

## TWO CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE JOIN FORCES IN RESEARCH ON LA REUNION ISLAND

The DST-NRF Centres of Excellence in Tree Health Biotechnology (CTHB) and Invasion Biology (CIB) joined forces in March (2014) to investigate microbiological aspects of the relationship between *Acacia koa* and *A. heterophylla*. This study emerged from the fascinating discovery by CIB researchers, Dr. Jaco le Roux and Prof. David Richardson, and co-workers that these two species, the former native to Hawaii and the latter native to the island of La Reunion (about 18 000 km apart) are most likely a single species. Their hypothesis (supported by robust data) is that *A. heterophylla* was introduced to La Reunion by sea birds (petrels) about 1.4 million years ago.



Field work in La Reunion to investigate microbiological aspects of the relationship between *Acacia koa* and *A. heterophylla*

The investigation team included their host, Prof Dominique Strasberg of the University of Reunion, Prof Pedro Crous of the Centraalbureau voor Schimmelcultures (CBS) in the Netherlands, Prof David Richardson and Dr Jaco Le Roux of CIB Stellenbosch, Prof. Mike Wingfield (CTHB) and Dr Angel Valverde from the Centre for Microbial Ecology and Genomics (CMEG) at the University of Pretoria. This group brought together ecologists, microbiologists, plant pathologists and mycologists with various skills including molecular and population genetics. The aim was to compare various components of the microbiota of *A. heterophylla* and *A. koa*, therefore adding new knowledge regarding the very unusual occurrence of these species (most probably one species) in two very different parts of the world. This research will require follow-up sampling in Hawaii that has been scheduled for later in 2015.