



# SAAB President's Report — 2016

During 2016, we composed a letter to accompany an offer of amnesty on previously unpaid subscription fees. In this letter, we enumerated the benefits of being a member of SAAB and I believe it is worth repeating that information here:

“The South African Association of Botanists (SAAB) is one of the most prestigious professional societies in South Africa. We have a number of extremely important activities and initiatives, including:

- An annual congress, which provides an opportunity to meet colleagues and initiate new collaborations, exchange new ideas, learn new approaches, and especially for postgraduates to present papers and/or posters and be inducted into the academic community and mentored on professionalism at conferences.
- An extremely professional international botanical journal (the South African Journal of Botany) which has a current Impact Factor of 1.244 and is published six times a year by Elsevier with no page charges or handling fees.
- A communication list server (SAABNET) through which members are advised of employment, bursaries and funding opportunities, as well as other relevant news, or can advertise for new staff or postgraduate students.
- Recognition of excellent undergraduate performance through the awarding of three Honours bursaries a year.
- Recognition of outstanding postgraduate performance through the awarding of prizes for excellent presentations at conferences.
- Recognition of peers through the awarding of two senior and one junior medal as well as certificates annually.
- Being an accredited voluntary associate of SACNASP, thus representing the needs of our members who are registered with that body.
- Maintaining a website with useful documents, announcements and an archive of the Association's history.

SAAB invests finances in the following:

- Providing seed money for the annual congress organisation.
- Supporting at least one international key note speaker at each congress.
- Providing cash prizes for student awards at conferences.
- Supporting the Best Young Scientist from the annual congress to attend the following year's annual congress to present a 'plenary' lecture on their research.
- Providing medals that are awarded annually.
- Providing the finances for three Honours bursaries.
- Paying a part-time permanent secretary to ensure that the society is professionally and competently run.
- Providing a partial salary to support the professional assistant of the Editor-in-Chief of the South African Journal of Botany.

In addition, SAAB members are eligible for:

- Reduced subscription fees for the South African Journal of Botany.
- Reduced registration fees for annual congresses.
- Their honours students to apply for the SAAB Honours bursaries (only students of SAAB

members are eligible).”

I believe that this points out what an active organisation SAAB has become and how effectively it operates. We are extremely grateful to all who play their roles, especially the various Local Organising Committees, who ensure that our Association meets annually and has academically stimulating interactions. In the letter, we also pointed out how the subscription fees for SAAB do not nearly cover all that we spend and the reason we are able to operate so effectively has been through the money SAAB receives and has invested. SAAB has tried a number of strategies in the past to generate income, but they were not always successful. It has been the strategy to turn our journal into an income-generating opportunity rather than a cost that has made the difference. We now receive payment for the editorial costs of our journal and this is what has helped SAAB to become a financially viable entity. The journal would not earn what it does if it was not of the status and calibre that it currently holds and we thus thank the Editor in Chief and his Editorial Board for the sterling work they do. In addition, the Editor in Chief is extremely generous in his time and in subsidising the editorial costs and it is due to this that the journal appears to make a profit for SAAB and thus make it possible for SAAB to have become the extremely successful organisation that it is.

### **1. Council**

During 2015, the SAAB council comprised:

Prof K. Balkwill (President); Dr P. Hills (Vice-President and Treasurer); Prof J. Van Staden (Editor in Chief); Dr D. Thompson; Dr L. McGaw; Prof P. Watt; Prof M. Meyer & Dr Q. Kritzinger. There has not been a SANBI Nominee, but Prof R.J. Sebola attended by special invitation. Mr M. Scott is the Permanent Secretary.

### **2. Student Council**

This year’s Student Council has generated much activity on their Facebook Page. This is the kind of activity that is feasible and desirable for a group that is so geographically separated.

### **3. Constitution**

Principles to guide a major overhaul of the Constitution were approved at the 2016 AGM and a revised Constitution will be presented to the 2017 AGM for discussion and possibly approval. During the revision of the Constitution, it came to Council’s attention that other issues, not covered by those principles required attention and we are bringing them to the AGM as separate Motions for consideration.

