



SAAB President's Report — 2014

2014 has been a busy year for SAAB, in which we attended to many small matters and had one or two major breakthroughs on major issues. There are still a number of important issues that we hope to deal with in 2015.

1. Council

During 2014, the SAAB council comprised:

Prof K. Balkwill (President); Dr N. Makunga (Vice-President); Dr P. Hills (Treasurer); Prof J. Van Staden (Editor in Chief); Prof G. Smith (SANBI Nominee); Dr D. Thompson; Dr M. Light; Prof P. Watt; Prof A. Ellis; Prof M. Meyer & Dr Q. Kritzing. Mr M. Scott is the Permanent Secretary. Ms Ashton Ruyters is the President of the Student Council.

We held a mid-year meeting in Johannesburg --- it was very constructive in helping us to achieve the goals for the year. I am very grateful to those who were able to attend and contribute. Next year's mid-year meeting will be held in kwaZulu-Natal. We found that an effective tool for the President and Permanent Secretary was to develop an Action list after each council meeting and monitor progress on issues on a regular basis. I am very grateful to the outgoing Vice-President for her advice and support during the year, and especially that she was prepared to serve an extra year as President. During her term, we saw further growth in the Student Council and its activities and great improvement in our website among her other important contributions. We welcome our incoming Vice-President and look forward to working with her very much indeed.

2. Student Council

Student Council activities were impacted by the more specialised nature of the 2014 Congress that was combined with AETFAT and thus there were fewer students and they were from a restricted range of disciplines. None-the-less, the Student Council has been active during 2014, as elucidated in the Student Council report.

3. Constitution

Although we appraised the whole of the Constitution a few years ago, we have found some anomalies or some areas where the Constitution seems out of touch with current realities. We are thus proposing four motions at the AGM that will clarify and adjust aspects relating to types of membership, the procedure related to the SAAB Junior Medal, the journal and the procedure for electing Honorary Members. There are at least two areas that still require attention in 2015 — the composition of council, including the relationship of SAAB to SANBI and the justification for an elected member on Council, and the criteria for awarding the Gold Medal.

4. Conferences

The 2014 Congress was in conjunction with AETFAT and held at Stellenbosch. The congress was superbly organised and the programme was academically extremely stimulating. It was a delight to be able to meet with and listen to so many international delegates. Sadly, there were misunderstandings and misconceptions that led to only a restricted range of SAAB disciplines participating in that congress. I believe that both SAAB and AETFAT were the poorer for this and it has especially affected the SAAB student activities. The 2015 Congress has been ably organised by the University of Venda – the first time it has been hosted by that institution and the

furtherest north we have met. We have made an effort to make all disciplines feel welcome and part of the congress. Thank you to the Local Organising Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr Peter Tshisikhawe, for their excellent work. University of the Free State has offered to host the 2016 congress and we have gratefully accepted. We are hoping to have a more coastal venue in 2017.

5. SAABNET

SAABNET has continued to be an extremely useful resource to communicate with members, to advertise posts and to receive adverts of posts that have been on offer, amongst other things. We are extremely grateful to those that manage it, ensuring that we never receive SPAM or inappropriate communication from that source. The membership of SAABNET is far greater than the membership of SAAB. We have decided to use that as a marketing tool by inviting members of the list to become members of SAAB, rather than removing all non-members.

6. South African Journal of Botany

We are extremely grateful to the Editor in Chief for his extremely efficient and effective management of the journal. In 2012, 142 articles were published, which was up from the previous high of 105 articles the year before. This represents a huge amount of work on the part of the Editor in Chief, his secretarial staff, the editorial board, the referees and the publishers. Our journal enjoyed its highest impact factor of 1.659 in 2011. In 2012, the impact factor was 1.409 and in 2013 it was 1.340. This must be seen in the light that prior to 2011, the highest impact factor was 1.106 and that the impact factor for a particular year is the ratio of cites of articles published in the two previous years divided by the number of articles published in those two years. As there is a lag between publication and citation, when the number of articles increases rapidly, as has been the case with the SAJ Bot, this will arithmetically reduce the impact factor of the journal. In addition, our journal is a generalist botanical journal and articles in certain fields (for example taxonomy) attract very few citations. Thus chasing after impact factor too strongly might have unintended consequences for the type of journal to which we have committed. We should, however, consider whether there are ways in which we can increase the possibility of papers being cited in press soon after publication. One way of doing this may be to circulate the Table of Contents on SAABNET as soon as an issue is published. We are very happy with the relationship with Elsevier as our publishers, and we have just signed an agreement for another 5 years beginning in January 2016.

