

Mycorrhiza Mycology e-mail list server –A contribution to Tree Health Biotechnology in South Africa



The Mycorrhiza Mycology e-mail list server has recently been established for South Africa by Dr Marieka Gryzenhout, a post-doctoral fellow associated with the Tree Pathology Co-operative Programme (TCP) and the DST/ NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB). Fungi represent the greatest number of organisms affecting the health of trees and in South Africa there is

no current literature on these organisms available in bookshops. Guides to identify fungi, especially mushrooms and other macrofungi commonly encountered in gardens and in nature, are especially lacking. This is despite the fact that there is currently an abundance of identification guides for plants, birds, reptiles and insects. In an effort to rectify this situation and to engage more closely with people interested in fungi (those that affect tree health as well as others) Mycorrhiza was established. The primary intention has been to meet the needs of nature lovers who would like to learn more about fungi, specifically macrofungi, which include the fungal components of Mycorrhizae (an obligate symbiosis between fungi and plants) and many tree pathogens. This group also serves to stimulate the involvement and interest of those who are already knowledgeable, like fellow mycologists, plant pathologists, botanists and amateurs who study mushrooms as a hobby.



Activities of the Mycorrhiza group include monthly newsletters written by Dr Gryzenhout, which contain basic information on fungi. They also contain more advanced articles about the various groups of fungi that people see in gardens and in nature, and other interesting stories regarding the fungi. Each newsletter also includes an interesting recipe using fungi, with the aim of

promoting a broader interest in organisms that are often seen as having negative properties. Two local fungi are treated in each newsletter (including pictures, how to identify them and background information). Unknown fungi that people have encountered are also included in the newsletter, with the hope that someone registered on Mycorrhiza will recognise them. To assist in this process, various international experts on fungi have been invited to be part of the Mycorrhiza group.

Amongst the public, there exists a great hunger for and interest in fungi. People who know very little about fungi are amazed when they learn about the various aspects of mycology. With the assistance of students in the TPCP/CTHB group, Dr Gryzenhout has given several public lectures and has also been invited to outings specifically aimed at looking for fungi in botanical gardens and nature reserves. This has led to several other interesting developments. She has appeared on the Kyknet television series on gardening, Tuinpaleis, and has had a telephonic interview on the Afrikaans radio station, RSG. Dr Gryzenhout also writes a bimonthly series of popular articles on various aspects of fungi in the gardening magazine, "The Gardener" (Afrikaans edition: "Die Tuinier").

Much can be gained scientifically by those joining the Mycorrhiza group and even more can be gained from it in future. South Africa has an incredibly rich fungal diversity that is basically untapped. Through Mycorrhiza, an inventory of a small part of this diversity is being established. It also highlights the great need for scientific research and the lack of expertise in this field. Through Mycorrhiza a network of professional mycologists, pathologists, botanists and amateurs is also being created, which is striving to promote closer co-operation, new opportunities and knowledge of research done by fellow scientists.

Mycorrhiza plays a fundamental role in educating the public and creating awareness in the fields of mycology and plant pathology. It also strongly complements the work done in the TPCP/CTHB. Not only are the obvious fungi that people see, such as mushrooms, being discussed, but the impact that fungi have in nature is also being promoted. This includes the impact of fungal pathogens and the work done by the TPCP/CTHB regarding the health of trees is promoted in such discussions. This undoubtedly will lead to further research opportunities for the TPCP/CTHB programmes.

If you wish to add your name to the Mycorrhiza listserver, please contact Marieka at: marieka.gryzenhout@fabi.up.ac.za