

PHYLOGENETIC WORKSHOPS IN 2006

The Phylogenetic Workshops presented under the auspices of FABI focuses on the theoretical and applied aspects of the majority of methods used in inferring phylogenetic relationships amongst organisms. Within the TPCP and CTHB context, understanding phylogenetic relationships is an essential aspect of pest and pathogen identification and management. These workshops were initiated after the realization that most researchers have limited experience in the practical application of evolutionary models and tree building algorithms as well as the execution of computer software used for the analyses. A major objective for the workshops is to provide "hands on" experience in the use of databases available on the world-wide-web and the different software, both commercial and freeware, currently available for evolutionary biologists. The workshops cater for researchers ranging from novices to those having advanced background in the field. Dr Martin Coetzee, who recently took up a UP Research Fellowship, is the driving force behind the workshops. He has been assisted by Drs Wolfgang Maier and Jane Wright, both doctoral fellows in the CTHB and TPCP, Dr Fourie Joubert from the Bioinformatics and Computational Biology Unit (UP) and Dr Sarita Maree from the Molecular Ecology and Evolution Programme, Department of Genetics, UP.

Two workshops were held in 2006. The first took place between 22-26 May and was attended by one researcher from ARC Exotic Disease Division, two from the ARC OVI Rabies Unit, one from the Department of Microbiology and Plant Pathology, UP, one from the Department of Veterinary Tropical Disease, UP, three from the NICD, one from the ARC-PPRI and six from FABI. The second workshop took place from 2-6 October. This workshop was attended by four researchers from ARC, one from Department of Veterinary Tropical Disease, one from the Department of Microbiology and Plant Pathology, UP and eleven from FABI.

The workshops have been a huge success and have achieved the aim of providing a platform for students and researchers within the TPCP to improve their skills applying the different phylogenetic models. In addition, the workshops have become extremely popular with research programmes in UP as well as from other parts of the country. These phylogenetic workshops are therefore providing an essential service to the research community in South Africa.