

OBITUARY

Dr M.T. Gillies. Medical Naturalist (1920-1999)

When composition of the first editorial board of this Bulletin was discussed, it was agreed that it should include entomologists of international repute with the widest of interests. One of the first to be approached was Mick Gillies, and his death leaves us all the poorer.

Born in 1920, the fourth child of the plastic surgeon Sir Harold Gillies FRS, a New Zealander, he produced a prize winning treatise on the egg laying behaviour and biology of the immature stages of Ephemeroptera whilst still at school. He started medical training in 1939 and by 1944 was a military Medical Officer in the Far East. After discharge from the army he went to the Soviet Union for a year as medical officer to the British Embassy in Moscow, where he learned to speak Russian and spent hours delving into streams for insect larvae.

His military service had taken him to Pakistan, India, Burma, Thailand and Hong Kong and wherever he went he collected mayflies, identifying them with a collection of lenses carried in his pocket and held in position on makeshift microscope frames made from whatever was at hand. When forced to abandon ship in the Malacca Straits he managed to save his collections, which was fortunate as they contained a number of hitherto undescribed species.

On his return from Russia he took his collections to the British Museum (Natural History), where he received helpful encouragement from the late Douglas Kimmins.

At this point he decided to give up the practice of medicine and take up a career in Medical Entomology. After training with Professor Patrick Buxton, FRS, he joined the newly formed East African High Commission Medical Research Institute in Amani, Tanganyika Territory (now Tanzania) early in 1951, where he carried out pioneering research work on Afrotropical malaria vectors. His knowledge of Russian kept him abreast of Soviet research, and he was influential in making their advanced age grading techniques available to workers in the western world.

On leaving East Africa, he spent two years in the British Museum (Natural History) during which Gillies & De Meillon's (1968) *Anophelinae of Africa South of the Sahara* was completed. Together with Gillies & Coetzee's (1987) *A supplement to the Anophelinae of Africa south of the Sahara*, this remains the standard work on Afrotropical *Anopheles*.

A further period of field research began in 1965, when he was given charge of the newly formed Mosquito Biology Unit in Sussex University, England. Until he retired in 1981, a programme of field research in the Gambia was augmented by parallel laboratory research in Sussex. Additional research was carried out by staff members and by a succession of his postgraduate students, all of whom made important contributions to the understanding of mosquito behaviour. When at Sussex University and also during his retirement, local faunal studies in Sussex included year on year recording of the presence and seasonal abundance of mosquito species.

The Afrotropical *Anopheles gambiae* sensu lato made its way down the Nile into Egypt during the 1930s and epidemic malaria persisted until the species was eradicated from the country in the 1940s. It was feared that ecological changes following construction of high dam at Aswan might be a prelude to re-invasion by the same vector bringing further devastating epidemics into Egypt. Commissioned to study possible risks, Mick lived on a boat on Lake Nasser gathering data permitting an informed assessment of the situation.

In the 1920s it was reported that biological "races" of *Anopheles maculipennis* with different vectorial potential could be distinguished by examination of maxillary dentition. During the following decades maxillae of this and many other species of *Anopheles* world-wide were examined for the possible detection of vector and non-vector "races". That many previously recognised species are in reality species complexes, some embracing vector and non-vector species, is now well known. However, when Mick looked at dentition in the early 1950s, he was able to manipulate maxillary development within a single egg batch by rearing under different larval conditions, effectively ending a forty years old false trail.

After retirement his interest in mayflies and mosquitoes was maintained with studies in Africa, Asia, South America and England.

He published widely and made important contributions to scientific literature on the Diptera, Ephemeroptera and Lepidoptera. He took a keen interest in ornithology and herpetology. Such wide interests gave him rare insights into the interplay of heredity and environment on morphological and biological peculiarities observed in whatever insect he was studying.

The Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene in London awarded him the Chalmers Medal in 1965 for research into tropical medicine, and the Christophers Medal in 1982 for his work in tropical medicine and hygiene.

However, it is not only as a scientist that he will be missed. Despite the long, arduous and antisocial hours invariably involved, he was a delight to work with, and his research units were always happy ones. The writer had the privilege of assisting him during his early days in East Africa and has never ceased to be thankful for his good fortune. His younger successor, Tony Wilkes, stayed until Mick's retirement and, with complementary skills and personalities, they made an effective and resourceful team. He will be sorely missed by his former students and staff, and also by colleagues and friends scattered around the world. Fortunately, his memoirs are soon to be published under the apt title: *Mayfly on the Stream of Time – an autobiography*.

He counted Edward Lear, the celebrated 19th century humorous author of *The Book of Nonsense*, amongst his forebears and his father is said to have had an outrageous sense of humour. Though unassuming and retiring, Mick's sense of humour was well developed and definitely impish. At one time his toilet roll holders were programmed to play music; an ultra-nationalistic guest found that use of the toilet roll caused his national anthem to be played; an equally bemused guest from the other end of the political spectrum later performed her ablutions to the Internationale.

As may be guessed, some of his best friends were highly individualistic. He and Jean Mouchet made perfect foils for one another. Mouchet once served him bacon, together with large glasses of red wine, for morning breakfast at 4.30am (their programme demanded early starts). When Gillies demurred, he was informed that his poor host had gone to considerable trouble to comply with the outlandish habits of this English GENTLEMAN. The only civilised procedure was to wash it down with good French red wine (because the meat was red, at least before it was cooked). That effectively ended protestations. Gillies prepared the following morning's breakfast, kippers (smoked herring), which do not count as red meat, but which Mouchet pronounced uneatable. Gillies pointed out that he had been forced to drink red wine for breakfast the previous morning, despite his preference for good English ale. Now, because he had gone to endless pains to prepare this delectable breakfast, it was Mouchet's bounden duty to eat it. Mouchet conceded that the logic was impeccable; for that reason, but only that reason, the kipper would be enjoyed forthwith.

All this notwithstanding, he was a genial and welcoming host, and lucky guests were served wine produced by himself from his own grapes, harvested from vines planted by himself. His ashes were scattered in his favorite spot, his garden, exactly where they should be.

Clem Ramsdale