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# Harnessing social media to fight insect invasions: Social wasps as a case study

Dr Ruan Veldtman (SANBI/Stellenbosch University)

DATE: Monday, 2 June 2025 | 16h00–17h00 SAST

VENUES:
- Neelsie Cinema, Stellenbosch University
- Online

*--- A recording of the talk will be published on the NITheCS YouTube channel afterwards ---*


## ABSTRACT

Global change is now an unavoidable fact but how humanity will deal with the challenges that arise from it is an important point in history. The accidental transport of alien species is being accelerated through globalisation and climate change leading to an increasing number of invasions. Although small and often unnoticed, invasive insects can potentially result in significant economic and ecological problems, arguably more catastrophic than invasive plants. However, insect biosecurity is proving ineffective to keep out all pests, especially with a uniform decline in available resources and taxonomic expertise. In a globalised world and human interest being largely dependent on social media, it is my premise that the scourge of insect invasion can only be effectively combatted with the help of citizen scientists. But motivating 'conservation and biodiversity literate' people is not enough. Potentially every human being with a smart phone can contribute valuable data, which in turn can be used for better data capture and decision making. Using the invasive German wasp, *Vespula germanica* (or yellowjacket), I will show how social media can be used to bring about practical change in a 50-year-old insect invasion. Hopefully in the medium-term, South Africa will become the second region (after Australia, Western Australia specifically) to successfully eradicate this pest from its territories.


## BIOGRAPHY

Ruan Veldtman is a senior scientist at the South African National Biodiversity Institute and extraordinary associate professor at the department of Conservation Ecology and Entomology at Stellenbosch University. He works in the field of applied biodiversity research specialising in ecological entomology. His research deals with those entomological aspects linked to services provided by ecosystems and the impact of biological invasions. Other interests include wild silk moth ecology, plant–insect interactions, biological control of plant invasions, pollination ecosystem services and invasive wasp management. He is also avid supporter of interdisciplinary exchanges around entomology such as agricultural economics and sustainable agricultural production.

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