

FABIANS CELEBRATE PHD DEGREE WITH MESFIN GOSSA AND HIS FAMILY

FABI congratulates Mesfin Gossa on successfully defending his PhD thesis at his oral exam following his prestige seminar on 1 November. Mesfin celebrated this milestone with his friends, family and fellow FABlans. He completed his PhD thesis under the supervision of Dr Brett Hurley, Prof. Bernard Slippers and Dr Jeff Garnas. He is the first student at FABI to complete his PhD degree with Dr Hurley as a primary supervisor.



His external examiners were Dr Marc Kenis of the Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International (CABI) in Switzerland and Prof. Massimo Faccoli from the Department of Agronomy, Food, Natural Resources, Animals and Environment at the University of Padova in Italy. Dr Hurley congratulated Mesfin on completing his PhD thesis in three years – a feat he attributed to great focus, being methodical and hard work.

Mesfin's PhD study was titled "Ecology and diversity of introduced *Pissodes* (Coleoptera: Curculionidea) in South Africa" and it investigated the identity and genetic diversity of a weevil species introduced to South Africa in 1942, and previously identified as *Pissodes nemorensis*, a species native to North America.

Using morphological and molecular analysis and by comparing weevil samples collected from pine growing regions in South Africa and those of origin from North America and Europe, Mesfin's study revealed that the species introduced to South Africa was unlikely to be *P.*

nemorensis. The invasive weevil species in South Africa was likely to be an unrecognised member of the *Pissodes strobi* complex or a hybrid between *P. nemorensis* and *P. strobi*, Mesfin hypothesised in his study.

