

## CTHB AT FABI HOSTS DELEGATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

The DST-NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) at the University of Pretoria hosted 28 undergraduate students and staff from the University of Venda (UniVen) on 22 August. UniVen is one of seven institutions in the Centre's research network. The aim of the visit was to introduce the students to the research done by staff and students in the CTHB and its sister programme, the Tree Protection Co-operative Programme (TPCP). Research leaders, postdoctoral Fellows and PhD candidates in the CTHB and the TPCP gave the students snapshots of their research through short presentations and tours of the facilities such as the FABI Fungal Culture Collection, the FABI Biocontrol Centre at UP's Experimental Farm and the Future Africa Campus.



CTHB Director Prof Emma Steenkamp encouraged the students to use the visit to gauge how they can fit postgraduate studies in their lives. As the DST-NRF SARCHI Chair in Fungal Genomics, Prof. Brenda Wingfield reflected on the application of genomics on tree health matters. Head of the Macadamia Protection Programme Dr Gerda Fourie spoke about integrated pest management in South Africa's macadamia industry.

Postdoctoral fellow Dr Vuyiswa Bushula-Njah spoke of the benefits of mentorship by "seasoned experts" in her development as a researcher as well as the opportunities to network and collaborate with researchers from different parts of the world. PhD student Andi Wilson touched on her journey as an undergraduate student in the CTHB's mentorship programme and her progression to her PhD study, which focuses on mating in *Huntia moniliformis*.

PhD student Quentin Guignard encouraged the students to be curious and to explore projects in fields that may not be familiar to them. He showed how visual and chemical ecology are applied to pest management. Juanita Avontuur gave a snapshot of her PhD study on rhizobia-legume symbiosis and spoke about her involvement in the CTHB Outreach programme. Dr Neriman Yilmaz spoke about the beneficial and harmful role of fungi and her work on mycotoxins in grains for human consumption and animal feed.

The day ended at the Future Africa campus where Dr Osmond Mlonyeni talked to the group. In his presentation, he encouraged students to identify the mountains that might stand between them and their dreams and then focus on conquering them. He used his own career path as an example and inspiration for them.