

Figuring life's jigsaw puzzle

At the relatively tender age of 32, Dr Marieka Gryzenhout has completed a PhD, won a string of prestigious science awards, bursaries and grants and is in the process of publishing a book on her research. She is also mother to one-year-old daughter Sietske.

Gryzenhout's formidable international reputation in mycology began growing while she was a student. She completed all her degrees in a short space of time, all cum laude.

Gryzenhout's research has mainly entailed detailed taxonomic studies of the *Cryphonectriaceae*, a new family of fungi. Within this family, she describes an additional eight new genera. The fungi represent some of the most important fungal pathogens of forest trees in the world. "These microscopically small life forms have enormous implications for our economy, ecology and quarantine regulations," she says, "as they



Dr Marieka Gryzenhout, winner of a 2007 L'Oréal award

can kill trees or stunt their growth."

Currently, as a postdoctoral fellow at the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (Fabi) at the University of Pretoria, she is continuing her work on this fungal group while expanding her mycological experience by studying other diverse fungi occurring on trees.

Gryzenhout clearly loves what she is doing. "I find the life of fungi fasci-

nating, and there is still so much to research and discover in this area," she says. Her work as curator of the culture collection of the Tree Protection Cooperative Programme and Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology situated within Fabi involves many challenges, but she thrives on a good challenge.

Another challenge is to link species discovered in South Africa today with discoveries in other parts of the world centuries ago. She has just found a reference to a species described in 1882!

She is editor of the official newsletter of the African Mycological Association and the newsletter for the *Mycorrhiza* email list server for South African amateur mycology — and she was personally responsible for the launch of these two newsletters.

She also promotes mycology by giving public lectures and writing popular articles.