



Dion Garrett supervising microscopes Credit: Francisca Sconce

‘Do you want to hold an insect?’ Creating a buzz at the Big Bang Science Fair 2017

Francisca Sconce

Meeting a six-legged friend up close was a new experience for many visitors to the Royal Entomological Society’s stand at the Big Bang Science Fair 2017, which took place from the 15th to 18th March at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham.

Our ‘cutest’ and ‘friendliest’ attraction was the leaf insect *Phyllium philippinicum* and we also had sun beetles *Pachnoda marginata peregrina*, Madagascar hissing cockroaches *Gromphadorhina portentosa* and black beauty stick insects *Peruphasma schultei* for the more enthusiastic to handle. A female atlas moth *Attacus atlas* on display was an excellent ‘hook’ to our stand (‘is that real?’) along with a commercial buff-tailed bumblebee *Bombus terrestris audax* hive kindly supplied by Koppert Biological Systems.

Communicating science alongside the fun was our priority and we tailored each conversation to a visitor’s particular knowledge level, which varied highly within the Big Bang’s

target age range of 7 – 19 years as well as family groups at the weekend. Our selection of live insect species allowed us to talk about hemi and holometabolous life cycles, mimicry, warning colouration and eusociality. We also showed how entomologists classify insect groups using the Society’s new display box of preserved specimens from different insect orders. Sweep nets and the use of a pooter (‘be sure which tube to suck!’) demonstrated simple techniques to survey insects.

Insects of economic importance including diamondback moth *Plutella xylostella*, wax moth *Galleria mellonella*, large pine weevil *Hylobius abietis* and peach-potato aphid *Myzus persicae* were on view under microscopes, which inevitably prompted a microscopy lesson (‘what do all these dials do?’) as well as a discussion on different methods to manage pest insect populations. Entomopathogenic fungi species including *Metarhizium sp.* initiated

conversations about biological control and Harlequin ladybirds *Harmonia axyridis* enabled us to speak about monitoring insects with citizen science.

75,000 visitors attended the Big Bang Science Fair 2017 which was ‘the largest celebration of STEM in Europe’. Our team of staff, students and alumni from the Royal Entomological Society and Harper Adams University were busy talking about insects and handing out Society and Harper Adams materials including over 1600 copies of the Garden Entomology booklet. We also highlighted careers in Entomology using the Society’s new ‘How can you work with insects?’ banner and publicised the return of EntoSci, the entomology conference for schools and colleges, which will take place at Harper Adams in April 2018.

Thank you to all involved with the stand, in particular to Liam Crowley and Scott Dwyer who were there for all four show days. We hope to return to Big Bang Science Fair in 2018, see you there!



Julian Beniers – insect orders box Credit: Francisca Sconce



Liam Crowley – insect handling Credit: Francisca Sconce



Luke Tilley – bumblebee hive Credit: Francisca Sconce



Simon Leather – insect handling Credit: Scott Dwyer



Drawer microscope table Credit: Francisca Sconce



Francisca Sconce, Liam Crowley – stand is ready Credit: Scott Dwyer



Banner display Credit: Francisca Sconce



Stand crowd Credit: Francisca Sconce



Stand kick off selfie Credit: Liam Crowley



Atlas moth Credit: Francisca Sconce



Insect tanks Credit: Francisca Sconce



Sun chafer beetle Credit: Francisca Sconce



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Madagascar hissing cockroach Credit: Liam Crowley