SOUTHERN AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR PLANT PATHOLOGY

SA Plant Pathologist

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Editorial

Many scientists hesitate to join societies offering excuses such as “membership is too expensive”, “I don’t have time”, “I can network online”. But societies offer you so much more - they connect you to mentors and collaborators, give you access to awards, leadership roles and a collective voice that will shape the future of the discipline. Membership signals commitment, it builds your professional profile, and anchors you in a trusted community. Belonging to a society is more than a transaction — it’s an investment in your career, your network, and the future of science.

I am going to use the International Society for Plant Pathology (ISPP) as the example to illustrate why membership of SASPP is important. The purpose of the ISPP is to promote the worldwide development of plant pathology, and the dissemination of knowledge about plant diseases and plant health management. It is managed by a council consisting of an executive committee and councillors nominated by associated societies (there are 60 societies of which seven reside in Africa, including SASPP). The ISPP sponsors the International Congress of Plant Pathology and other international meetings on plant pathology and closely related subjects. It also establishes committees to consider and report on different fields or problems in plant pathology. It publishes a journal, Food Security, in collaboration with Springer and produces newsletters on a regular basis. All members of a society, in this case SASPP, benefit from their association with ISPP. At the International Congress for Plant Pathology held in Lyon, France, a number of student members of SASPP received travel awards to attend and this included their air ticket, conference fees and accommodation. The next conference is in Australia in 2028…

In addition to the international reach of ISPP, the SASPP provides members with tangible opportunities for professional growth at the local level. The biennial congress brings together researchers, students, and industry partners to exchange the latest scientific findings and foster collaborations that directly benefit agriculture in the region. The society also supports awards, and occasionally organises workshops that build critical skills such as molecular diagnostics, bioinformatics, and science communication. For early-career scientists in particular, these platforms create visibility and valuable connections that can shape future career paths.

Membership of SASPP strengthens the collective capacity of plant pathology to respond to national and global challenges. Plant health underpins food security, trade, and sustainable farming, and societies like SASPP and ISPP provide the framework for coordinated action. By belonging to such a society, members are not only investing in their own careers but also contributing to the advancement of science that benefits society at large. Whether it is lobbying for research funding, contributing to training programs, or shaping plant health policy, the unified voice of a professional society carries far more weight than that of any individual scientist. If you are not yet a member, I encourage you to become one!

Teresa Coutinho, University of Pretoria; teresa.coutinho@up.ac.za

SASPP awards 2026

Below is a short description of each of the awards made by the SASPP (details pertaining to the application process are available on the website):

Christiaan Hendrik Persoon Medal

- This is the highest accolade bestowed by the SASPP, awarded to individuals who have demonstrated exceptional scientific achievement and service to the society. Notably, it has been awarded only seven times since its inception in 1979.

J.E. Vanderplank Award

- Named after the renowned plant pathologist, this award recognizes significant contributions to plant disease epidemiology.

Applied Plant Pathology Award

- This award honours individuals who have made notable advancements in the practical application of plant pathology, leading to improved disease management strategies.

Publicity Award of the SASPP Society

- Granted to members who have effectively promoted plant pathology to the public, enhancing awareness and understanding of the discipline.

Fellow and Honorary Memberships

- These distinctions are conferred upon members who have provided outstanding service to the society and have significantly advanced the field of plant pathology.

Biennial John and Petakin Mildenhall Best PhD Award

- This award recognizes the best PhD dissertation in plant pathology submitted during the biennial period.

Biennial Conference Awards

During the biennial conferences, the SASPP presents several awards to encourage and recognize excellence among students:

- Pannar Floating Trophy for Best Oral Presentation by a Student: Awarded to the student delivering the best oral presentation.
- Pannar Award for Best Poster Presentation by a Student: Granted for the best student poster presentation.
- SASPP Plant Health Products Floating Trophy for Best Oral Presentation on Biological Control: Recognizes outstanding oral presentations focusing on biological control methods in plant pathology
- Inqaba award for the Best Oral Presentation by a student in molecular biology

These awards not only celebrate individual achievements but also foster a culture of excellence and innovation within the plant pathology community in Southern Africa.

