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The history and future of the South African Association of Botanists and the South African Journal of Botany

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ABSTRACT

In 1913, two Botanical Institutions developed from two foci in South Africa: the privately funded National Botanical Gardens (NBG) developed in Kirstenbosch and the government funded Botanical Research Institute (BRI — then the Division of Botany) in Pretoria. Both organisations started journals: the Memoirs of the Botanical Survey of South Africa in 1919, Flowering Plants of South Africa in 1920 and Bothalia in 1921 by BRI and the Journal of South African Botany (JSAB) by NBG in 1935. In 1968, the botanical community of South Africa formed the South African Association of Botanists (SAAB) to collectively address the professional needs of botanists. In response to a government initiative, the South African Journal of Botany (SAJB) was launched in 1982 with the support of SAAB. From 1985, the JSAB and SAJB were united under the name of the latter, but continuing the numbering of the former (i.e. from Volume 51). In 2005, SAAB agreed with Elsevier that they would publish the South African Journal of Botany on behalf of SAAB. This arrangement and the efforts of the then Editor-in-Chief, Prof J. van Staden, led to the journal becoming a financial asset to SAAB and to it growing in size and international stature. As long as the arrangement with Elsevier remains favorable and persists, the future of the South African Journal of Botany is positive. The good governance guided by a wise constitution and the astute financial discipline of SAAB have secured the future and sustainability of SAAB and will assist the Association to live up to its Mission Statement.

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1. Introduction

The history of the establishment of herbaria, botanical gardens and scientific publications is complicated (McCracken and McCracken, 1988; Huntley, 2012). Several factors influenced the early development including the Anglo-Boer War (or South African War), the two World Wars, and the different English vs Afrikaner approaches in the early stages (McCracken and McCracken, 1988). Carruthers (2011) provided a historical review of botany and botanical journals with the enticing title "Trouble in the garden: South African botanical politics 1870-1950". Our contribution is more focused on the period after 1950.

2. Creation of the National Botanical Gardens and the Botanical Society

Three directors of the National Botanical Gardens (NBG) have written books on the establishment and development of the NBG at various stages (Compton 1965, Rycroft and Ryan 1980 and Huntley, 2012). A delegation from the Cape led by Sir Lionel Philips met with Louis Botha the first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa. Botha agreed that the Kirstenbosch Garden could be started on the site donated by Cecil John Rhodes to the government, but cautioned that the garden should not duplicate the work of the Department of Agriculture. At a public meeting on 10 June 1913 the Botanical Society was created with the aim of supplementing the small government grant of £1000 per annum. A Board of Trustees was also created with Lord Chief Justice de Villiers as the first chairperson. The NBG was formally established on 1 July 1913.

In 1903, Harold Pearson was appointed as the first professor in Botany in the Harry Bolus chair at the South African College later renamed the University of Cape Town (UCT). He was a brilliant student at Cambridge University and later became assistant curator of the Cambridge herbarium and assistant to the curator of Kew Botanical Gardens. He built up the Botany Department at UCT from nothing. He was the natural choice to be appointed as the first Director of the NBG with no salary. Pearson died at the very young age of 46 in 1916. His work cemented the link between UCT and NBG. The Harold Pearson chair in Botany was created in his name and subsequent directors of NBG were concurrently appointed in this chair.

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For three years the NBG had no director until another distinguished Cambridge scholar, Robert Harold Compton, was appointed as the second director in March 1919. He remained director for 34 years until 1953. He faced many difficulties including the movement of the Bolus Herbarium and library that was housed at Kirstenbosch back to UCT in 1924 due to damp conditions at Kirstenbosch. Compton had to start a new herbarium, which is now named after him. In 1983 when UCT had space problems it was decided to move the Bolus Herbarium back to Kirstenbosch, but this decision was overturned at a university senate meeting. In 1956 the South African Museum offered its herbarium to the National Herbarium in Pretoria, but due to space limitations it could not be accepted. Kirstenbosch was building two new wings at the time and gladly accepted the gift. In the 75th birthday issue of Veld & Flora Dr John Rourke (1988) provided a fascinating history of the Kirstenbosch herbarium including the correspondence between Compton and Mrs Bolus.

3. Establishment of the Botanical Research Institute

In 1905, another Cambridge graduate, Dr I B Pole Evans, was appointed as mycologist and plant pathologist in the newly established Transvaal Department of Agriculture. In 1913, the same year that the NBG was established, the Division of Botany was formed in the new Union Government with Pole Evans as its leader. The Division of Botany was renamed the Botanical Research Institute in 1961. Within a month of Pearson's death, Pole Evans motivated that the control of Kirstenbosch should be moved to Pretoria. This proposal was blocked during the three years before Compton was appointed as the next Director of the NBG in 1919. Pole Evans launched three journals: the Memoirs of the Botanical Survey of South Africa in 1919, Flowering Plants of South Africa in 1920 and Bothalia in 1921.

4. Competition between Cape Town and Pretoria

The history of botanical journals and botanical gardens in South Africa shows that there has always been strong competition between the National Botanical Gardens in the South and the Botanical Research Institute in the North. Pole Evans was a good personal friend of Jan Smuts, his neighbor who was later President of South Africa, and used his political influence in the competition between North and South in the early days (Carruthers, 2011). Pole Evans objected to Kirstenbosch being seen as a national botanical garden because many South African plants from elsewhere in the country could not be grown in the western Cape. The Botanical Society had members from all over South Africa, some of them very influential, that supported the establishment of Kirstenbosch as part of the NBG.

Brian Rycroft the third Director of the NBG was an excellent marketer of the beauty of South African plants within and outside South Africa leading to better funding for the NBG, a non-governmental institution, from the state and other supporters. He also established eight regional botanical gardens around South Africa. Despite the growth of the Compton Herbarium under curatorship of Dr John Rourke and the publication of JSAB, a 1976 committee concluded "research does not actually exist at the National Botanic Gardens of South Africa" (Naude et al. 1976). The NBG was considered to be very strong in managing botanical gardens and weaker in research.

The BRI, under directors Dyer, Codd and de Winter, was very strong in research especially in plant taxonomy and ecology and had several satellite herbaria, but was not as strong in managing botanical gardens. During the 75th anniversary of the BRI a symposium was held and Dr Donald Killick gave an excellent and exhaustive presentation of the history of the BRI and all the publications it delivered (Killick, 1979). At the same meeting the president of SAAB criticized BRI for not promoting experimental research in botany (Grobbelaar, 1979).

Collaboration between the BRI and NBG subsequently improved. An example is the newsletter called *Forum Botanicum*, which was started on 1 December 1962, just before the golden anniversary of the NBG, to act as a communication medium between botanists in southern Africa. The two editors were John Jessop, who later emigrated to Australia, and Ted Oliver. At a later stage Enid du Plessis joined Ted Oliver as Editor. The NBG paid the postage for Forum Botanicum, the newsletter which was then written and edited by BRI officials and sent to botanists at various universities and research institutions.

5. The creation of the South African Association of Botanists

In the 1950's, botanists could present their research results at larger societies such as section B of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science (S2A3), the Biological Society and the Royal Society of South Africa, the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns (SAAWK), or at smaller societies such as the Society for Plant Physiologists and the Limnological Society of South Africa.