One of our most important successes during 2014 has been to resolve the difficulties around copyright ownership with NISC. What had prevented resolution in the past was a dispute over who owned copyright of a certain set of volumes. We agreed that regardless of who did or did not own copyright in the past, NISC wanted to cede all the copyright in its possession to SAAB and SAAB wanted to obtain that copyright. We thus paid the agreed amount to NISC and now own all the copyright. NISC have also provided us with all the stock they had in their possession as well as searchable pdf's for the volumes they had published. We have compiled data on the number of papers in each past volume and the number of pages per paper. We have provided these data and example pdf's to Elsevier to have them assess the feasibility of putting pdf's of all past volumes on to the same website as the current volumes. Negotiations are in process. An important consideration must also be access to these pdf's — if it is not open enough, it will defeat the purpose of all the trouble we have taken to recover copyright to the material.

7. Website

The website is a special concern of the Permanent Secretary and is kept up to date with the assistance of Barnabus Daru.

8. Bursaries

The suite of applications for the SAAB bursary this year were of a far higher calibre than in some previous years. A contributing factor might be that we delayed the closing date to give students time to have chosen their projects before applying. This is important for fulfilling the criterion of working on plants. The successful candidates for 2014 were A. Kuprek (Stellenbosch), S. Troost (UCT) and A. Cornelius (North West).

9. Membership

We currently have 235 ordinary members, up from 220 in 2013 and 206 in 2012, this is encouraging growth. Student membership has plummeted from 105 in 2013 to 25 in 2014, however. This will have been due to issues related to the congress. Another matter of concern is the high number of ordinary members who are in arrears with their subscription fees.

10. Finances

The finances of the Association are in very good shape, largely due to the arrangement we have with Elsevier with regard to publishing our journal and the high standards of management maintained by the Treasurer and Permanent Secretary. We would not be able to cover our annual running costs on our membership fees alone. Please see the Treasurer's Report for further detail.

11. Awards

In 2014, the SAAB Gold Medal was awarded to Prof Richard Cowling of NMMU and the SAAB Junior Medal was awarded to Alastair Potts for his PhD that he obtained through UCT. Honorary membership has been conferred on Prof Eugene Moll. We are very grateful to those who have proposed members for these awards and to UCT for adjudicating PhD theses that were submitted for the 2015 SAAB Junior Medal. A reaction that we sometimes hear to the announcement of Medal winners is "What about so and so?" We encourage members to nominate candidates who they feel are worthy of these awards, so that their eligibility can be considered. There were no nominations for Silver Medal in 2014, despite there being many worthy candidates.

12. SACNASP

Our mid-year council meeting received a presentation by SACNASP on the issue of Continuous Professional Development. This is not entirely relevant to academics, who dominate council and so we need to determine how many of our members are members of SACNASP, so that we can determine the extent to which we should become involved. There was a call for nominations for council members of SACNASP and we have nominated Prof George Bredenkamp who has a long history of association with the council as well as bridging the gap between academia and professional consulting work – we are not yet aware of the outcome.

13. Future Challenges for SAAB

We would like to undertake a strategic planning exercise so that we can understand what SAAB members are expecting out of SAAB. We should then address the structure of Council as well as the Constitution to facilitate SAAB realising the expectations of members. We would like to facilitate the relaunching of the South African Herbarium Workers Group.

14. Acknowledgements

I am grateful to fellow Council members for their support and input into the Society. I am grateful to the Permanent Secretary for giving me the necessary constant reminders, for his role in the website and SAABNET and his liaison with the Local Organising Committee, amongst others. I am grateful to the membership for their involvement and participation in SAAB.