SASPP/BSPP award:

Grace Waterhouse Fellowship

The Grace Waterhouse Fellowship has been set up to encourage links between the SASPP and the British Society for Plant Pathology (BSPP), with a particular focus on plant pathologists in the early stages of their careers. The fellowship will be awarded competitively no more than once a year to a junior plant pathologist with high potential. Members of the SASPP in the early stages of their career, studying in a southern African country, may apply for the Grace Waterhouse Fellowship to support a working visit of between one and three months to a laboratory in the UK. The aim is to encourage collaboration and interdisciplinary research, to enable students to acquire new techniques, and to make new contacts.

Criteria:

- Any applicant must have been a member of SASPP for at least one year and must be registered for an MSc by research or PhD at the time the Fellowship award is taken up.
- No member may be awarded a Grace Waterhouse Fellowship more than once. The host must have been a member of the BSPP for at least two years.
- The Grace Waterhouse fellowship is intended to support

a) travel, accommodation and other personal costs that are not covered by the student's stipend and
b) a contribution to any consumables which are essential for the applicant's proposed research in the host laboratory. In view of the travel costs and the UK being a relatively expensive country to live in, the maximum value of any award would be £5000, although members are encouraged to be economical.

The closing date each year for the fellowship will be the 31st October, and it is expected that the placement will take place during the following year. Applications cannot be submitted for both the BSPP travel fund and for a fellowship in the same year.

54th SASPP Biennial Congress

Theme: "**Ukuqinisekisa Ikusasa Elisimeme Ngempilo Yezitshalo**" (English translation **"Ensuring a Sustainable Future through Plant Health"**)

The organizing committee of 54th SASPP Biennial Congress is thrilled to invite you to the upcoming Congress with the theme: "Ukuqinisekisa Ikusasa Elisimeme Ngempilo Yezitshalo" (English translation "Ensuring a Sustainable Future through Plant Health"). The congress is a premier gathering of leading experts, researchers, students and industry in the field of plant pathology. This congress will be a platform for sharing ground-breaking research, innovative ideas, and fostering collaborations that will shape the future of our discipline.

The 54th SASPP Congress will be held from 18 – 21 January 2026 at the Premier Hotel Umhlanga, which forms part of the eThekwini Metropolitan area. Umhlanga is a fast-developing area located along the Indian Ocean coast, north of the city of eThekwini and is well-known for its beautiful pier and promenade. The congress venue is about 20 min drive from King Shaka International airport.

Key dates:

Abstract submissions open – 7 January 2025
Online registration opens – 2 May 2025
Submission deadline for oral and poster abstracts – 30 June 2025
Notification of acceptance/rejection – 31 July 2025
Provisional Programme available – 8 September 2025
Early bird registration closes – 30 September 2025
Online registration closes – 11 December 2025
Congress dates 18 – 22 January 2026

NAMPO Cape September 2025

Sandra Lamprecht and Zakkie Pretorius presented talks on soilborne diseases and loose smut of wheat, respectively, at Nampo Cape in September 2025. They were invited by Syngenta to address several industry groups and producers during this very popular agricultural exhibition.

IN MEMORIAM

Dr PS (Schalk) van Wyk (1 April 1944 – 12 June 2025)

Reflections on a Visionary South African Plant Pathologist

Taken in the Wingfield's Bloemfontein garden circa 1990

The plant pathology community was saddened by the passing of Dr Schalk (PS) van Wyk on 12 June 2025. Born in Potchefstroom on 1 April 1944, Schalk matriculated from Senekal High School in 1961 before pursuing a BSc (1966), BSc Honours (*cum laude*, 1968), and MSc (*cum laude*, 1969) in plant pathology at the University of the Free State. Early in his career, he worked with the Department of Agricultural Technical Services and later joined Stellenbosch University, as a lecturer and where he completed a PhD in 1973 on diseases of Protea, particularly *Phytophthora cinnamomi.*

Farming was one of Schalk's lifelong passions, and for nearly a decade he immersed himself in agriculture before returning to academia in 1983 as a senior lecturer at the University of the Free State. He continued part-time to balance his academic contributions with farming and business pursuits. From 1993, he was associated with the Oil and Protein Seed Centre in Potchefstroom while working as a consultant and entrepreneur.