A meeting was held on 13 February 1968 at Pretoria University at the initiative of Prof HP van der Schijff to discuss the creation of a professional body of botanists (Hugh Glen, pers. comm.). The botanists present were, Prof. P.J. Botha (SAAWK), Dr L.E. Codd (BRI), Dr B. de Winter (S2A3 Section B), Prof. H.B. Rycroft (NBG) and Prof. H.P. van der Schijff (Biological Society). This meeting decided that professional and university-trained botanists should be approached to test their views on the formation of the new association, and that Prof. van der Schijff and Dr de Winter would conduct this survey and convene any meeting arising from it.

Based on the feedback received a meeting was arranged on 2 September 1968 by Dr B. de Winter and Prof H.P. van der Schijff in the Botany Department at the University of Free State. Dr L.E. Codd was elected as chairman of the meeting and Dr J.J.P. van Wyk as secretary.

The main aim of the meeting was to form an autonomous society to look after the interests of botanists. A lot of time was spent discussing the draft constitution of the SAAB. A steering committee was elected to act on the decisions taken, with L.E. Codd as chairperson, B de Winter as secretary, and P.J. Botha, P.G, Jordaan, W.J. Lutjeharms, H.B. Rycroft, H.P. van der Schijff, J.J.P. van Wyk, and E.M. van Zinderen Bakker as members.

The 47 delegates at the meeting are considered to be founder members and are listed below under institutions as they were known at that stage (Anonymous, 1966). This list shows the diversity of institutions where botanists were active as well as how many travelled long distances, probably by train, to the meeting: Botanical Research Institute — L.E. Codd, B. de Winter, M. de Winter, J. Vahrmeyer, J.C. Scheepers, O.A. Leistner, A.A. Mauve, I.C. Verdoorn & M.J. Wells; University of Pretoria — H.P. van der Schijff, N. Grobbelaar, J.M.P. Geerthsen, A. Eicker, P.J. Robbertse, P.D.J. Kok, R.L. Verhoeven, W.F. Reyneke & G.K. Theron; Potchefstroom University for CHE — P.J. Botha, M.C. Papendorf, J.N. Eloff, J.W. du Toit, J. Coetzee, W.J. Louw & J.J.P. van Wyk; University of the Free State — E.M. van Zinderen Bakker, P.C. Keulder, J.U. Grobbelaar, L. Scott & J.A. Coetzee; University of Witwatersrand — C.F. Cresswell & F.D. Hancock; University of Cape Town — W.J. Lutjeharms & H.R. Tölken; Rhodes University — A.M. Jacot Guillarmod & J.P. Jessop; NBG Kirstenbosch — H.B. Rycroft & E.P. du Plessis; University College of Zululand — J.J.A. van der Walt; University College of the North — D.R. Janse van Vuuren; University of Fort Hare — M.H. Giffen; Pretoria Training College — P.J. Badenhorst; University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland —K.N.G. MacLeay; Saasveld Indigenous Research — F. von Breitenbach; Stellenbosch Botanic Station — H.C. Taylor; Seaweed Laboratory — RH Simons; and SA Institute of Medical Research — P. Martin.

Initially between 1968 and 1978 there was an alternation in succession of presidents between General Botany and Plant Physiology

Table 1
Presidents of the South African Association of Botanists and the years for which they were president. Up until 1975, the terms of office ran from July to July and were a single year. There was an 18-month term from July 1974 to December 1975 because the Congress and AGM were shifted from July to January. From 1976 terms ran from January and were normally for two years.

Year	President
1968–1970	L.E.W. Codd (2 terms)
1970–1971	P.J. Botha
1972–1973	H.P. van der Schijff (2 terms)
1974–1975	O.A.M. Lewis (18 months)
1976–1977	B. de Winter
1978–1979	N. Grobbelaar
1980–1981	J.N. Eloff
1982	J.G.C. Small
1983–1984	J.H. Visser
1985–1986	G.K. Theron
1987–1988	R.A. Lubke
1989–1990	C.T. Johnson
1991–1992	G.J. Bredenkamp
1993–1994	A. Eicker
1995–1996	H. Baijnath
1997–1998	J.U. Grobbelaar
1999–2000	F.C. Botha
2001–2002	J. van Staden
2003–2004	C.E.J. Botha
2005–2006	J.M. Meyer
2007–2008	K.J. Esler
2009–2010	J.M. Farrant
2011–2013	N. Makunga[1]
2014–2016	K.Balkwill[2]
2017–2018	P. Hills
2019–2020	J.S. Boatwright
2021–2022	G.V. Goodman-Cron
2023–2024	A.O. Aremu
2025–	K. Glennon

[1] N. Makunga was President for three years, because no suitable and available President-Elect was identified in time.
[2] K. Balkwill was President for three years, because during her year as Vice-President, the President-Elect decided to emigrate, so another President-Elect needed to be elected and then serve his one-year term as Vice-President.

with Codd followed by Botha, van der Schijff, Lewis, de Winter and Grobbelaar but the sequence was broken after Eloff and Small followed Grobbelaar (Table 1).

At its inception, SAAB was too small to contemplate holding an independent congress, and so continued to operate under the umbrella of S2A3. Meetings were held in July each year as part of the long-running series of S2A3 gatherings. At a later stage section B of S2A3 was transferred to SAAB. There was a Society for Plant Physiology that agreed to terminate their society to join the new society. The Phycological Society and the Limnological Society of South Africa decided to remain independent, rather than join SAAB.

6. Comparison of fields covered by Bothalia and JSAB

In 1921, BRI launched their journal, Bothalia. Different issues of the same volume were published in subsequent years, so that the first 10 volumes straddled a period of 52 years. In that period, 280 (an average of 5.4 per year) items and 6456 (an average of 124 per year) pages were published (Table 2 & Supplementary Document 1). Of these, 86.8% were in the fields of Systematics, Floristics, Biogeography and Anatomy, 3.9% in the field of Ecology and 3.9% in the area of Agriculture and Agronomy. General or historic items made up 3.6% and there was a single book review. Authors included staff of BRI as well as scientists from outside the organization, some independently and some in collaboration with BRI staff members. Between 1973 and 1984, 71% of the papers in Bothalia were in the fields of Systematics, Floristics, Biogeography and Anatomy, 21% in Ecology and Invasion Biology, and about 3% each in Ethnobotany / Economic Botany and General or Historic. Averages of 40.2 items and 303.8 pages were published each year.

Compton launched the Journal of South African Botany (JSAB) in 1935 and successive Directors of the NBG acted as Editors. Volumes were published regularly, with one volume each year and averages of 16.9 articles and 195.5 pages per year (Table 2). In the first 10 volumes, 67% of the items were in the fields of Systematics, Floristics, Biogeography and Anatomy, 6.5% in the field of Ecology and 1.1% in the area of Physiology. A single paper on Economic Botany appeared in 1942. Ten percent of the items were General or Historic, including obituaries and dedications and 15.4% of the items were Book Reviews. As in Bothalia, authors were from the staff of the publishing institution as well as from other local and international organisations. Between 1975 and 1984, the JSAB had a large number of Book Reviews (26.5% of all items), while 48.5% of items were in the fields of Systematics, Floristics, Biogeography and Anatomy, 10.7% in Ecology and Invasion Biology, 5.3% in Physiology and 3.8% were General or Historic (Table 3). Averages of 41.25 items and 466.8 pages were published each year. The NBG also published 12 Supplementary Volumes to the JSAB, which comprised longer taxonomic revisions. After the creation of SAJB the Supplementary Volumes continued as a series of books titled Annals of Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens.

