



AARON THOMAS HARVEY

PhD Candidate | Molecular Genetics

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📍 Boksburg, Gauteng | 🚗 Driver's Licence: Code B | 🗣 Languages: English, Afrikaans

Education

PhD Genetics (In-progress), University of Pretoria, 2025 – Current

Thesis: Investigating the role of RNA plasticity in *Persea americana* rootstocks during *Phytophthora cinnamomi* infection.

Member of Hans Merensky Chair in Avocado Research and FABI.

MSc Genetics with distinction, University of Pretoria, 2023 – 2024 (2 years)

Dissertation: Characterisation of the *WAK* / *WAKL* gene family with a focus on members in *Persea americana* implicated in defense against *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

Member of Hans Merensky Chair in Avocado Research and FABI.

BScHons Genetics with distinction, University of Pretoria, 2022 (1 year)

Mini-dissertation: The complex architecture of avocado *callose synthase* genes and their role in defense against *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

BSc Human Physiology, Genetics and Psychology with distinction, University of Pretoria, 2019 – 2021 (3 years)

Member of The Golden Key Honour Society.

Grantleigh College (IEB), Richards Bay, KZN, 2018

Honours – Academics; Colours – Drama and Public Speaking; Chairperson of Academic Portfolio.

Research & Teaching Experience

University of Pretoria, Department of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology

- 2025 – GTS 251 (Molecular Genetics) & GTS 261 (Genetic Diversity and Evolution) Tutor; appointed Consultant Tutor.
- 2024 – GTS 251 (Molecular Genetics) & MBY 261 (Mycology) Tutor.
- 2023 – GTS 251 (Molecular Genetics) & GTS 354 (Genome Evolution and Phylogenetics) Tutor.
- 2022 – GTS 161 (Introductory Genetics) Tutor.
- 2020 – PHY 131 (Physics for Biology Students) Tutor.

Teneo Online Education

- 2021–2022 – Online Tutor for Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Life Sciences & Dramatic Arts.
- 2022 – External Marker for English and Natural Science.

Conference Presentations

1. Harvey A., van den Berg N., Taylor, N., Swart V. Callose synthases fortifying avocado defence against *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. Poster presentation, 54th Biennial Congress of the Southern African Society for Plant Pathology, Jan 2026, Umhlanga, KZN.
2. Harvey A., van den Berg N., Swart V. This is your *WAK* up call: Keeping avocados healthy, one gene at a time. Oral presentation, BGM Postgraduate Symposium, Nov 2024, University of Pretoria.
3. Harvey A., van den Berg N., Swart V. *In silico* characterisation of the *WAK/WAKL* gene family in avocado. Oral presentation, XX International Plant Protection Congress, Jul 2024, Athens, Greece.
4. Harvey A., van den Berg N., Swart V. Genome-wide *in silico* characterisation of the avocado *WAK* and *WAKL* gene family. Oral presentation, 53rd Biennial Congress of the Southern African Society for Plant Pathology, Jan 2024, Golden Gate National Park.

Publications

1. Harvey A, van den Berg N, Swart V. Orchestrating RNA plasticity in plant immunity. (*In Review*), Plant Cell Reports. 2025.
2. Harvey A., van den Berg N., Swart V. (2025). *In silico* characterisation of the avocado *WAK/WAKL* gene family with a focus on genes involved in defence against *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. *Front. Plant Sci.* 15:1467148. doi: 10.3389/fpls.2024.1467148
3. Harvey A., van den Berg N., Swart V. (2024). Describing and characterizing the *WAK/WAKL* gene family across plant species: a systematic review. *Front. Plant Sci.* 15:1474781. doi: 10.3389/fpls.2024.1474781

Leadership & Service

- 2025 – FABI Social Club Group Leader.
- 2023–2024 – Co-lead Facilitator, TREEhouse Initiative, FABI.
- 2023 – Hans Merensky Chair in Avocado Research Social Club Co-chair.
- 2022–Present – Active member, Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI).

Other Achievements, Awards & Training

- 2025 – Runner-up, National Three-Minute Thesis Competition (University of the Free State)
- 2025 – Runner-up, University of Pretoria Three-Minute Thesis Competition.
- 2021 –Teneo Online Education Tutor Training (Microsoft Teams/Zoom experience).

- 2020 – Tutor Training through the University of Pretoria (including online tutor training).
- 2020 – Mentor, STARS Mentorship Programme, University of Pretoria.
- 2020 – Became a Golden Key Honour Society Member.
- 2019 – Placed 6th on the Top 10 Academics List, TuksEkhaya Residence, University of Pretoria
- 2018 – Placed 1st in two categories and awarded Overall Top Performer, Zululand Eisteddfod.
- 2017 – Placed 2nd, Zululand Schools Public Speaking.

References

Dr Velushka Swart – Postgraduate Supervisor and MBY 261 & GTS 251 Lecturer

✉ velushka.swart@up.ac.za

Prof Noëlan van den Berg – Postgraduate Supervisor and MBY 261 Coordinator

✉ noelani.vandenberg@up.ac.za