

## MITES AND MALFORMATIONS CLOSE TO HOME

Floral malformation is an important disease problem on mango trees where it is associated with various *Fusarium* spp. and mite activity. A similar disease is found on the water berry (*Syzygium cordatum*) tree that is related to *Eucalyptus* in the Myrtaceae. The team of the Tree Protection Co-operative Programme (TPCP) and the DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) have an interest in this disease linked to potential health threats to *Eucalyptus* and to *S. cordatum* that is an important amenity tree. Malformed flowers were sampled extensively in the natural range of these trees including sites in the KwaZulu-Natal province.



To understand the role of mites in floral malformations on waterberry and to compare samples from the field with those in a more secluded environment, Prof Mike Wingfield along with FABI PhD candidates Darryl Herron and Rachel Mkandawire sampled heavily-malformed inflorescences in the garden of Prof Wingfield's Brooklyn (Pretoria) home. Early results provide an excellent basis for comparison where the garden trees have a much more limited assemblage of mites and *Fusarium* spp. than those found in natural forests. As a scientist, sometimes you do not have to go very far in order to put the pieces of a puzzle together. In this case, Mike's garden provided an easy opportunity to study floral malformation close to FABI and without necessitating an extensive field trip. An important lesson is that one should not underestimate the value of tree disease problems close to home.