So, Bothalia and JSAB were good vehicles for publishing taxonomic and ecological papers, but there was no dedicated South African Journal for publishing work in the more experimental and

Table 2
Summary Statistics of number of papers in particular fields in Bothalia and Journal of South African Botany (JSAB) in their first ten volumes. SI = Special Issue.

	Bothalia Vols 1 to 10			JSAB Vols 1 to 10		
	Total	Proportion %	Ave p.a.	Total	Proportion %	Ave p.a.
Field		1921–1972			1935–1944	
Systematics, Floristics, Biogeography and Anatomy	243	86.8	4.67	114.0	67.5	11.4
Ecology and Invasion Biology	11	3.9	0.21	11.0	6.5	1.1
Agronomy and Agriculture	11	3.9	0.21	0.0	0.0	
Physiology	0	0.0		2.0	1.2	0.2
Pollination	0	0.0		0.0	0.0	0.0
Ethnobotany / Economic Botany	0	0.0		1.0	0.6	0.1
Pharmacology	0	0.0		0.0	0.0	
Phytochemistry	0	0.0		0.0	0.0	
Biotechnology (including proteomics and genetics)	0	0.0		0.0	0.0	
General / Historic	10	3.6	0.19	18.0	10.7	1.8
Book Reviews	1	0.4	0.02	26.0	15.4	2.6
Total articles	280		5.4	169.0		16.9
Total pages	6456		124.2	1955.0		195.5

Table 3
Summary Statistics of number of papers in particular fields in Bothalia (1973 to 1984 and the most recent four years), Journal of South African Botany (JSAB) (1973 to 1984 [its last ten years]) and South African Journal of Botany (1982 to 1991 [its first ten years] and the most recent two years).

Field	Bothalia			Bothalia			JSAB			SAJB			SAJB		
	Vol 11–15			Vol 50–54			Vol 41–50			Vol 1–57			Vol 152–175		
	Total	Ave p.a.	Proportion	Total	Ave p.a.	Proportion	Total	Ave p.a.	Proportion	Total	Ave p.a.	Proportion	Total	Ave p.a.	Proportion
Systematics, Floristics, Biogeography and Anatomy	342	34.2	70.8	25	5	36.2	208	20.8	47.7	328	32.8	45.7	47	23.5	3.5
Ecology and Invasion Biology	100	10.0	20.7	29	5.8	42.0	48	4.8	11.0	191	19.1	26.6	43	21.5	3.2
Agronomy and Agriculture	1	0.1	0.2	0	0	0.0	2	0.2	0.5	10	1	1.4	150	75	11.3
Physiology	2	0.2	0.4	1	0.2	1.4	19	1.9	4.4	104	10.4	14.5	85	42.5	6.4
Pollination	7	0.7	1.4	1	0.2	1.4	9	0.9	2.1	17	1.7	2.4	9	4.5	0.7
Ethnobotany / Economic Botany	14	1.4	2.9	0	0	0.0	1	0.1	0.2	10	1	1.4	22	11	1.7
Pharmacology	0	0.0	0.0	0	0	0.0	1	0.1	0.2	0	0	0.0	166	83	12.5
Phytochemistry	1	0.1	0.2	0	0	0.0	10	1	2.3	14	1.4	1.9	178	89	13.4
Biotechnology (including proteomics and genetics)	0	0.0	0.0	0	0	0.0	1	0.1	0.2	21	2.1	2.9	263	131.5	19.7
SI Calcium Homeostasis in Plants													4	2	0.3
SI Cosmoceuticals Production													15	7.5	1.1
SI Frontier areas in Orchid Biotechnology													12	6	0.9
SI Role of Melatonin in Regulation of Abiotic Stress													23	11.5	1.7
SI Metabolomics and Modeling													27	13.5	2.0
SI Plant Stress Mitigation													68	34	5.1
SI Plants and Contaminants													22	11	1.7
SI Nanotechnology for Plant Resilience													26	13	2.0
SI Trends and challenges in Plant Physiology and Biotechnology													5	2.5	0.4
General / Historic	15	1.5	3.1	3	0.6	4.3	15	1.5	3.4	5	0.5	0.7	168	84	12.6
Book Reviews	0	0.0	0.0	1	0.2	1.4	122	12.2	28.0	19	1.9	2.6	0	0	0.0
ZOOLOGICAL		0.0		11	2.2	15.9									
Total articles	482	48.2	99.8	69	13.8		436	43.6		718	71.8		1333	666.5	
	1973–1984			2020–2024			1975–1984			1982–1991			2023–2024		

applied botanical fields such as plant physiology, plant biochemistry and plant pathology. The South African Journal of Science and the Transactions of the Royal Society of southern Africa were general scientific journals and the Tydskrif vir Wetenskap en Tegnologie of the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns was also a general journal and only published in Afrikaans. In addition, there were journals considered to have low impact for botanists such as the South African Journal of Agricultural Science, the Journal of the Chemical Institute, the Journal of the Limnological Society of southern Africa and the Proceedings of the Royal Society of South Africa.

7. The creation and activity of the Bureau for Scientific Journals

The scientific advisor to the Prime Minister recommended that a number of strong journals with the title "South African Journal of . . ." should be created and supported in line with Australian and Canadian journals. The Department of National Education provided funding for the Section Foundation for Education, Science and Technology section of the Council for Scientific Publications to enable the newly created Bureau for Scientific Publications (BSP) to publish a series of national journals including one in Botany.

The BSP tried to convince the NBG and BRI to change the name of Bothalia and/or JSAB to South African Journal of Botany (SAJB) with promised financial support. Neither organization was willing to do this. This led to a delay in the creation of the SAJB. Prof N. Grobbelaar then wrote to Botanists to ask whether they would support a newly created SAJB. He was willing to act as Editor and use his staff and support from the University of Pretoria to manage the journal. This situation continued from Volume 1 in 1982 until Volume 3 Number 3 of 1984.

In the journal the council of SAAB was listed with the Editorial Committee. Initially the journal was bilingual with English and Afrikaans abstracts and some Afrikaans papers were published. From Volume 61 of 1995, the option to submit Afrikaans articles was removed from the Instructions to Authors, although the first two articles in Number 1 still had abstracts in English and Afrikaans, but there were no Afrikaans abstracts thereafter. A more detailed discussion of the change in the use of Afrikaans in scientific societies and research journals over the past 100 years has been provided Eloff (2025).

8. Change in the directorship and activities of NBG

Prof Brian Rycroft retired in 1983 and the vacant position was advertised. There were some overseas applicants, as well as very strong applications from the North and the South of South Africa and the NBG Board decided to appoint J.N. Eloff from the central part of the RSA from 1 October 1983.

Eloff was a member of the Council of SAAB and a Board member of NBG for many years. He also served as a member of the Scientific Advisory Committee of BRI. He was a plant biochemist and noted the statement of the Meiring Naude committee that "Irrespective of the praiseworthy attempt at accommodating guest researchers, research does not actually exist at the National Botanic Gardens of South Africa (Naude et al., 1976). At the 75th Anniversary of the establishment of BRI, Prof N. Grobbelaar (1979) seriously criticized BRI for not doing any work on plant physiology. Even as early as 1922, Compton had stated that "The erection of a laboratory as recommended by the National Botanic Gardens Advisory Committee should be taken in hand as soon as possible" in his annual report (Compton, 1983). Consequently, increasing research in plant physiology was an important priority for Eloff, especially research on the economical use of plants and on the medicinal value of plants and he made a case for this in his inaugural lecture at UCT (Eloff, 1985a).

