PROFESSOR WILHELM DE BEER RECEIVES THE SAIF DISTINGUISHED FORESTRY AWARD

Congratulations to Prof. Wilhelm de Beer who was awarded 2020's Distinguished Forestry Award by the Southern African Institute of Forestry (SAIF). The award recognises his substantial contribution and efforts in response to the invasion of the Polyphagous Shothole Borer (PSHB). Professor de Beer is a research leader and Professor at the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI) and the Department of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology at the University of Pretoria. His research focus is mycology, including fungi of bark and ambrosia beetles. He is one of the world leaders in this area of research, having published a book "Ophiostomatoid Fungi: Expanding Frontiers", numerous book chapters and about 150 papers in scientific journals.

Wilhelm's expertise in bark and ambrosia beetles and their associated fungi has been extremely fortuitous, given the recent introduction and spread of the polyphagous shothole borer (PSHB), *Euwallacea fornicatus*. This beetle and its symbiotic fungi pose a serious threat to numerous trees in South Africa's urban and native forests, as well as some fruit crops such as avocado. It is perhaps one of the most serious insect invasions in the history of our country.

Since the PSHB was first detected in South Africa in 2017, Prof. de Beer and his team have worked tirelessly in response to this invasion. This has included numerous consultations and trips across the country to track the spread of this insect; increasing awareness of the PSHB through engaging with media, including newspapers, TV and radio as well as meetings with various stakeholders to provide information and initiating a number of research projects to address important questions for the management of this invasive pest.

The PSHB continues to pose a serious threat to urban and native forests in South Africa. However, it is clear that without the work of Prof. de Beer and his team at FABI, the country would be in a far worse position.