large mammals and other special attractions at the Hluhluwe/Umfolozi Game Reserve in Kwazulu-Natal. An intention of the game drives was to show everyone the *BIG FIVE* as well as the *LITTLE FIVE* (including two insects, the rhinoceros beetle and the ant lion). The field tour was an enormous success and ended in Durban in time to allow the 70 delegates to register for ICE and to meet up with thousands of other colleagues from around the world. Many delegates made the point that this was the best forest entomology meeting that they had ever attended. “Most importantly, many new collaborative research ventures were established and these will strongly influence Forest Entomology in South Africa and the rest of the world for many years to come” said organizer, Dr Bernard Slippers.



GROUP PHOTO



Pre-ICE 2008 IUFRO Forest Entomology meeting delegates drumming to the African beats at FABI