Eloff used Veld and Flora to communicate with members of the Botanical Society, the support organization of the NBG, about various aspects of the management of NBG (Eloff, 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1987a, 1988). The importance of the role of the Botanical Society in supporting the NBG in marketing and fund-raising and supporting the director in the changing environment cannot be underestimated. Eloff also communicated with the wider scientific community in South Africa (Eloff 1986b). Under his leadership the research component was developed and the threatened plant research laboratory was built and was opened by the State President, P. W. Botha (Eloff, 1987b).

9. Changes in the management of the South African Journal of Botany

Based on the success attained by Prof Grobbelaar with the early volumes of SAJB, it was not difficult to convince the Board of NBG that the JSAB should be amalgamated with SAJB. At that stage the JSAB had completed 50 years of publication. The NBG Board and SAAB council agreed that the next volume number should be 51 and that it should be stated that the journal is incorporating volume 1-50, 1935-1984 of JSAB and is produced for SAAB and the NBG. An insert with volume 51 of SAJB (Fig. 1) explained the situation. That SAJB had a publication history of

"EX UNITATE VIRES"

The somewhat surprising change in volume number in this series from Volume 4 to Volume 51 is the result of applying the national motto of South Africa, "Strength in Unity". This is the first issue of the amalgamated publication of the South African Journal of Botany and the Journal of South African Botany which appeared from 1935–1984. This first combined volume which is published by the National Bureau for Scientific Publications, is a joint undertaking of the South African Association of Botanists and the National Botanic Gardens. By mutual agreement they have elected to follow the volume numbering of the now defunct Journal of South African Botany. The Councils of both these bodies have accepted and appreciate the benefits accruing from the incorporation of these two journals.

The Director of the National Botanic Gardens at Kirstenbosch will be the Scientific Editor. He will nominate two members of the editorial panel and the Council of the South African Association of Botanists will designate the other three members of the panel. Miss Lovell Bosman, who has had over 12 years of experience as Editorial Officer of the Journal of South African Botany, will serve as the Scientific Editorial Officer, salaried by the National Botanic Gardens.

The Bureau for Scientific Publications has approved several changes which will be evident in this and future issues. It has been decided that recent and important books will be reviewed and that loose leaf inserts regarding international botanical symposiums or congresses will be included from time to time. We hope that the practice of the Journal of South African Botany of dedicating each volume to an eminent botanist will continue.

In the last issue of the Journal of South African Botany, homage was paid to all the people who had been involved with the production of the Journal. In the first issue of this new consolidated journal I would like to record my appreciation of the work of Prof. Nathanaël Grobbelaar, the Editor of the South African Journal of Botany since its inception in 1982 until 1984. I would also like to pay tribute to his Editorial Board. Prof. Grobbelaar was much more than just an Editor. He was the driving force behind the establishment of this journal and, in his role of Scientific Editor, had to convince botanists to support this new publication. He had to deliver approved manuscripts to the Bureau for Scientific Publications without any additional secretarial assistance, and very few people understand how much work is involved in this process. It is appropriate, therefore, that the first volume of the incorporated journal should be dedicated to him.

J.N. Eloff

SCIENTIFIC EDITOR

Figure 1. Insert that was included with volume 51 of the South African Journal of Botany to explain why the numbering had jumped from Volume 3 to Volume 51.

many years may have contributed to Elsevier being willing to support SAJB and SAAB at a later stage.

To honour Compton who started the JSAB, the NBG Board agreed to award an annual Compton prize for the best paper published in the journal. The editorial board would evaluate the papers published. In the early volumes of the journal the winners of the Compton prize were listed.

Ms Lovell Bosman in Kirstenbosch acted as Scientific Editorial Officer and Eloff was appointed as the Scientific Editor from Volume 3 Number 4 in 1984. The editorial committee consisted of five people C.E.J. Botha, R.N. Pienaar, J.P. Rourke, G.K. Theron and J. van Staden. The Bureau for Scientific Publications published the journal and the annual subscription cost was R30 for the six numbers of a volume. The Scientific Editor provided an annual report to the AGM of SAAB and to the Research Committee of NBG. Questionnaires were handed out at each SAAB AGM to assess the opinion of members around various issues pertinent to the journal. Eloff continued as the Scientific Editor after his early retirement from the National Botanical Institute in 1994.

10. Creation of the National Botanical Institute

The experience of Eloff with the NBG, BRI and SAAB made it very clear that instead of a North-South competition there would be many benefits if NBG and BRI were amalgamated. It was not difficult to convince the NBG Board and officials from the Department of Environment Affairs. There must have been discussions with the officials responsible for BRI, but Eloff was invited to provide extended input to the part of the Forest Act that handled the amalgamation of the BRI and NBG (Anonymous, 1984).

The amalgamation of BRI and NBG coincided with the retirement of Bernard de Winter, Director of the BRI. Brian Huntley was appointed Chief Director, based at Kirstenbosch, and Eloff as Director of Research, based at the National Herbarium in Pretoria. He was still the Editor of SAJB. The Chief Director and Director of Research had different views on what the research priority of the new organization should be and the Chief Director decided to end the work on plant utilization. The Director of Research was thus allowed to retire early at the age of 55 on 1 April 1994. As he had been Editor of SAJB by virtue of his position as Director of NBG, his retirement should have ended his term as Editor of SAJB, but the NBI did not mind him continuing as Editor until volume 64 Number 5 of 1998 and SAAB council supported the decision.

From volume 64 Number 6 of 1998, three Scientific Editors of SAJB were appointed (i.e. Prof G.J. Bredenkamp (UP), Prof G.F. Smith (NBI) and Prof J. van Staden (UN PMB)). The Editorial Board consisted of Prof H.P. Linder (UCT), Prof. A.E. van Wyk (UP) and Prof B-E. van Wyk (UJ). Prof J. van Staden became the sole Editor-in-Chief (EiC) from 2001. This corresponded with the transfer from The Foundation of Education, Science and Technology as joint publisher of the journal together with SAAB to NISC (National Inquiry Service Centre) Pty Ltd as the publisher.

11. Statistics SAJB

In the first ten years of the SAJB (1982–1991), Systematics, Floristics, Biogeography and Anatomy (45.7%) and Ecology and Invasion Biology (26.6%) continued to dominate the fields of published papers, but new areas like Physiology (14.5%), Biotechnology (2.9%) and Phytochemistry (1.9%) made their appearance (Table 2). Initially the Scope of the journal was included under Editorial Policy in the Instructions to Authors and stated "Full length papers and short communications based on original research will be published. . . . . Manuscripts must be unpublished results, not under consideration for publication elsewhere." And articles could be in English or Afrikaans, with an abstract in both languages. In Volume 53 Number 1 of 1987, the Editorial Policy was expanded to include the following:

"The Journal will publish the following types of articles:

Research articles: All contributions must be based on original research, not under consideration for publication elsewhere, and should constitute a definite advance in knowledge in that field. The manuscript should usually (a) state a problem or hypothesis, (b) describe how reproducible data was obtained to answer the problem or test the hypothesis and (c) come to a conclusion. (The fact that nobody has ever looked at an aspect such as the chemical composition or morphology or species composition or any other aspect of a plant or group of plants will not qualify a manuscript on that topic for publication unless it leads to a significant advance in our scientific knowledge.)

Short communications: The same requirements as for research articles apply, but short research articles should contain new and meaningful results which warrant urgent publication and which may appear in a more comprehensive article at a later stage.

