

POLYPHAGOUS SHOT HOLE BORER PROJECTS LAUNCHED IN FORESTS OF THE SOUTHERN CAPE

FABI's Prof Wilhelm de Beer and Prof Francois Roets of Stellenbosch University visited the southern Cape in February to launch two research projects on the impact of the Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer (PSHB) on native trees in the area. The beetle and its fungus were discovered last year infesting native trees in gardens in George and Knysna. Over the next two years, two MSc students, Elmar van Rooyen based at the University of Stellenbosch and Garyn Townsend, based at Rhodes University but registered at the University of Pretoria, will regularly survey the forests around George and Knysna.



The aims of these projects are to determine:

- the rate of spread of the beetle,
- which native tree species are infested, and
- what the impact of the beetle and its fungus will be on these native trees.

To date, the beetle has been recorded from 35 native host tree species in South Africa. During this week's surveys the beetle was found on several more tree species. The students are currently doing fungal isolations and identifications of the beetles and fungi to confirm whether all of these represent the PSHB. Although the beetle and fungus will definitely not kill all the native tree species that it infests, there might be some species at risk of being killed and thus removed from sensitive ecosystems. The PSHB made headlines again with articles in the Sunday Times, Rapport, and the George Herald. The latter newspaper also placed a video of an interview with Prof de Beer on Youtube.