

CERATOCYSTIS SPECIES IN AFRICA, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE ACACIA WILT PATHOGEN *C. ALBIFUNDUS*

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Very little is known regarding *Ceratocystis* species in Africa. Most reports date back to when *Ceratocystis* and *Ophiostoma* were treated collectively and there are no specimens available for verification. Interest in these fungi in Africa has increased with reports of *C. fimbriata* causing disease on plantation-grown eucalypts. This fungus, together with *C. pirilliformis*, a presumably Australian fungus, and *C. moniliformis* has also been found on wounds on eucalypts in South Africa, in the absence of disease symptoms. An intriguing discovery of a *Ceratocystis* species was that of a fungus, initially identified as *C. fimbriata*, responsible for death of non-native *Acacia mearnsii* in South Africa in 1989. This fungus was later shown to represent a distinct taxon, *C. albifundus*. Herbarium specimens representing two earlier collections of *C. fimbriata* from native *Protea* species in South Africa most likely also represent *C. albifundus*. *Ceratocystis albifundus* is the most important pathogen of *A. mearnsii* trees in South Africa and also now known on *A. mearnsii* in Uganda and Kenya. *Ceratocystis albifundus* is morphologically similar to *C. fimbriata* and differs only in a few characteristics and its position in a distinct phylogenetic clade based on DNA sequence comparisons. Recent surveys have yielded *C. albifundus* from wounds on many native South African woody plants, reinforcing the view that it is native to Africa. This is supported by population genetic studies and the absence of disease in native trees. The discovery of *C. albifundus* in Africa has emphasised the fact that species of this important pathogen genus have been overlooked on the continent. The unusual jump to a non-native plant was needed to recognise it. Surveys are being undertaken to identify *Ceratocystis* species on native African trees and these are likely to result in the discovery of additional native and possibly also introduced *Ceratocystis* species.