Review articles: Review articles will be accepted if the reviewer summarizes and critically evaluates the data of other workers and (a) comes to new conclusions regarding the problems investigated or (b) indicates a gap in our knowledge, which requires additional research. Contributors are advised to send the Scientific Editor an outline before writing a review paper.

Book reviews: Concise objective evaluation of books which have recently been published will be solicited by the Scientific Editor.

Letters to the Editor: Criticism or comments on any articles that have recently appeared in S. Aft. J. But. will be published at the discretion of the Scientific Editor."

In Volume 54 Number 1 of 1988, the words "in the field of Botany" were added after "The Journal will publish the following types of articles". After the transfer to NISC, the Aims and Scope became a separate item inside the front cover of the journal and stated:

> *"South African Journal of Botany* publishes papers which make an original contribution to any field of Botany. Papers are accepted on the understanding that their contents have not been published, or submitted for publication, elsewhere. Editorial policy is flexible as to the nature of the papers considered for publication. The journal publishes minireviews, full papers, short communications and book reviews."

In a report on the 1996 Congress, which was hosted in Stellenbosch, Esler (1996) wrote " One of the more contentious debates raging in SAAB at the moment is the status of the South African Journal of Botany, which does not have a high impact factor in the international circuit, and imposes relatively high page charges (not a good incentive). Should we be supporting the journal with our research in order to raise standards? Should the journal be scrapped? Would a reduction of the number of issues and/or lower page charges be an alternative? This issue requires careful thought and consultation."

12. Agreement with Elsevier

During 2005, the Editor-in-Chief, Prof J van Staden, entered communication and negotiation with Elsevier to become the publishers of the SAJB. In August 2005, Prof Marion Meyer, the then President of SAAB, signed an agreement with Elsevier on behalf of SAAB, to take over the publication of the journal from 2006. This arrangement included the payment of an editorial fee to SAAB and Prof Meyer insisted that this fee should be paid in Euros rather than Rands. The wisdom of these two leaders of SAAB transformed the Society's journal, which for most scientific societies is a financial liability, into a financial asset for SAAB. Through the generosity of Prof van Staden, the stipend to the Editor-in-Chief and the contribution of SAAB to the salary of his editorial assistant were much less than the editorial fee

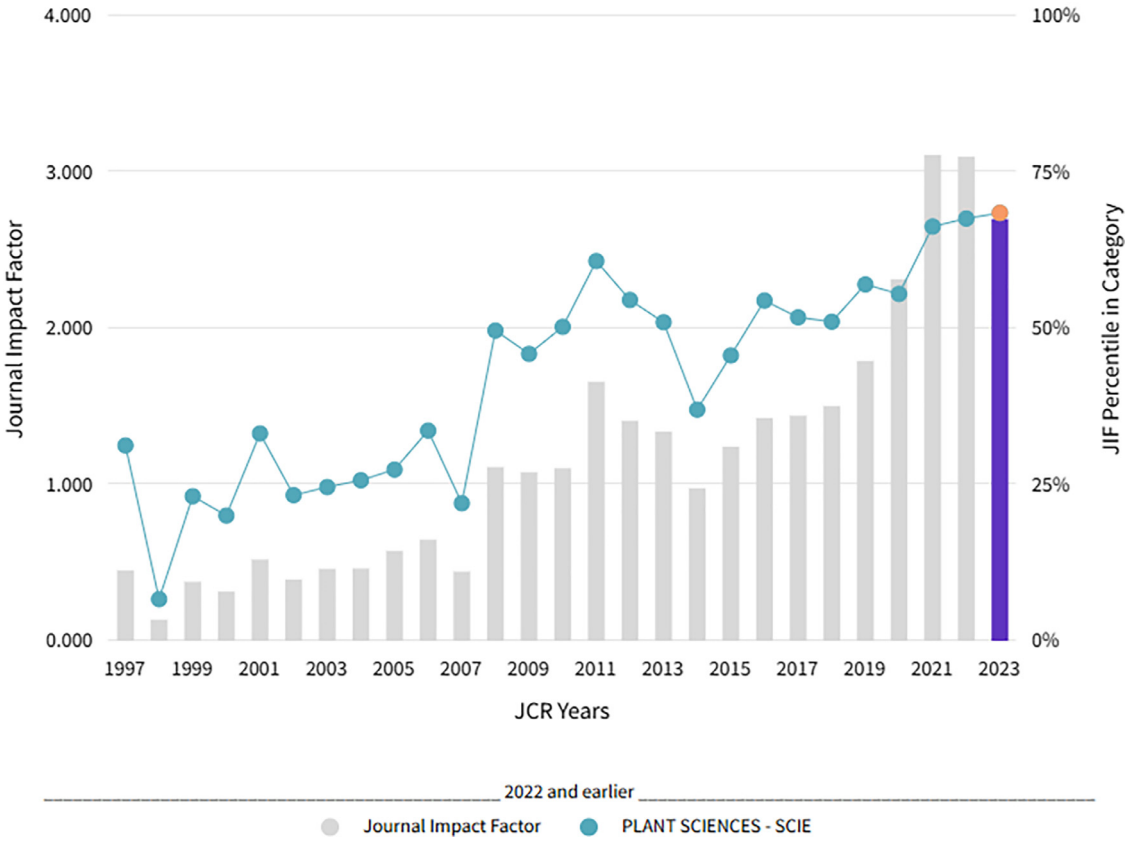

Figure 2. Journal Impact Factor of South African Journal of Botany (bars) and Percentile in the Plant Sciences Category (dots) from 1997 to 2023 as reflected in Journal Citation Reports (JCR, 2025).

paid by Elsevier so that the balance could be invested for the benefit of SAAB. This capital has been well-stewarded by the Treasurers of SAAB and the interest now supports student bursaries, seed money for conferences, and financial support for guest speakers at conferences. There are also no page charges for publishing in the journal.

In his role of Editor-in-Chief, Prof van Staden screened all submissions to the journal and rejected those that did not match the scope, were scientifically unsound or where the language was poor. He then delegated the better submissions to the members of the editorial board to manage finding reviewers, to assess the reviewers' comments and to recommend an editorial decision, and he handled a huge load of papers himself. He then checked all recommendations and endorsed or modified as appropriate. Initially Elsevier had a page limit on each issue and there were fewer issues each year. The need to serve the publishing requirements of the SAAB community meant that the number of papers by foreign authors had to be limited and the number of special issues had to be restricted, so the "of species that are of importance to southern Africa" clause of the Aims and Scope was emphasized. As the journal prospered, so the page restriction was relaxed and the number of issues per year was increased and then the "Manuscripts dealing with significant new findings on other species of the world and general botanical principles will also be considered and are encouraged." sentence of the Aims and Scope allowed the inclusion of more papers from elsewhere. The number of issues per annum has now reached twelve and in the years 2021 to 2023, the proportion of South African authors was 11.47%, with 19.2% from India and 5.53% from Brazil, 5.32% from Saudi Arabia and 4.47% from each of Pakistan and Turkey (calculations based on data available in Journal Citation Reports (JCR)). The journal has now opted for virtual special issues and all these developments, when used wisely, have contributed and can continue to contribute to the performance of the journal and to its international profile.

In general, the Impact Factor of the journal has seen a steady increase over the period recorded in JCR (Fig. 2), with the lowest being 0.136 in 1998 and the highest being close to or just above 3.1 in 2021 and 2022, the years where the statistics were based on the final two years with Prof van Staden as EiC.

