

THE SOUTH AFRICAN

Shothole country: Dangerous tree-killing, avo-destroying beetle found in the Cape

The “Polyphagous Shothole Borer” (PSHB) has been discovered in Somerset West, just outside of Cape Town: Protect our avocados at all costs!

by [Tom Head](#)

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A London Plane tree showing external symptoms of PSHB beetle attack in Somerset West, Cape Town. – Photo: Cape Town Invasive Species / Facebook

Several academic researchers have been able to confirm this week that the “Polyphagous Shothole Borer” (PSHB) beetle has made its presence felt in the Western Cape. The troublesome-yet-tiny insect has already infested

Liquid Amber and London Plane trees in Somerset West, around 30km outside of Cape Town.

It’s bad news for the plant life in the region, as these tenacious little terrors have already attacked 80 different species of trees across the country. Their arrival in the Cape will not be widely welcomed, as they are notorious for causing the death of the trees they live in. [They also have an unhealthy appetite for one of SA’s favourite foods...](#)

SOMERSET WEST HOSTS AN “INFESTATION”

In [Israel](#) and [California](#), the PSHB beetle caused substantial damage in avocado orchards, and although South African orchards are closely monitored by FABI team members, they have already been detected on a backyard avocado tree in Johannesburg late last year.

Elmar van Rooyen, an MSc student from Stellenbosch University currently working on the PSHB beetle for his thesis, [was able to collect samples left behind by the insect and its symbiotic fungus](#). Professor Francois Roets of Stellenbosch University and Professor Wilhelm de Beer of the University of Pretoria also verified these findings.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE POLYPHAGOUS SHOTHOLE BORER BEETLE:

- It has its origins in south-east Asia, was first discovered in Mzansi in 2018.
- Several government departments – plus municipalities – are already working together to eradicate the threat.
- Trees worst affected by the PSHB beetle include the London Plane, Boxelder, Japanese Maple, Chinese Maple, English Oak and Liquid Amber. They have also targeted peach, olive, grapevine, guava and fig trees.

HOW THE PSHB BEETLE KILLS ITS VICTIMS

Once they have burrowed their way into a tree, the beetle inoculates its fungus and then multiplies. These trees pose a serious risk to the environment around them as they become a source of infestation.

It’s enough to make the skin crawl! The trees, which will eventually die after infestation, need to be removed to protect other nearby plant life. It’s going to take a huge coordinated effort to tame this invasive species and however the government plan to tackle this, they must vow to keep our avos out of harm’s way.