Schalk will be remembered for his deep curiosity and talent for solving scientific problems, especially in plant disease management. His pragmatic and often lateral thinking, perhaps honed through years of farming, extended beyond pathology to fungal taxonomy and mechanisms of spore development. I vividly recall the 1985 SASPP meeting in Hogsback, where he enthusiastically sketched his ideas on how macroconidia formed in *Fusarium*. This led to our first collaborative paper (Van Wyk et al., Transactions of the British Mycological Society 88: 347–353, 1987) and many more thereafter.

Though reserved, Schalk was intellectually generous and relished one-on-one scientific discussion. He published prolifically: approximately 80 peer-reviewed papers spanning *Fusarium* spp. (14), fungal taxonomy (14), spore development and ultrastructure (17), sunflower diseases (12), and groundnut pathology (13), among other topics. Many of his popular articles offered practical guidance to farmers—testament to his commitment to bridging research and real-world impact.

Schalk's insight earned him lasting friendships with two giants of South African plant pathology, Professors Peter Knox-Davies and Wally Marasas. He mentored many who went on to have distinguished careers, including Rupert Anelich, Pedro Crous, André Celliers,

Diedre Fourie, Rikus Kloppers, Sandra Lamprecht, Marnel Mouton, Zakkie Pretorius, John Rheeder, Altus Viljoen, Pieter van Wyk, and Ferdi van Zyl, among others.

On a personal note, Schalk's influence on my own career was profound. When FABI was founded in 1998, he gifted me a varnished tree branch bearing *Trametes versicolor* (turkey tail) basidiocarps—an artefact that has since become a floating trophy awarded at each annual Tree Protection Co-operative Programme (TPCP) meeting. It remains a fitting and cherished symbol of a remarkable mind and a special friend.

Dr Schalk van Wyk's legacy endures in the many students and colleagues he inspired, the research he shaped, and the agricultural challenges he helped solve—with both intellect and heart.

Unsolicited reflections by Mike Wingfield

Alan John Lauder Phillips (1952-2025)

It is with deep sadness that I announce the passing of Alan John Lander Phillips – plant pathologist, mycologist, photographer, and friend to all who knew him. Professor Phillips, or simply "Alan," had a remarkable career in both plant pathology and mycology. His loss will be deeply felt by all touched by his passion for research and his unwavering dedication.

Alan was born on March 19, 1952, in Victoria, Hong Kong. He studied Applied Biology and went on to obtain his PhD from the University of Wolverhampton in 1980, focusing on "A study of the antagonists and colonizers of sclerotia of *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* (Lib.) de Bary." His expertise in *Sclerotinia* led to his appointment at the Agricultural Research Council's Plant Protection Research Institute (PPRI) in Rietondale, Pretoria, where he managed a major biocontrol programme on the pathogen. He eventually rose to the positionof Principal Agricultural Researcher and Programme Manager.

At that time, I was completing my military service before being seconded to PPRI to conduct research in forest pathology, where I had the privilege of becoming Alan's first PhD student. Alan followed a strict routine: inspecting his plants and disease-control experiments in the greenhouses first thing in the morning, tea at 10 a.m., then devoting the rest of his day to experiments and writing. I was always struck by the fact that nearly all his publications from the 1970s to the early 2000s were single-authored papers under the name "A.J.L. Phillips." During his tenure at PPRI, he also served as chairman of the Northern Branch of the Southern African Society for Plant Pathology. In addition to *Sclerotinia*, Alan conducted detailed research on *Elsinoë* (scab disease), *Ascochyta*, and *Rhizoctonia* root diseases. His work in South Africa culminated in co-authoring the book Phytopathogenic Fungi from South Africa (2000). Soon after, Alan relocated permanently to Portugal, where he became Visiting Principal Investigator at the Faculty of Sciences, University of Lisbon. There, he played a central role in the field, serving as Vice President of the Sociedade Portuguesa de Fitopatologia and President of the Mediterranean Phytopathological Union.

