

MICHEL BECOMES THE LATEST FABIAN TO FULFIL REQUIREMENTS FOR A PHD

James Michel Tchotet Tchoumi has become the latest FABian to pass his PhD, fulfilling all the requirements for completing his degree. He presented his PhD Prestige seminar on 29 August entitled “Wood-rot fungi in the Garden Route National Park (GRNP) and surrounds of South Africa: Identification and taxonomy”. Michel’s PhD was done under the primary supervision of Prof. Jolanda Roux with Prof. Martin Coetzee and Prof. Mario Rajchenberg from CIEFAP - Centro de Investigacion y Extension Forestal Andino Patagonico in Argentina as co-supervisors. His external examiners were Prof. Panos Tsopeles from the NAGREF- Institute of Mediterranean Forest Ecosystems in Athens, Greece and Dr Tonjock Rosemary-Kinga from the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Bamenda in the Cameroon. Professor Wilhelm de Beer was the internal examiner.



Michel’s study aimed to establish the identity and host range of Basidiomycetous wood-rot fungi associated with wood rot systems in the GRNP and lay a foundation on which to continue studies to determine the impact of selective harvesting and other anthropogenic impacts on these forests. Wood-rot fungi play an important role in nutrient recycling. Michel’s PhD study was the first to document the diversity of these fungi in the GRNP and will allow knowledge-based management decisions to be made including understanding and predicting the impact of selective logging on tree health.

The specific objectives of his study included assessing the diversity and host affinities of wood-rotting Basidiomycetes associated with declining native trees in timber-harvesting compartments in the GRNP. He found 26 species of Basidiomycete wood rotting fungi with the dominant taxonomic groups being *Ganoderma* and *Hymenochaetaeaceae*. Using molecular and phylogenetic studies, he identified six species that are new to science and four previously described species for the first time in South Africa. A strong host preference was found between the most abundant fungus and the denser host trees at all sites and those sites that underwent less long-term logging had the highest species richness of wood rotting Basidiomycetes.