13. Back copies go online

Around 2013, Elsevier approached SAAB to include electronic versions of the back numbers of SAJB on the Science Direct website, with the issues of the journal that they had published on SAAB's behalf. At this stage, NISC owned the copyright of at least the issues of the journal that they had published. When a representative of SAAB opened negotiations with NISC in this regard, there were still sensitivities around SAAB having decided to take their journal to Elsevier and there was a misunderstanding around who owned the copyright of the issues that were published before NISC was involved. The NISC director argued that NISC had acquired the copyright of all issues, right back to 1982, while the SAAB representative was not convinced that NISC owned the copyright from before they published the journal.

In 2014, the then president of SAAB (Prof K. Balkwill) approached the new Managing Director of NISC (M. Schramm) to see if we could resolve a win-win arrangement, where NISC obtained the money they sought and SAAB obtained the copyright to all of SAJB. The SAAB president suggested that the agreement could state that SAAB obtained all copyright regardless of who owned it previously. However, the agreement that was presented unequivocally stated that NISC owned all the copyright and were ceding it all to SAAB. At first glance, the SAAB president was tempted to argue, but then realized that SAAB was still getting what they needed and so entering a legal wrangle would serve no constructive purpose. Thus, an agreement

was signed on 14 May 2014. NISC then sent all the old hard copies to the SAAB President at the University of the Witwatersrand. They were sorted and single copies of all the represented issues were gathered and sorted. Members of SAAB were approached to provide missing issues. Then the physical issues were disassembled, the rough edges from the binding were guillotined off, and a postgraduate student used a photocopying machine to produce electronic copies of all papers. These scans were sent to Elsevier on a portable hard drive and Elsevier arranged and paid for the scans to be converted into searchable pdf's and loaded onto the website. This meant that the papers were accessible to search engines and thus could be read and cited. The two-fold benefit was that authors would obtain additional citations of their papers and the increased visibility of SAJB would lead to readers looking for papers in more current issues of SAJB, thus potentially improving the Impact Factor of the journal.

14. Change in Editor-in-Chief and appointment of Associate Editors

Very sadly, in the second half of 2021, Prof van Staden became ill and could not cope with the immense workload (2624 submissions in the year, Table 4). His excellent editorial assistant, Lee Warren, did her best to hold the fort and sent papers to members of the editorial board, but with no indication that they had not been screened in any way. Elsevier became aware of the bottle neck that was building up in the editorial process and approached the SAAB Council to intervene. In collaboration, Elsevier and the SAAB Council appointed 10 Associate Editors from amongst the Editorial Board, with the understanding that their responsibility was to screen papers before sending them to handling editors to manage the review process. To speed the editorial process, the handling editors were given final say in the editorial decision and papers did not return to the Associate Editors for ratification of decisions. Some of the challenges that became apparent were that some Associate Editors were inexperienced in such a role and needed guidance, with the lack of screening that had occurred while the EiC was ill there was much confusion about the Scope of the Journal, and because there had been delays in sending papers to Handling Editors and no screening before doing so, the number of papers in the system was huge. The workload of the handling editors was high and they had not been told that they had the authority to do desk rejects and so were sending all the papers delegated to them out for review. This meant they were having great difficulty in finding enough suitable reviewers and were anxious to avoid reviewer fatigue amongst their pools of reviewers. Consequently, the handling time for manuscripts was increasing.

In February 2022, Prof K. Balkwill was appointed as Interim Editor-in-Chief, initially for six months, but this was eventually extended to 15 months. Initially he also acted as the Associate Editor for the General Category, which was the fourth biggest. This gave him quick and broad experience in using many aspects of the Editorial Management system and in the kinds of issues that editors would need to deal with.

With the assistance of the more experienced Associate Editors, Decision Trees were drawn up for Associate and Handling Editors (Supplementary Documents 2 & 3) to provide guidance on the principles behind the decisions that had to be made as well as the practicalities of implementing them in the Editorial System. Two further guides were created; one on how to find reviewers using the facilities of Scopus within the Editorial Management system (Supplementary Document 4); and one on how to proceed once the reviewers' comments were received (Supplementary Document 5). The efforts of the Associate Editors and these guidelines assisted in reducing the number of papers that editors had to deal with beyond the initial screening process and in speeding up the handling of papers that were deemed to be within the journal's scope and of sufficient quality to warrant being reviewed (Median number of days from submission to first online publication reduced from 179 days in 2021 to 1675.5 in 2022 and 136 in 2023 — Table 5). At this stage, there were many papers that had been in the system for six months or more that were

Table 4
Number of articles submitted to South African Journal of Botany, number of papers published, rejection rate, impact factor and number of issues (volumes) per annum between 2018 and 2024. Data compiled from Editor's Reports accessed at https://sabotanyblog.wordpress.com/journal/ on 25 January 2025.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total submissions	1628	2163	2818	2624	2785	4370	4420
Papers published	412	422	425	464	687	677	673
Rejection rate (%)	77	80	85	80	78	83	84
Impact Factor	1.504	1,792	2.315	3.11	3.1	2.7	
Number of issues (volumes)	6	8	8	8	9	12	12

Table 5
Number of papers submitted, rejected and accepted and handling speeds over the period for which Elsevier have managed the South African Journal of Botany. Data provided by Elsevier.

YEAR	Median days submission to first decision	Median days submission to first publication online	Median days submission to publication VoR	Submitted count	Accepted count	Rejected count	Published VoR count	Rejection Rate
2006	10	127	214.4	242	99	144	135	59%
2007	12	148	250.4	419	134	284	85	68%
2008	16	206	305.6	369	108	304	128	74%
2009	12	153.5	228.4	444	116	318	132	73%
2010	13	134	213.3	558	131	414	86	76%
2011	14	148	268.7	642	113	488	124	81%
2012	17	148	210.4	694	126	537	173	81%
2013	19	158	195	716	193	516	195	73%
2014	19	148.5	148.4	806	169	574	154	77%
2015	14	172	204.8	1,051	187	773	197	81%
2016	16	213.5	240.5	1,034	244	796	203	77%
2017	13	183	210.5	1,234	253	931	280	79%
2018	13	164	174.9	1,773	324	1,320	255	80%
2019	14	164	208.4	2,163	418	1,668	422	80%
2020	11	171	217.3	2,818	413	2,266	425	85%
2021	12	179	213.3	2,624	488	2,002	464	80%
2022	10	167.5	224.7	2,785	605	2,209	694	79%
2023	8	136	136.2	4,370	690	3,496	677	84%
2024	11	148	147.5	4,420	688	3,578	694	84%

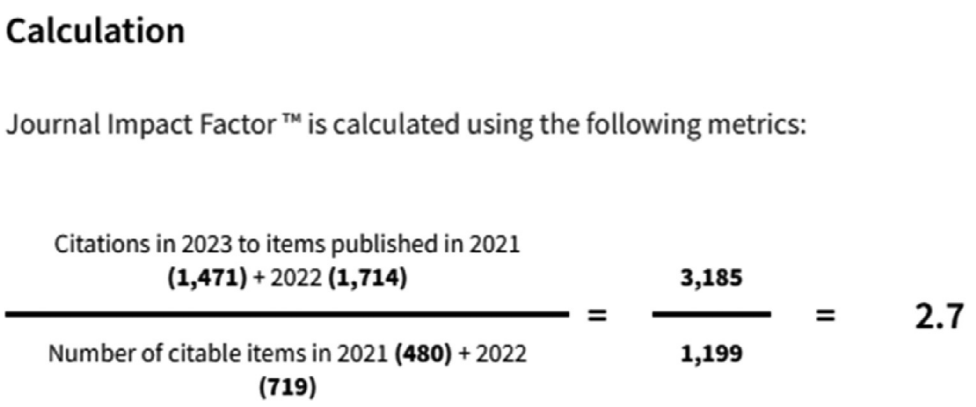

Figure 3. Calculation of Journal Impact Factor of South African Journal of Botany for 2023 as reflected in Journal Citation Reports (JCR, 2025).

