

FABI HOSTS A “CELEBRATION OF SCIENCE” WITH A SPECIAL SEMINAR BY THREE FABI PHD GRADUATES

Three FABI alumni headlined a “celebration of science” at the Institute on 7 August. The trio, who completed their PhD degrees at FABI in recent years, presented on their recent research projects and their vision for forestry and agricultural research in the future.



Dr Nicky Creux’s seminar, “The effect of a changing environment on the timing and co-ordination of flower maturation and pollinator visits” related how her fascination with how plants “tell time” led her to the University of California, Davis, where she conducts research on the circadian rhythms of sunflowers. She showed that mature sunflower heads facing an easterly direction attracted more insect pollinators than those facing west. Dr Creux completed her PhD thesis in the Forest Molecular Genetics programme in 2013.



Dr Markus Wilken discussed sexual reproduction in fungi in his seminar, “Birds do it and fungi do it: Sexual reproduction in the fungal family Ceratocystidaceae”. He showed that sexual reproduction in fungi was not only dynamic, but also had many advantages for the pathogen such as the reshuffling of existing genes and the elimination of deleterious mutations. He also showed that understanding sexual reproduction of fungi was crucial to overall and better understanding of pathogen and plant interactions. A postdoctoral Fellow at FABI, Dr Wilken completed his PhD thesis in 2015.



Dr Rosita Yocgo spoke of the need for “smart agriculture” in response to climate change and the demand for increased food production in her presentation “Uniting plant biotechnology and modelling concepts to predict plant-environmental interactions”. She said a multi-disciplinary approach that used historical and localised information to “understand the present” and to help scientists “see into the future” was essential for “smart agriculture”. Dr Yocgo completed her PhD degree in 2011 and is currently with the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences.