

FABIAN PARTICIPATES IN THE FIRST NRF-NSF FUNDED BARK BEETLE-FUNGUS WORKSHOP IN FLORIDA, USA

A group of 15 scientists from South Africa and the USA met at the University of Florida, Gainesville, from 8 to 10 December 2018. They are part of a network formed in early 2018 in response to a joint call for funding from the NRF and NSF. Professors Jiri Hulcr from the University of Florida and Wilhelm de Beer of FABI initiated the successful application. The network aims to establish new or strengthen existing collaborations between scientists from the two countries involved in research on all aspects related to bark and ambrosia beetle ecosystems. A Wiki page documents all information and progress of the network.

The South African team also includes Prof Francois Roets from the University of Stellenbosch (who also attended the meeting), Prof Eastonce Gwata (University of Venda), Dr Mapotso Kena (University of Limpopo), Dr Tendai Musvuugwa (Sol Plaatje University), as well as Dr. Irene Barnes, Prof Noelani van den Berg, and Dr Tuan Duong from FABI.



The American team includes Prof Diana Six (University of Montana), Dr Matt Kasson (West Virginia University), Dr Caterina Villari (University of Georgia), Dr Chase Mayers (Iowa State University), Dr Romina Gazis (University of Florida, Homestead), and Shannon Lynch (University of California-Santa Cruz), all of whom attended the meeting.

The network of experts identified major capacity gaps, challenges, and opportunities in contemporary bark beetle-fungus research. Together, they produced a draft community

whitepaper that lays out a strategy to develop a set of standards for sampling, experimental design, data capture, symbiosis and pathology inference, statistics, and molecular tools, that will guide new researchers in the field. In addition, they plan to establish a platform to facilitate data sharing through established data portals like iDigBio.

Although current NRF-NSF funding is restricted to South African and American scientists, the team has invited researchers from all over the world to participate in the initiative by attending online and future in-person meetings over the next five years. FABI will host the next in-person meeting in November 2019.

This project comes at a pertinent time, as South Africa has to deal with the current invasion of the Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer that is killing thousands of trees in the country. The network will enable the South African team working on the PSHB to draw on the expertise and experience of colleagues from around the world in their battle against the beetle and its fungus.