

## **THE 8<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL MYCOLOGICAL CONGRESS (IMC8)**

The 8<sup>th</sup> International Mycological Congress (IMC8), hosted by the Australian Mycological Society, was held in the Cairns International Conference Centre, Australia, from 21-25 August 2006. Cairns is a beautiful town in the north of Queensland where it is nestled between the Great Barrier Reef and an ancient tropical rainforest, which are both listed as World Heritage sites. Parts of these rainforests are the oldest continually surviving rainforests on earth and dates back more than 120 million years. Plants representing all stages of evolution can be found here. The Great Barrier Reef consists of thousands of individual coral reefs that span an area larger than the United Kingdom and is considered as one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. It supports the greatest concentration of marine life on the planet with more than 1500 fish species, 350 coral species, 10000 species of sponges and 4000 species of molluscs.

The Congress was attended by almost 800 delegates (students, researchers, academics, practitioners and industry representatives) from all around the world. Although most delegates were from Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and Japan, a significant number represented countries from North and South America, Europe and Africa. Fourteen Fabians also presented their research. They include the MSc students (Joha Grobbelaar and Gilbert Kamgan Nkuekam), PhD students (Wilhelm de Beer, Magriet van der Nest, Marelize van Wyk and Draginja Pavlic), post-docs (Drs Martin Coetzee and Xudong Zhou), project leaders (Drs Bernard Slippers and Emma Steenkamp and Prof Jolanda Roux) and Professors Mike and Brenda Wingfield.



**TPCP/CTHB researchers at the Brisbane International Airport**

A wide spectrum of mycological topics was addressed, ranging from ecology, evolution and biosecurity to fungal pathology and medical and veterinary mycology. In most of these, it was demonstrated how new technologies such as fungal genomics and proteomics will increase our knowledge of the evolution and biodiversity of fungi, ultimately enabling us to control fungal disease and to utilize fungi optimally in agricultural, food and medical sciences. The plenary talks were given by world-renowned research leaders. These talks included such topics as forest fungi in a changing world (Mike Wingfield, SA); the fungal tree of life (Franz Oberwinkler, Germany); mycology and mycologists (David Hawksworth, Spain) species concepts in fungi (John Taylor, USA); comparative fungal genomics (James Galagan, USA); and mating in fungi (Regine Kahmann, Germany).

The majority of the presentations by Fabians addressed the evolution, diversity and population biology of economically important pathogens of South African commercial forest species. Bernard and Magriet presented talks on their research on the molecular and ecological patterns of distribution in populations of the Sirex woodwasp and its fungal symbiont *Amylostereum areolatum*. Emma talked about the outbreak of pine pitch canker in the Western Cape and the distribution of the causal agent of the disease. Martin presented his work on the evolution of the pine pathogen *Armillaria fuscipes* and other *Armillaria* species in the form of a poster and an oral presentation. Brenda also touched on biosecurity issues with her presentation of Dr Marieke Gryzenhout's work on *Cryphonectria* in a talk entitled "Cryphonectria canker of Eucalyptus: A little-known disease caused by an assemblage of fungi of extreme quarantine relevance". This and several other talks also referred to the importance of native and introduced plant pathogens. Jolanda presented a poster on native *Crysosporthe* species that represent a serious threat to native African and Australian Myrtales, while Draginja talked about speciation and gene flow in the *Botryosphaeria parva*-*B. ribis* complex on native and introduced plant hosts. The fungi associated with forestry products such as wooden utility poles were also considered. Wilhelm presented a poster on Elsie de Meyer's work on *Paecilomyces* species isolated from damaged utility poles in SA.

Poster presentations by Fabians covered various aspects of the biology and evolution of Ophiostomatoid fungi. Jolanda and Gilbert presented on *Ophiostoma* and *Leptographium*-like species associated with native and Norwegian trees. Marelize and Zhou covered the topic of new species of *Ceratostyis* associated with Australian eucalypts, and of *Leptographium* associated with pine; Wilhelm presented on the *Ophiostoma* species associated with a birch-infesting *Scolytus* bark beetle; and Zhou on the link between the movement of *Ophiostoma ips* and its bark beetle vectors. Wilhelm also covered the topic of new *Ophiostoma* species associated with termites in South Africa and presented Renate Zipfel's work on the overall evolution of these fungi. The association of Ophiostomatoid fungi with insects was a topic that was also discussed.

The Congress was a tremendous success and enjoyed by all FABIans. It gave them the opportunity to present their work and discuss their research with both world-renowned scientists and students from other countries. It was also a wonderful opportunity for them to network with people from many other countries and so to build up their collaborative linkages and make many new friends.

(Article written by Magriet van der Nest, PhD student)