

## **Shifting SA palynology into the digital age: Establishment of an Electronic Pollen Reference Database**

Pollen analysis, also referred to as palynology, is the principal method available to determine the responses of vegetation to environmental change and is widely used within the fields of Quaternary palaeoscience and palaeobotany. The process of identifying pollen grains under the microscope is not straightforward. Access to up-to-date reference material is an absolute necessity for palynologists to accurately and consistently identify present-day and fossil pollen. The field of palynology has a long history in South Africa, but the management and upkeep of pollen reference collections have not kept pace with digital advancements — at present, a comprehensive electronic database of South African pollen reference material does not exist! The lack of an integrated electronic pollen imagery database shared across all palynology laboratories severely hampers the advancement of the field in South Africa. This project aims to transfer five decades of palynology research into the digital age by developing an integrated data management and digital storage system for South African pollen identification material.