

“Pathogen of the Month” – A look back to when it started

Late in 2006, Dr. Sarah Collins took on the baton as APPS Regional Councillor for WA. She decided that she could achieve more for the region with additional hands on deck and so formed the first APPS Regional Committee which included, Dr. Aaron Maxwell as Treasurer, and Dr. Chris Dunne and Dr. Daniel Hüberli as the Secretaries. Discussions late in 2006 focused on raising awareness among WA members about current plant pathology research and connecting WA members.

APPS Pathogen of the Month (POTM) was developed by Dr. Chris Dunne. The idea was inspired by a small poster of ‘fungus of the month’ by Richard Robinson at the Science Division of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA; formerly the Department of Environment and Conservation). Chris’ aim for POTM was to raise the awareness of the broad range of plant pathogens in WA and Australia and help foster connections between researchers with common interests by spreading POTM authorship across a variety of agencies and research groups. Chris drafted a 12-month plan to profile significant and unique fungal pathogens, pests, viruses, nematodes and other disease agents (Table 1). It was also the Regional Committee’s aim to broaden the perceived focus of the Society on fungal pathogens and often neglected other diseases.

Dr. Daniel Hüberli’s artistic prowess was employed in the design template for POTM and he developed the eye-catching and useable design that has been adopted for each month’s issue. In keeping with the brains behind the whole idea, the first issue on [Armillaria root rot](#) was authored jointly by Chris and Richard Robinson and released on the 2nd February 2007.

Table 1. “Pathogen of the Month” in the first year of its release of 2007.

Month	Pathogen	Disease	Host	Taxon
February	Armillaria luteobubalina	Armillaria root rot	Australian natives	Fungi
March	Wheat streak mosaic virus	Wheat streak mosaic virus	Cereals	Virus
April	Quambalaria coyrecup	Corymbia canker disease	<i>Corymbia calophylla</i> , <i>C. ficifolia</i>	Fungi
May	Meloidogyne fallax	Root knot nematode	Crops and more	Nematodes
June	Phytophthora ramorum	Sudden oak death	Wide range including Aust. natives	Oomycetes
July	Candidatus Phytoplasma	Witches’ broom, big bud, little leaf	Many host species	Bacteria
August	Xanthomonas axonopodis pv. citri	Citrus canker	Citrus and other Rutaceae spp.	Bacteria
September	Puccinia graminis f. sp. tritici Ug99	Stem rust of wheat	Wheat and some other cereals	Fungi
October	Mycosphaerella cryptica	Leaf blotch, crinkle leaf	<i>Eucalyptus</i> spp.	Fungi
November	Tilletia indica	Karnal bunt	Wheat, durum, triticale	Fungi
December	Zythiostroma sp.	Aerial canker in <i>Banksia</i>	<i>Proteaceae</i> spp.	Fungi



L to R: Sarah Collins, Chris Dunne, Aaron Maxwell, and Daniel Huberli after an APPS WA Regional Committee meeting.



POTM's successful first release in February came under the notice of the APPS management committee at the time. The management committee considered ideas of making the website more of a pathologist's resource and considered putting a link to the front page of the website as the POTM was accessible only from the [APPS regional WA](#) page.

Daniel edited and sent out via email all issues with input from all three Regional Committee members. Issues were released monthly on the WA regional webpage with 12 issues per year. Each release was announced, initially only to WA members, with an email containing the PDF as an attachment, and then from April 2009, only the web link to the issue. The email announcements were often cryptic, sometimes with a little help from the POTM authors, to stimulate some discussion among recipients of what the new POTM issue might be about. Here is one such email Daniel sent with the [POTM November 2008](#); can you guess what it was?

“Turn on some Bach, light the candles, and your next moves... may be connected! You gently place a glass of Shiraz (from South Australia of course!) on your antique Jarrah desk and grab a sheet of handmade paper to write a letter to your friends in South America! What is the connection and why are the wine growers and managers of native and plantation forests so ‘itchy’ nervous?”

After more than a year of running the “Pathogen of the Month (POTM)” with submissions from WA APPS members, the WA team called for submissions nationally from regional councillors. Submissions from across the Nullarbor were received from the July 2008 issue onwards which was by Dr. Kerry Everett from Plant and Food Research (formerly Hort Research) in Auckland, New Zealand. From this time, Dr. Peter Williamson, the APPS Secretary and Web Manager, sent out email alerts of new POTM issues to all APPS members.

Over the period of September 2007 to February 2008, website statistics placed three of the POTMs in the top five downloads from the APPS website, with up to 128 downloads/month. Dr. Peter Williamson revamped the POTM webpage in March 2008 and he also included the pathogen, disease, hosts and contributor on the website so that it became a useful resource.

After June 2011, Daniel handed over the Editor role of POTM to Mr. John Duff. While the format and basic design still remain the same, some changes in colour and styles have occurred; green for “nematodes”, blue for “bacteria”, orange for “fungi” and purple for “viruses”. Unlike the initial years of POTM, there have been times when only a small number have been forthcoming from plant pathologists around the country. John has tried to organise it so that each region contributed a POTM each month, but this was sometimes a difficult ask. Recently there has been one main contributor from The University of Sydney, Dr. Francine Perrine-Walker and her colleagues. It would be great to see more contributions from wider afield to keep POTM growing. Additionally, under John's Editorship, Technology of the Month (TOTM) was introduced in September 2016 with the release of [Fungal Proteins as a Potential Toxin Screening Tool to Improve Barley Disease Resistance](#). This has been slow to take off even though there are a vast number of techniques used by plant pathologists that could be shared with like-minded researchers. TOTM would be an invaluable tool for those not wanting to re-invent the wheel or think of ways to implement a procedure that has already been developed by someone else.

All issues of POTM and TOTM can be downloaded from <https://www.appsnet.org/Publications/potm/index.html>