This period marked the second phase of Alan's career, during which he focused increasingly on fungal taxonomy. He assisted numerous students in Europe and especially Asia, concentrating on diseases of woody hosts such as grapevines and fruit trees. He became a global authority on the taxonomy of Botryosphaeriaceae and *Diaporthe*, applying modern phylogenetic methods to his work. His landmark 2013 revision of the Botryosphaeriaceae remains one of the most highly cited references in the field. Although Alan published more than 100 scientific papers, he always believed that publications should advance science rather than personal recognition. Nonetheless, his impact was undeniable—he was named a Highly Cited Researcher for five consecutive years (2019–2023), a remarkable achievement for a largely independent scientist with modest resources.

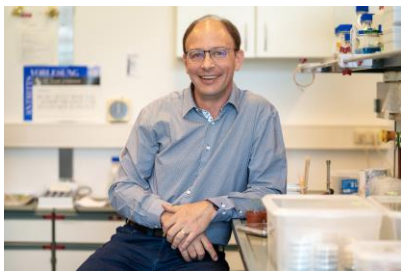
Few colleagues knew that Alan was also a passionate and award-winning photographer, whose works were collected and sold as art. I fondly recall our many debates about cameras and lenses, as well as his uncompromising opinions on the quality of Portuguese red wine. Another lesser-known fact is that Alan was a dedicated reviewer for leading mycological journals – many researchers will have unknowingly benefited from his keen eye, deep knowledge, and linguistic precision.

Alan was a quiet man who found joy in teaching and supporting others. His passion for fungal biology was boundless. Anyone who crossed paths with him gained not only a colleague but a lifelong friend.

In this time of grief, my thoughts are with his wife, Ana, and his family and friends. Alan's legacy will endure in the lives of those he touched and in the science to which he devoted his life.

Pedro W Crous

Congratulations



FABI celebrated the recent announcement that its Director **Prof Bernard Slippers** has been awarded the Humboldt Research Award by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. This prestigious award recognises his outstanding research and academic contributions and provides funding for three years for research visits and collaboration with leading researchers in Germany. It is conferred on internationally recognised researchers in recognition of their entire academic record to date.

The DSTI-NRF Centre of Excellence in Food Security (CoE-FS) is proud to celebrate a major national honour awarded to our Co-Director and Food Safety Lead, **Prof Lise Korsten**. At the 2025 NSTF–South32 Awards ceremony, held on 31 July 2025, Professor Korsten received the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award, recognising her extraordinary contributions to science, policy, and society over the course of her distinguished career.

Prof Lise Korsten was conferred a distinguished honorary doctorate by Gent University, Belgium on 21 March 2025, in recognition of her transformative contributions to resilience in food security and safety.

UNLOCKING THE VALUE OF BIO-INPUTS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

SABO is proud to host the Bio-Alliance SA-Brazil event, in partnership with the Agricultural Attaché of the Brazilian Embassy. This event will focus on the impact of collaboration towards achieving sustainable, science-based bio-inputs solutions at a global scale and give students in the bioproducts industry a chance to learn, connect, and showcase their own innovative work.

