

## Postgraduate Forum 2011

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Delegates at the PG Forum 2011

Earlier last year, I became one of the postgraduate representatives of the RES, and I was asked to organise the 2011 postgraduate forum. I held the forum in the Royal Hotel in Hull, and over the course 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> February, 38 delegates attended. The days were broken up into 4 sessions of talks, each containing one talk by an invited speaker, as well as talks by the students, and we had a poster session.

During the first session, Dr. Helen Roy spoke to us about her 'life as an entomologist'. I actually met Helen at the first PG Forum I attended, at Rothamstead in 2008, and she has since become a very close collaborator and friend. Helen is passionate about her work, and discussed her time spent as a child attending local natural history meetings on the Isle of Wight through to her career as a lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University, and now as an ecological entomologist at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. It is also nice to see that Helen has managed to achieve a balance between a successful career and happy family life!

The first student talks came from Matthew Carroll, who spoke about 'climate change and upland ecosystems: effects of soil moisture and moorland drainage on cranefly populations', Heather Campbell, who spoke about 'cohabitation on an ant-plant: colony distribution of four ant species within swollen thorns of *Acacia erioloba* in Namibian savannah', and Dan Jeffries, who spoke about 'factors affecting the dispersal of the invasive harlequin ladybird, *Harmonia axyridis*, in the UK'.

After coffee, we had a further three student talks. I opened the session by speaking about my PhD research on 'The global invasion of the harlequin ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*)', and found that it's actually a little difficult to chair the session that you are in, and try to keep yourself to time! I then handed over to the other RES PG rep., Toby Fountain, who spoke about 'Weaving resistance: silk and disease resistance in the weaver ant *Polyrhachis dives*'. Finally, Vicky Hartley spoke about 'Genetic differentiation in the twin spotted wainscot moth (*Archanara geminipuncta*) from four UK *Phragmites* reedbeds'.

Dr. Roger Key spoke to us about his 'inordinate fondness for beetles - UK insect biodiversity through the eyes of an insect photographer'. This was a whistle stop tour of the insect class, accompanied by amazing photographs illustrating interesting members of each group. We also learnt how to tell the difference between a grasshopper and a cricket! I found this talk

very interesting, and learnt that the folding mechanism of the solar panels on the space shuttle is actually based on the folding mechanism of earwig wings. Is there no end to what we can learn from insects?!

The first day's talks were rounded off by Dr. Luke Tilley, who told us about the benefits of student RES membership, such as access to the RES library and services of the librarian, a subscription to Antenna magazine, and monthly meetings on various entomological topics.

After a quick cake break, we had a poster session. Eleven posters were offered by the students, on diverse subjects such as 'community ecological assessment of reclaimed coal sites' by Kevin Rich, 'biology and control of currant-lettuce aphid (*Nasonovia ribisnigri*)' by Gemma Hough, and 'identification of UK blowfly species using a SNaPshot™ multiplex reaction based on the cytochrome oxidase I gene' by Helen Godfrey.

The conference dinner was held at Hitchcock's Vegetarian Restaurant in the old town area of Hull, which was attended by 30 delegates. I was a little worried how people would react to the lack of meat, but the delicious Caribbean-style food went down a treat, and was followed by 'all-you-can-eat' desserts. I highly recommend their yummy banoffee pie!

The second day started with Prof. Stuart Reynolds and Prof. Rod Blackshaw talking to us about scientific writing and publishing. Approaching writing a PhD thesis can seem like a mammoth task, and Stuart and Rod advised starting with the easy bits, such as materials and methods, results, acknowledgements and references. They also offered advice on tricky subjects such as how to deal with reviewers comments on submitted papers. They suggest not to get too emotionally involved, and to come back to the comments again after a day – good advice! I am very grateful to them both for stepping in at short notice to give this talk.

Three more student talks then followed. Claire Dooley spoke about 'patterns in population dynamics over space', Simon Segar spoke about 'convergent evolution of community structure across three continents' and Rachel Pateman spoke about 'niche expansion at the northern range boundary of the butterfly *Aricia agestis* in response to recent climate warming'.

After coffee, the final invited speaker, Dr. Richard Gill, spoke to us about his 'life as a PostDoc'. Rich was previously a PhD student at University of Hull, working on social evolution of ants, and then continued this work as a postdoc at University of Leicester, and is now about to start a second postdoc at Royal Holloway to study the decline of bees. As someone who has recently finished their PhD, Rich was able to tell us about the things he would have done in hindsight, and his recommendations for getting that elusive postdoctoral position.

We then had a final 5 student talks, with a lunchbreak in the middle. Rory O'Connor spoke about 'the ecology of the adonis blue and chalkhill blue butterflies: one plant, ants and patchy landscapes', Jennie Garbutt spoke about 'RNA interference in the tobacco hornworm, *Manduca sexta*', Richard Comont spoke about 'ladybirds in the UK: can biological traits explain distribution patterns?', Bobbie Johnson spoke about 'understanding insect diapause: a metabolomic analysis, and finally Stuart Hands spoke about 'plants, pests and parasitoids: effects of host plants on the third trophic level.

All in all, I think the forum went really well and I was glad to see everyone survived their night in Hull. We even managed to escape the snow this year, which was becoming a bit of a forum tradition! I just hope all the delegates enjoyed the conference as much as I did.



### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Kirsty Whiteford for her help during the organising process, as well as Toby Fountain and Dan Jeffries, for their support, and help on the day.

I would also like to thank all of the invited speakers for some brilliant talks, and of course to all the students who spoke and who brought posters. Without them, the conference would not have been such a triumph!

### PG Forum 2011 Prize winners

We were very grateful to the RES for offering four student prizes, which were won by:

Best talk: Rachel Pateman

Runner up talk: Cathleen Thomas

Best poster: Andres Arce

Runner up poster: Emma Wright

Thank you to Profs. Stuart Reynolds and Rod Blackshaw for judging the competition, and congratulations to all the prize winners.

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