

FABI WELCOMES OTHER VISITORS DURING 2013

Every year FABlans travel to other centres either on research visits or to present at national and international conferences. Likewise, researchers and students from other institutions both in South Africa, Africa or abroad, visit FABI. This networking is essential to build collaborative linkages and promote scientific excellence. We mention just a few of the visitors to FABI during the course of the second half of 2013. While at FABI, many of these visitors take an active part in our Social Club activities as will be seen from the photos in this article.



Prof George Hudler and his wife Sandy (photo taken at annual SPOOF meeting, “Friday the 13th” dress theme), spent a mini-sabbatical in FABI during June/July this year. George, a professor at Cornell University in the USA is one of the world’s best-known Forest Pathologists and his visit was specifically planned to meet with students of the CTHB /TPCP and to add value to their projects with guidance and suggestions. George is also a passionate educator who has received numerous awards for teaching, some linked to his course

"Magical Mushrooms and Mischievous Moulds" - known to be one of the most popular classes at Cornell and attended by large numbers of students from various disciplines and the public. Some of his sabbatical time was spent updating his book of the same title which is a best seller in the field. Interestingly, from a FABI standpoint, George spent a six month sabbatical with the group at the University of the Free State that were responsible for starting FABI. He ended that sabbatical shortly before the move of the 55-strong team from Bloemfontein to Pretoria. As part of the farewell activities, George 'inducted' the team as a member of the Society for the Publication of Outrageous Findings (SPOOF), which he and some of his colleagues established at Cornell University many years ago. Meetings of SPOOF have become an integral part of FABI and it was a special privilege to have George as the guest speaker for the annual SPOOF meetings in FABI in 2013.



Prof Mario Rajchenberg and his wife Viviana (photo taken at annual SPOOF meeting, “Friday the 13th” dress theme) visited FABI during June/July this year as part of a RSA-Argentina Agreement funded through the NRF. He is a PI associated with CONICET and CIEFAP in Patagonia, Argentina. He was hosted by Dr Martin Coetzee of FABI. His visit cemented future collaboration between his research group and the CTHB, and establishes new friendships between students and a great mentor. A separate nugget has been written on his visit.



Rodrigo Ahumada (left in photo – photo taken at annual SPOOF meeting) works at Bioforest SA in Chile and is a regular visitor to the University of Pretoria where he is registered for his PhD. Rodrigo is expected to complete his PhD shortly and graduate in April 2014.

Dr Carlos Rodas (right in photo) hails from Colombia, and like Rodrigo has been doing a PhD part-time at UP while working for Smurfit Kappa Carton de Colombis in Colombia. He completed his PhD this year and

celebrated obtaining his doctorate together with his family and colleagues at the September 2013 graduation ceremony.



Prof Treena Burgess (left in photo) is from Murdoch University in Australia and is also a regular visitor to FABI, spending 2 months each year supervising students here as well as doing collaborative research with Prof Mike Wingfield and other colleagues at FABI. Her funding for these research visits is provided jointly from FABI and Murdoch University. Treena and her son Dre are very much part of the “FABI family” and she has hosted and co-supervised many of the FABI

colleagues and students in Australia. Treena’s speciality research area is the biology, ecology and genetics of beneficial and detrimental microorganisms in natural ecosystems, plantation forestry and horticulture, with a focus on biodiversity and biosecurity issues.

Dr Stephanie Slinski (right in photo above) is a post-doctoral fellow from the University of UC, Davis in the USA. She spends 6 months at FABI doing collaborative research with colleagues at FABI and the other 6 months in the Gordon Lab at her University in the USA. She assists MSc and PhD students in the Wessels Lab at FABI and is co-supervisor of one of our MSc students, Simone Fouche. Her research speciality area is *Fusarium circinatum*, which causes a disease of pines known as pitch canker. She is using cultural, genetic and genomic techniques to study factors affecting virulence of *F. circinatum* on *Pinus radiata*. One of her main objectives is to characterize the effects of monoterpene components of resin on the ability of *F. circinatum* to cause disease. She is also working to identify genomic regions linked to virulence.



Prof Eddie Mwenje currently holds the position of Vice-Chancellor of Bindura University, Zimbabwe and also serves as a member of the Board of the DST/NRF Centre of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) at FABI. Eddie is also very much a member of the FABI family where he co-supervises many of our students and does collaborative research with colleagues at FABI. He was due to have a month's sabbatical at FABI this year to concentrate on his research work hosted

specially by Dr Martin Coetzee. However, pressures from his own University seriously interrupted his time with us but we look forward to his return in November for the CTHB Board meeting when we hope he will be able to spend two weeks continuing with his collaborative research and publication writing. His wife, Judy, accompanied him on his visit in September.



Prof Pedro Crous, CEO of the CBS-KNAW Fungal Biodiversity Centre in the Netherlands is also a frequent visitor to FABI. He is a Core Team member of the CTHB and has published widely both with FABIans and other researchers.

Prof Jennifer Thompson, is a very well-known geneticist from the University of Cape Town where she and Prof Dave Woods were pioneers in the field of genetically modified organisms (GMO's). She recently published her book, "Food for Africa", and visited FABI on 25 September to present a very well-attended seminar on "The Life and work of a scientist in GM crops".

Dr Bill Ciesla is a retired entomologist and forest health specialist at the US Forest Service. He and his wife visited FABI in October where he had round table discussions with staff and students and presented a module course on entomology.

These are just a few of the scientists who have visited FABI over the last 5 months since June 2013. What a privilege for both FABI students and staff to be able to network and learn from these researchers while visiting FABI. This in turn will open doors for FABI students and researchers who will be able to visit their labs in their countries having set up these collaborative linkages.