out of scope, but had been sent out for review and were then considered to be worthy of acceptance or revision and resubmission — it seemed unfair to then reject them as out of scope, so we were lenient on this issue for an interim period. This together with an concerted effort to conclude the then current Special Issues led to a significant increase in the number of papers published in 2022 (i.e. 694 as opposed to 464 in 2021 — Table 5). The increased number of published papers in turn led to a drop in the impact factor in 2023 (Fig. 3). If one assumed a 10% increase in number of papers and a 10% increase in citations over 2022, the calculation would have been 1471 + 1618 citations divided by 480 + 528 which equals 3089 / 1008 which equals 3.06 and would have been rounded up to 3.1, the same as the previous year.

In 2022, the Scope stated that Review articles were by invitation of the Editor-in-Chief (EiC) and that potential authors could approach the Editor-in-Chief about submitting mini-reviews, which could be interpreted that the journal discouraged review articles, despite them improving the citation rate of the journal. Many requests were received, but it was very difficult to make a decision on a review that was not yet written and indicating that a review could be submitted might be misinterpreted as saying that the review would be published. In addition, many reviews were submitted without first obtaining permission from the EiC and there was no indication that they were review rather than research articles. Because of the wide diversity of topics covered by the journal, it was difficult for the Interim EiC to make an informed decision on whether a topic was worthy of a review and so the review proposals were referred to the appropriate Associate Editors and often they felt they could not make a decision without seeing the review. This was inefficient. We thus removed the necessity to consult with the EiC before submitting a review article and designed a questionnaire that had to be submitted with review articles (Supplementary Document 6) that made it easier for the Associate Editors to assess the reviews. In particular, the answers to the questions "What is your experience in the field? What will the synthesis of information tell us that is new and important?, What evidence of new trends with global relevance that most researchers may have missed will you be exposing in the review, and What new insights into the topic will your review provide?; were very telling. This new approach as well as review articles that are included in the increased number of special issues have led to an increase in the number of review articles in the journal.

15. Future of SAJB

The SAJB continues to attract a large number of submissions (4420 in 2024, Tables 4 & 5). The number of papers published in a year has stabilised at nearly 700 and the rejection rate is at its highest in the last 7 years (Table 5). The handling time is good, with it taking an average of 148 days from Submission to online publication of individual papers (Table 5) and 186 days from Submission to Issue Realisation (i.e. hard copy publication of full issues [volumes]).

Although there has been a recent drop in the impact factor as a consequence of the rapid increase in the number of articles published, SAJB has maintained the first position that it attained in 2022 amongst the seven general plant science journals against which it has been benchmarked for many years (Table 6). Indeed, the 2023 drop in impact factor led to a drop of four positions amongst Plant Science Journals, whereas the closest competitor dropped by 16 positions (Table 6). Part of this performance is due to the change in the proportion of papers in the categories where citation rates are lower than others (i.e. Systematics, Floristics, Biogeography & Anatomy and Ecology & Invasion Biology — jointly 6.7% now, as opposed to 73.3 in the first ten years of the SAJB – Table 2). Despite the huge shift in proportions of papers published in the various fields accommodated in the journal, the huge increase in number of papers published means that the number of papers in the more traditional fields is reasonably constant (an average of 23.5 papers per annum in the last two years, compared to 20.8 papers per annum in the last ten years of JSAB and 32.8 papers per year in the first ten years of SAJB —

Table 6
Comparison of performance of South African Journal of Botany compared to the seven general plant science journals against which it has been benchmarked for many years. Data compiled from Editor's Reports accessed at https://sabotanyblog.wordpress.com/journal/ on 25 January 2025.

Journal	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	IF	Ranking (of 228)	IF	Ranking (of 234)	IF	Ranking (of 235)	IF	Ranking (of 239)	IF	Ranking (of 239)	IF	Ranking (of 265)
South African Journal of Botany	1.504	112	1.792	101	2.315	105	3.111	81	3.1	78	2.7	84
American Journal of Botany	2,858	53	3.038	48	3.844	50	3.325	72	3	80	2.4	96
Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society	3.057	46	2.076	88	2,911	77	2.828	89	2.4	106	2.3	98
Brazilian Journal of Botany	0.958	166	0.930	173	1.269	166	1.368	169	1.6	149	1.4	161
Botany	1.315	127	1.147	152	1.323	164	1.361	170	1.1	182	1	194
Australian Journal of Botany	1.504	143	1.386	131	1.237	171	1.505	158	1.1	182	0.9	207
New Zealand Journal of Botany	1.118	145	0.761	190	1.173	173	1.016	197	0.9	198	0.8	216

Table 2) and is limited by the number of suitable papers submitted, rather than a change in the Scope of the journal.

Change management to the new editorial approach that includes ten Associate Editors, each dealing with topics in which they are specialized, has gone well and guidelines have been provided to empower the Editorial Board to make swift and informed decisions. An energetic, wise and enthusiastic Editor-in-Chief is now substantively in place and he is very ably supported by an efficient and astute Editorial Assistant. The relationship with Elsevier, the publisher of the journal, remains good and SAAB and Elsevier cooperate to achieve what is to both their benefit — an efficient and effective editorial management process that leads to timely publication of good quality articles.

Although there are new threats to all journals from unethical publication practices and inappropriate use of Artificial Intelligence, the Editorial Board and Elsevier are cooperating to take preventative measures where possible and to take appropriate punitive action where necessary. Sixty-seven per cent of the editorial board is South African (journal website 2025), but 88.53% of the published papers are from other countries (calculated from data for 2021 to 2023 in JCR) and the rejection rates for the four countries other than South Africa and India that submit the most papers are much higher (2021 data in Annual report on SAAB website). Thus the South African editors and especially the Associate Editors are carrying a high load that benefits scientists from other countries.

16. The future of SAAB

SAAB has persisted as an active scientific society serving the needs of its members since its inception in 1968. The conferences are organized by plant science institutions and organisations from around the country on a rotational basis and have taken place regularly (Table 7).

Table 7
Venues and hosting institutions of SAAB conferences. Data compiled from SAAB electronic archives, Presidents' reports and SAGM minutes available at https://sabotanyblog.wordpress.com/about/governance/ and accessed 10 January 2025, abstracts published in South African Journal of Botany and data provided by E. Geerts.

