



International Society for Plant Pathology

(Professor Richard Falloon, President)



ISPP

Report to ISPP from an Associated Society for 2003-2008.

Name of Society. Southern African Society for Plant Pathology.

Established: March 1962

Web address for Society. <http://www.saspp.co.za>

Name (s) of personnel preparing report. Dr. Karin Jacobs, President

Nominated Officers. Is the list for your society on the ISPP website correct?
(<http://www.isppweb.org/societies.asp>) Yes/~~No~~* (*strike out whichever is not applicable)

(If Yes there is no need to list them here. If listing is not correct, please list here President, Secretary, Treasurer, Business Manager/Office and ISPP councillors (address, telephone and email contacts).

Will a Society member be making corrections to the ISPP entry for your society on-line? Yes/~~No~~*

Society Contact: (Karin Jacobs) **Email:** kj@sun.ac.za

Society membership. 145 members in 2006; 154 members in 2007; 179 members in 2008.

Report for 2003-2008.

• *Society Activities and publications.*

The SASPP had its beginnings as part of the South African Society for Plant Pathology and Microbiology, which was formed in 1962. These two disciplines had close relationship until the 1980's after which the two societies separated into the SASM and the SASPP in 1981. The role of the society is embedded in its constitution and can be summarized as follow:

1. The SASPP acts as the official mouthpiece of Plant Pathologists in Southern Africa.
2. It aims to provide opportunities for plant pathologists to meet and exchange information of mutual scientific interest.
3. The SASPP coordinates affiliation with related scientific societies in Southern Africa, as well as with corresponding and related foreign societies.
4. It gathers and disseminates information on Plant Pathology.

• The Society publishes short articles online on its website, as the community it serves, as well as the number of members in the society, does not justify maintaining a journal. Abstracts from conferences are published in the South African Journal of Science.

- *Society Conferences and Workshops*

Until 2007, the SASPP hosted an annual conference during which time the Annual General Meeting of the SASPP was also held. At the 2007 AGM, the constitution was changed so that the conference is now held biennially. The next SASPP conference will be from 25-29 January 2009 in Gordon's Bay, South Africa.

In alternate years, branches host 1-day symposia in the regions, focusing on issues that may be relevant to that branch.

- *Other plant pathology conferences in Region.*

Other plant pathology related meetings in the region include the annual symposia of the Soilborne Plant Diseases Interest Group of South Africa as well as the biennial conference of the Plant Breeding Society

- *Plant Pathology in the Region.*

Overall, the plant pathology community in South Africa plays an important role as service provider to the Agricultural and Forestry sectors of the South African economy. In addition, research conducted at various Universities as well as the Agricultural Research Council is of a high quality as reflected in the list of publications on the website.

One of the major issues for the Society as well as the broader plant pathology community in the region is the decrease in numbers of skilled scientists. This has led to a significant decrease in members of the society, which only recently seemed to have tapered off. Also, retaining trained scientists in the country is a huge challenge.

- *Funding opportunities*

Funding for research is mainly the direct result of interaction with industry as well as research funding from the National Research Foundation.

Plant pathology in the Region Served by the Society 2003-2008

Activities

The SASPP's most important activities during the last 6 years have been annual conferences. During this period, 5 conferences were held in various locations in the region, with each attended by between 100 to 140 delegates. In 2005, the annual conference was jointly hosted by SASPP, the African Mycological Association and the Pan African Society for Medical Mycology.

It was decided by majority vote at the 2007 AGM to convert to a biennial conference, to allow members to attend international conferences as well as other national conferences in alternate years. To foster contact between members of the society, branch symposia have been initiated to be held in alternate years to the national congress. So far two of these symposia were held during 2008, which were attended by 90 (Northern provinces) and 120 (Western Cape Province) scientists, respectively. These have proven to be very successful in bringing together researchers at academic and scientific institutions and people in the agricultural industry (agro-chemical, seed and producer organizations)

The current council (2006-2009) has concentrated on improving management of the society rather than beginning new initiatives. The finances have received particular attention, with much effort directed at improving membership fee collection and deleting long lapsed members from the books. Improved finances allowed financial assistance to be given for the first time for the traveling expenses of two international guest speakers at the 2007 annual congress, and this assistance shall be continued when possible. Furthermore, the management of the web site has been improved together with a redesign. Communication channels have been simplified to allow rapid and easy use of the listserver by all members.

Prof. Pedro Crous (currently of CBS) was awarded the Christiaan Hendrik Persoon medal in 2005. This is the highest honour the society can bestow. Prof. FHJ (Fritz) Rijkenberg was awarded Honorary Membership in

2004. Pannar Seed has been sponsoring a student award for conference presentations since 1994, and this support will continue for the foreseeable future. Inqaba Biotec initiated a student award in 2007 for the best molecular paper in plant pathology and this association will also continue.

Outputs

Scientific outputs are listed on the SASPP website, and papers published in peer-review journals are showing an upward trend. The website is currently our main form of communication and members regularly contribute scientific or technical articles for the site.

Challenges

One of the major challenges of the society is to recruit and retain scientists. Research costs are increasing faster than funding with the result that there are fewer active researchers, an international trend. The impact of this is visible in the decline of active researchers and smaller research groups attending the annual conferences.

Looking forward

The main activity of the SASPP will remain the alternating biennial national congresses and the branch symposia. Attention will be paid to strengthen relations between research and industry. Hosting of a large international conference is currently, and also for the foreseeable future, not an option that we consider. However, it has always been a priority and will remain so, to encourage our members to join international societies and, whenever possible, represent the SASPP at these events.