Who will be there?
Stakeholders including financial institutions, policymakers, grower associations, executive management, and government officials

Day 1 - Planting the seeds for Sustainable Agriculture
Session 1: Different lands, common grounds
Session 2: Beyond compliance: Building smart policies for a bio-driven future
Session 3: Capital Flows, Crop Grows: Financing Sustainable Agriculture Practices

Session 4: Voices from the field: The reality of adoption
Evening networking function
Day 2 – Focus: Innovation & Application
Session 1: Different lands, common grounds
Session 2: Beyond compliance: Building smart policies for a bio-driven future
Session 3: Capital Flows, Crop Grows: Financing Sustainable Agriculture Practices
Session 4: Voices from the field: The reality of adoption

Be part of the Bioproducts Student Poster Showcase
We invite students with research focused on the use of biological products In agriculture, forestry, or in promoting sustainable practices within the sector to showcase their work at the Bio-Alliance.

Why Participate?

- Gain recognition from experts in the biological Industry
- Share your research with industry leaders
- Initiate discussions and build on ideas
- Network with experts & fellow students
- Boost your academic and professional profile

Want to participate?
Send us an email to: info@sabo.org.za by 10 October 2025
Don't miss this opportunity to present your research to industry leaders and International experts!

About the hosts
SABO
Aims to promote the bio-product industry, as well as promote products that are developed based on sound scientific research and that are fully compliant from a regulatory perspective. SABO also aims to serve as a platform for its members to engage with relevant stakeholders.
Brazil
Brazilian Embassies promote the government interests in foreign and sovereign countries. Through the diplomatic missions, the government of Brazil is developing diplomatic relations on all levels to further improve its place on the world stage, which is one of the major goals of the country.

Profile of a Plant Pathologist: Prof Lizel Mostert

Current position
Associate Professor at the Department of Plant Pathology, Stellenbosch University

Tell me about your research
My research focus on trunk diseases of grapevines and fruit trees which cause cankers and dieback and have an economic impact on production due to yield losses. The research focus on the etiology, epidemiology and management of fungal trunk diseases. As phytomycologist at the Department of Plant Pathology, a major focus of my research includes the characterization of fungal pathogens. Fungal groups including the Basidiomycetes, Botryosphaeriaceae, Diaporthaceae, Diatrypaceae, Didymellaceae, Nectriaceae and Togniniaceae have been investigated in various projects and a diversity of

woody hosts. The biological control of plant diseases is important in providing an alternative to chemical control. My biocontrol research has included the use of *Trichoderma* species in the control of grapevine trunk diseases as well as the search for new organisms that have potential to be developed into biocontrol products. Various aspects have been researched to understand the mechanisms involved, optimise the application and improve field efficacy.

More recently our research group (Francois Halleen who has moved to Villa Crop and Minette Havenga his follow-up at Nietvoorbij ARC) have also started working on citrus diseases. These studies include anthracnose (*Colletotrichum* spp.), Alternaria brown spot and core rot, citrus scab (*Elsinoë fawcetti*) and rind distortion caused by *Botrytis cinerea*. Apart from characterising the pathogens involved, have these studies looked at distribution, epidemiology, virulence, fungicide sensitivity and detection.

Why is your research important?
The grapevine and deciduous fruit industries are important sectors in agriculture in South Africa. The citrus industry is the largest fresh fruit export industry in South Africanagriculture. Research on understanding and managing diseases that lower yields are important for the industry to improve practices and ensure tree and fruit health. In essence, to provide the necessary know-how for producers in the industry and to train the next generation of plant pathologists.

What is your favourite aspect of your research?
There are many aspects that brings reward: delivering a good project report, seeing a postgraduate student obtain a degree, getting the work published and seeing it being cited. I love it when it all comes together….every project is a unique puzzle that needs to be fitted. Sometimes a piece of the puzzle remains missing, which sparks the motivation for what should be followed up next.

What excites you about your research?
Getting out into the field for a new project, pushing the boundaries of what is known, getting time to look at fungi under the microscope and seeing the light go on for the quest for new knowledge in postgraduate student's eyes, to name but a few.

Tell me about what you like to do when you aren't working
Spending time with my family. We enjoy the outdoors, hiking, cycling and canoeing. My husband and children (now teenagers) have become avid mushroom spotters. They do the spotting and I, the identifications.