IUFRO SPOTLIGHT
International Union of Forest Research Organizations
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IUFRO Spotlight *is an initiative of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations. Its aim is to introduce, in a timely fashion, significant findings in forest research from IUFRO officeholders and member organizations to a worldwide network of decision makers, policy makers and researchers. IUFRO will encapsulate, and distribute in plain language, brief, topical and policy-relevant highlights of those findings, along with information on where/how to access the full documents.*

IUFRO Spotlight *also aims to present activities such as sessions at major IUFRO congresses or the work of IUFRO Task Forces with a focus on emerging key issues that are of great interest to policy makers and groups inside and outside the forest sector and contribute to international processes and activities. The* ***IUFRO Spotlight*** *findings will be distributed in a periodic series of emails as well as blog postings.*

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What's the buzz? Studying insects on 'the web'

A series of webinars, originally seen as a temporary response to some of the travel constraints imposed by the COVID pandemic, will most likely continue after post-COVID equilibrium is restored.

Release-recapture experiment with Hylurgus ligniperda. Photo by Nicolas Meurisse

"In light of the current pandemic, many scientific meetings were cancelled – including the many meetings that IUFRO Working Parties (WPs) and other units host each year," said Dr. Jeremy Allison of the Canadian Forest Service and coordinator of IUFRO's WP 7.03.16 that deals with *Behavioral and Chemical Ecology of Forest Insects*.

The webinars, intended to assist forest researchers in staying involved and current in their areas of interest, were initiated by IUFRO, with support from the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI) at the University of Pretoria and the Canadian Forest Service (CFS).

Dr. Allison is quick to acknowledge the contributions of his colleagues to the success of the webinars – deputy coordinators Sigrid Netherer and Andrés González Ritzel from his WP; coordinator and deputy coordinators Juan Corley, Jess Hartshorn and Dimitrios Avtzis from WP 7.03.05 (*Ecology and management of bark and wood boring insects*); and senior PhD students Josephine Queffelec and Quentin Guignard from FABI.

"They were instrumental in making this happen and for the success we've achieved," he said.

"One of the most significant benefits of these virtual meetings is our engagement with our science and our colleagues. They provide a platform for these research communities to engage and network while, in this specific case, promoting the importance of the behavior and chemical ecology of forest insects and

ensuring IUFRO member activities in these areas would continue during a time where global travel was not possible," Dr. Allison said.

"Chemical ecology is not an autonomous discipline but rather a way of viewing the world through a chemical lens," he said. "And behavioral ecology examines the ecological factors that drive behavioral adaptations. As a result, the subject matter of our Working Party (WP) – 'Behavioral and chemical ecology of forest insects' – is very broad."

The most recent six webinars were a joint effort with IUFRO WP 7.03.05 and covered topics that ranged from *"Climate Change Effects on Bark Beetle Range Expansion, Community Associates and Outbreak Dynamics", to "Visual Ecology of Forest Beetles."*

Coloured panel traps for woodboring beetles. Photo by Giacomo Cavaletto

Participants and attendees interacted either "live" or through recordings of the events posted to a YouTube channel created for this IUFRO Working Party.

"While we originally saw the webinars as a response to the pandemic, we quickly realized that, although a digital divide currently exists, virtual tools like webinars have immense potential to mitigate some of the variation in access to networks and information," said Dr. Allison.

The webinars have a global reach. Participants typically are from government research institutions and academia. Attendance has been as high as 230 and includes participants and attendees from countries in North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania.

There are still challenges to be overcome, he notes, before virtual tools become a commonplace solution for everyone.

"Virtual platforms like Zoom have immense potential to facilitate the development of networks and the sharing of information. But internet access is required, and it's been estimated that only about 55% of households globally have an internet connection. So, connectivity is an issue," he said.

"Time zones are also a challenge. Although the webinar presentations were pre-recorded, presenters and delegates attend live to interact with content and each other. Regardless of what time is selected, it will favor participation from parts of the world and restrict it in others.

"You also need a platform. The webinar series would not have been possible without the support of the FABI and CFS.

"We don't advocate for virtual tools/meetings as a replacement for in-person meetings and training but do view them as a complementary tool. There is no doubt they are here to stay," Dr. Allison added.

Speaking of the webinar series, he said: "We think the series has been successful. Almost all the researchers we contacted were happy to contribute to the webinars.

"And, as of June 1 we've had more than 3,000 views on our YouTube channel; the discussion periods following the presentations have been well-attended and usually went to the end of the allocated time period; the feedback from participants has been very positive and several members of these scientific communities have contacted us to express interest in presenting at the webinars.

"Virtual tools are currently more useful for maintaining and building on existing networks. However, as these tools improve, we are convinced that their utility for these and other currently underdeveloped functions will increase," he added.

IUFRO Working Party 7.03.16 - Behavioral and Chemical Ecology of Forest Insects
https://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-7/70000/70300/70316/

IUFRO Working Party 7.03.05 *Ecology and Management of Bark and Wood Boring Insects*
https://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-7/70000/70300/70305/

Webinar home page:
https://www.fabinet.up.ac.za/index.php/event/IUFRO_WP_7.03.16

The YouTube presentations can be found at:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCE1bhBiFrYSbUSh09LipkZw

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