

10th Anniversary Conference of the Southern African Society for Biosystematic Biology

SASSB conference at Illovo Beach, KwaZulu-Natal, 21-25th July 2009

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In July, the 18-monthly Conference of the South African Society for Systematic Biologists (SASSB), hosted by the School of Biological and Conservation Sciences (University of KwaZulu-Natal), was held at Illovo Beach. In addition to marking the Society's 10th anniversary, the conference also celebrated the 200th birthday of Charles Darwin and the 150th anniversary of his *On the Origin of Species*.

The Conference programme included a series of keynote addresses by various prominent South African scientists as well as representatives from the different DST-NRF Centres of Excellence. The keynote addresses included an amazing variety of topics such as "*Making biology count: small steps or a bold leap?*" by Dr Albert van Jaarsveld, President of the NRF, "*Phylogeography: Seeing genes in space and time from Darwin to 2009*" by Prof Paulette Bloomer, University of Pretoria, and "*The Evolution of Approaches to Phylogenetics*" by Prof Tim Crowe, University of Cape Town, to name but a few.

The presentations covered various aspects of biosystematics, including phylogeography, phylogenetics, applied systematics and conservation. Although the majority of these papers focussed on animals and plants, a small number of presentations also dealt with the systematics of eukaryotic and prokaryotic microbes. Not surprisingly, most of these were presented by delegates from FABI. Emilie Boissin, a new postdoctoral fellow in FABI, presented her previous work entitled "*Comparative phylogeography of hydrozoans from the Southwestern Indian Ocean*" and Emma Steenkamp talked about the "*Major advances in the field of fungal systematics*". Francois Boshoff and Lunghile Mthombeni presented posters on "*The Diversity of Bradyrhizobium species associated with native and non-native Acacia species*" and "*The characterization of Burkholderia species associated with Hypocalyptus and related Legumes*", respectively. Interest in the biosystematics of microbes was considerable, and this prompted Emma's nomination and appointment to the SASSB committee on which she is now the only microbiologist.

All the FABIans who attended the conference would like to thank the NRF, the DST/NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB), the Tree Protection Cooperative Programme (TPCP), the University of Pretoria and the South African Biosystematics Initiative (SABI) for sponsoring their attendance of the conference.