SAAB Congress	Year	Venue	Host
1st	1975	Pretoria	SAAB Council
2nd	1976	Cape Town	University of Cape Town
3rd	1977	Durban	University of Natal
4th	1978	Bloemfontein	University of the Orange Free State (with Grasslands Society of Southern Africa)
5th	1979	Stellenbosch	University of Stellenbosch
6th	1980	Pietermaritzburg	University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg
7th	1981	Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha)	University of Port Elizabeth (now Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University)
8th	1982	Pretoria	Northern Transvaal Regional Committee
9th	1983	Johannesburg	University of the Witwatersrand
10th	1984	Cape Town	University of Cape Town
11th	1985	Potchefstroom	Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (now University of North-West)
12th	1986	Umtata [Mthatha]	University of Transkei
13th	1987	Durban	University of Natal, Durban
14th	1988	Cape Town	Kirstenbosch & University of Cape Town
15th	1989	Pretoria	University of Pretoria
16th	1990	Grahamstown	Rhodes University
17th	1991	Pietermaritzburg	University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg
18th	1992	Westville, Durban	Univ of Durban-Westville
19th	1993	Belville	University of the Western Cape
20th	1994	Johannesburg	University of the Witwatersrand
21st	1995	Bloemfontein	University of the Free State
22nd	1996	Stellenbosch	Universtiy of Stellenbosch
23rd	1997	Alice	University of Fort Hare
24th	1998	Cape Town	University of Cape Town
25th	1999	Mthatha (previously Umtata)	University of Transkei
26th	2000	Potchefstroom	Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (now University of North-West)
27th	2001	Johannesburg	Rand Afrikaans University (now University of Johannesburg)
28th	2002	Grahamstown	Rhodes University
29th	2003	Pretoria	University of Pretoria (jointly with the International Society for Ethnopharmacology)
30th	2004	Durban	University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban
31st	2005	Bloemfontein	University of the Free State
32nd	2006	Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha)	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
33rd	2007	Cape Town	University of Cape Town
34th	2008	Drakensville	
35th	2009	Stellenbosch	University of Stellenbosch
36th	2010	Potchefstroom	Universityof the North
37th	2011	Grahamstown	Rhodes University
38th	2012	Pretoria	University of Pretoria
39th	2013	Drakensville	University of KwaZulu-Natal
40th	2014	Stellenbosch	University of Stellenbosch (jointly with AETFAT)
41st	2015	Tshipise	University of Venda
42nd	2016	Bloemfontein	University of the Free State
43rd	2017	Bellville	University of the Western Cape
44th	2018	Hatfield, Pretoria	University of Pretoria
45th	2019	Auckland Park, Johannesburg	University of Johannesburg (jointly with SASSB)
46th	2020	QwaQwa	University of the Free State
	2021	AGM was virtual, there were monthly Webinars	
47th	2022	Virtual	North-West University
48th	2023	The Ranch, Polokwane	University of Limpopo
49th	2024	Richards Bay	University of Zululand
50th	2025	Wits Rural, Hoedspruit	University of the Witwatersrand

Table 8
Membership data for the South African Association of Botanists. Data compiled from Presidents' reports and SAGM minutes available at https://sabotanyblog.wordpress.com/about/governance/ and accessed 10 January 2025 and data provided by E. Geerts.

Membership type	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Ordinary	282	195	189	168	236	206	220	235	237	267	239	209	199	211	206	227	240	219
Affiliate	10	10	5	7	7	5	5	5	6	5	6	3	4	4	3	2	3	3
Institutional	5	5	5	4	7	4	4	4	4	4	2	0						
Family	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	2	2	3	2	1						
Subtotal	302	215	204	184	254	219	233	246	249	279	249	213	203	215	209	229	243	222
Student	4	71	49	67	77	151	134	25	128	199	57	14	172	138	20	88	72	90
Retired (Emeritus)	9	10	7	7	7	8	12	9	9	9	17	18	18	19	24	25	25	27
Honorary	24	24	24	24	22	22	22	22	18	22	27	27	24	19	17	16	17	17
Life	8	8	8	7	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Subtotal	41	42	39	38	36	37	41	38	33	37	50	51	48	44	47	47	48	50
Total Members	347	328	292	289	367	407	408	309	410	515	356	278	423	397	276	364	363	362

Medals and Certificates (Supplementary Document 7) have been awarded regularly to recognize the achievements and service of members. The approach of the society to student members ensures a stream of new members (Table 8). These approaches include special membership rates for students, reduced rates for students at conferences that include the annual subscription fee for that year and prizes for the best student presentations and posters at conferences. In addition, there are Honours and Masters bursaries and the student who presents the best paper at a conference receives full sponsorship for the next conference and an opportunity to present a plenary lecture at that conference. There is a student council and various social media opportunities for students to stay connected. One of the three medals that the society awards annually is to the best plant science PhD submitted in the country and the recipient is given an opportunity to present an online webinar to the botanical community, in the same way as the more senior medal winners. The society's membership numbers are relatively constant (Table 8) despite there not being a conference in 2021 and a virtual online conference in 2022 due to Covid restrictions and despite the post-modern tendency to not belong to or participate in organisations. Governance of the organization is sound, with a constitution that is followed, but importantly is revised to keep abreast with developments within the society, the botanical community and the country (Supplementary Document 8).

Council members are elected by a democratic and transparent process and serve up to two two-year terms, after which they are not immediately eligible for re-election, and this brings new blood, new energy and new ideas to the leadership of the society. A president is elected from the council members and initially serves a year as the vice president under the current president, who becomes their vice-president a year later. At the end of that year, the vice-president retires after two one-year terms as vice-president and two years as president and a new vice-president is elected to serve under the then president in their second year of presidency. This brings continual renewal to the leadership of the society and reduces the temptation to serve one's ego rather than the needs of the society.

Another long-standing successful strategy has been to employ a secretary to support the administrative needs of the council and the president. Through the initiative to have the society's journal published by Elsevier and the financial advantages that have resulted, together with wise management of those resources, the society has been able to build up good capital to make its annual financial commitments to students sustainable. The efforts of Prof G. Goodman during her presidency to register the society as a public benefit organization and to have the capital wisely and securely invested have contributed to the long-term viability of the society. Very importantly, the Association has encouraged and embraced the international developments in plant sciences and topics of presentations at conferences reflect the trends that have occurred in the fields of papers published in the journal.

These efforts and arrangements enable SAAB to live up to its Mission Statement: "The Association is established for the advancement of Botany, to promote and uphold the status of this profession in all sectors of the population, and to perform such functions as may be desirable for the attainment of these objectives. The Association does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, creed or class, and is committed to removing any such barriers to the exercise of the profession."

17. Conclusion

In 1913, two Botanical Institutions developed from two foci in South Africa: the privately funded National Botanical Gardens (NBG) developed in Kirstenbosch and the government funded Botanical Research Institute (BRI — then the Division of Botany) in Pretoria. There was competition between these two organizations, which was resolved with the formation of the National Botanical Institute. Both organisations had started journals: the Memoirs of the Botanical Survey of South Africa in 1919, Flowering Plants of South Africa in 1920 and Bothalia in 1921 by BRI and the Journal of South African Botany (JSAB) by NBG in 1935. The NBG also published a number of books. In 1968, the professional botanical community of South Africa formed the South African Association of Botanists (SAAB) to collectively address the professional needs of botanists. In response to a government initiative, the South African Journal of Botany (SAJB) was launched in 1982 with the support of SAAB. From 1985, the JSAB and SAJB were united under the name of the latter, but continuing the numbering of the former (i.e. from Volume 51). In 2005, SAAB agreed with Elsevier that they would publish the South African Journal of Botany on behalf of SAAB. This arrangement and the efforts of the then Editor-in-Chief, Prof J. van Staden, led to the journal becoming a financial asset to SAAB and to it growing in size and international stature. As long as the arrangement with Elsevier remains favorable and persists, the future of the South African Journal of Botany is positive. The good governance guided by a wise constitution and the astute financial discipline of SAAB have secured the future and sustainability of SAAB and will assist the Association to live up to its Mission Statement.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

J.N. Eloff: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **K. Balkwill:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Supplementary materials

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