

## Editorial

### Cool?

The young boy one morning saw a large moth on the wall of his home. That visual experience led him to reach out a hand towards it and poke it with his finger. The moth flipped off the wall and flew into a nearby tree. First startled, then excited by the experience, he ran to the tree to find the moth, but it had disappeared. It led him to search everywhere he went for any creepy-crawlies he could find and observe their activities. Later schooling included biology as a whole organism subject and the school library had many books on animals including invertebrates and students were encouraged to use the library to research their favourite topics. His university course included whole animal studies, biodiversity and behaviour. His youthful experience led to a lifetime dedicated to entomology. Youthful experiences like his occur repeatedly all over the world, but very rarely now do they lead to a lifetime committed to entomology. The reason is without doubt the child's developmental environment.

Some years after retiring from full time biology teaching in a secondary school in England, I had the occasion to revisit the town of the school in which I had taught. I went into an inn for a meal. While I was awaiting the meal's arrival, I noticed that the young attractive blonde barmaid was looking at me intensely, unexpected taking into account our age difference, but even more surprisingly, she let herself out from behind the bar and came over to me. She said "It is Dr. Langton, isn't it? You won't remember me, but when I was 13 you taught me biology. Do you still have those two beetles I collected in the ditch between the playing fields?" During the summer term I used to take year 3 out of the classroom and row them out along the ditch with pond nets and dishes to see what they could find. I recollect that occasion well, because one very excited girl had collected a pair of *Dytiscus dimidiatus* Bergsträsser, a species I had not previously come across, nor since. Yes, I still did have them in my collection; happy, she returned to her place behind the bar.

When out collecting adults by sweeping vegetation, I always carry spare pooters. Sometimes my activities attract young children curious to know what I am doing. I lend them each a pooter and let them forage in my net for specimens. I then identify for them the various different insects in the tube. Invariably the answer is "Cool!" as they race off to show their parents their captures; in their efforts at naming the beasts the names get a bit mangled, but a small flame has been lit, unfortunately to be extinguished sooner or later by their educational environment. In these days, in the UK certainly, and elsewhere I believe, whole organism studies cease after primary school. I doubt that the barmaid I mentioned earlier would have been able to recount the workings of her kidneys or liver, but that which she saw and experienced had remained fresh in her memory for years. It is no surprise to me that recruitment into the study of insects is as low as it is. Morphological studies are unfashionable, even considered retro, but the esoteric and highly regarded studies in insects haven't the same eye-catching effect, certainly for the young, and have to rely on ready-made entomologists to recognize their value and join the elite.

Long may CHIRONOMUS depict upon its cover a whole specimen of a midge adult, larva or pupa. I have it on the best authority: they're "cool", and I couldn't agree more.

Peter H. Langton

Coleraine, Co. Londonderry, Northern Ireland. E-mail: [langtonph@gmail.com](mailto:langtonph@gmail.com)