### **4. Conferences**

The 2016 Congress at University of the Free State was extremely well organised and was heartily enjoyed by all attendees. It was academically stimulating and the quality of most student presentations was high, as usual. The University of the Western Cape together with Cape Peninsula University of Technology have organised the 2017 Congress and have been extremely effective in doing so. The #FeesmustFall campaign has had its effects, and the Congress had to be moved off of the University Campus due to rescheduling of exams and risk of potential protest action. Doing this at relatively short notice has generated considerable extra costs. It makes us aware of the extent to which universities usually assist us by providing venues free of charge or at minimal costs. We are very grateful to the current LOC for persisting despite the potential threats of #FeesmustFall and ensuring that the congress still takes place, despite all the additional work it has now taken on their part. The University of Pretoria have offered to organise the 2018 congress. I have approached our members at a number of other institutions asking them to

consider hosting the congress in 2019, but have not yet had any positive responses. The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University has agreed to host the 2020 congress, but we are still looking for a venue for 2019.

## **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 delighted that the impact factor of our journal is now above one again . . . 1.244 to be precise. 193 articles (the highest number in the last five years) were published in 2016. 1059 and 1049 articles were submitted in 2015 and 2016 respectively. We are extremely grateful to the Editor in Chief and his team of Assistant Editors for the extremely efficient and effective management of the journal. We are very grateful to Elsevier for their professional and supportive role. We enjoy a good and fruitful relationship with our publishers. Please remember that we can improve the impact factor of our journal by citing relevant **recent** articles in SA J Bot whenever we publish.

Having resolved some ticklish copyright issues, we have organised for pdf's of early issues of our journal to be made available on the web in phases. Phases 1 and 2 took us back to 1995. Phase 3 includes articles published from the inception of the journal and up to and including 1994 (fifteen years worth of publications). We had hoped to see these on the website within three to four months of our last Congress. However, there were difficulties around the resolution at which we had scanned the articles. Then, once we had rescanned them, there was difficulty with finding a suitable way of "transporting" the files to the service providers. Eventually, we put them onto a stick and sent them by courier. Then it transpired that some articles were missing and it was because they were too big and so the scanner had not transmitted them. We then had to rescan those papers in sections and then jump through a number of hoops to transmit them electronically. There were then delays in processing the files and then in getting the access correctly set. However, the task is finally complete and all of the archival material of SA J Bot is now available as pdf's and features in search engines. We are extremely grateful to Elsevier who have borne the cost of the processing from TIF files to high quality searchable pdf's.

## **7. Website**

The website was hacked twice and has had to be redesigned in new software. It is once again functional and contains much useful information.

## **8. Bursaries**

Once again, the quality of applicants for the SAAB Honours bursary for 2015 was very high. Three bursaries were awarded to excellent candidates.

## **9. Membership**

We currently have 267 ordinary members, the highest we have had for some years. This is our most important category and there is a slow but steady increase over the last few years – 220 in 2013, 235 in 2014, 237 in 2015 and 267 in 2016. Student membership is up from 128 in 2015 to 199 in 2016. Our total membership is at 457, up from 375 in 2015.

## **10. Finances**

The finances of the Association continue to be in very good shape, largely due to the arrangement we have with Elsevier with regard to publishing our journal and the generosity of our Editor in Chief, who shoulders the lion's share of the costs of editing the journal by his personal input and the supplementation he provides from other sources. The high standards of management maintained by the Treasurer and Permanent Secretary also contribute to this positive situation. We have been building up a surplus to make our Association sustainable, should we lose the Elsevier contract, or for a rainy day. Sadly, the #FeesmustFall protests have led to a rainy day and as a once-off emergency arrangement, SAAB Council has agreed to subsidise the considerably higher venue costs that have resulted from moving the conference off of a University Campus. This is something that is not sustainable, and was done this year to save the conference from cancellation. Future conference organisation will need to take this kind of eventuality into account.

## **11. Awards**

The SAAB Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals have all been awarded in 2016 (and will be announced at the dinner). We are very grateful to the team at University of Pretoria who adjudicated the theses submitted for the SAAB Bronze Medal.

## **12. SACNASP**

SACNASP asked us for input around the status and future of botany. One of the issues we raised was that despite the survey of Natural History Collections some years ago, there appeared to be no action. Perhaps that was helpful in seeing that the excellent proposal on Natural History Collections by Michelle Hamer has been successful and we look forward to the outworking of that project.

## **13. 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. I am particularly grateful for all the support and assistance that I have received from our current Vice-President as well as Dr Marnie Light during 2016. They have provided much helpful and wise insight on many important matters.

## **14. Conclusion**

Our Association is healthy, active and growing. Thank you to all who participate and contribute to making SAAB the big success it has become.