

Curation Blitz at Wallis Museum, University of Manitoba

On Monday 15 October 2009 during the joint annual meetings of the Entomological Societies of Manitoba and Canada, 18 curious entomologists made their way from the luxurious Fort Garry Hotel to the most important collection of insects in Manitoba, The J.B. Wallis Museum of Entomology (at the University of Manitoba) welcomed visitors to browse the holdings, to identify specimens in their area of expertise and to learn from experienced museum workers. Faculty members Rob Roughley (curator of the Wallis), Terry Galloway, and former graduate student Heather Flynn made the visitors feel welcome and facilitated access to the collections.

Through the evening, people from Ottawa seemed to focus on the back ends (a.k.a. boy-bits) of flies (Syrphidae, Conopidae and Empidoidea) while those from the north and east (Yukon and Newfoundland) seemed to be entranced by small vials of alcohol and presumably the aquatic insects in them as well. The more experienced museum workers spent most of their time ‘networking’ while neophyte grad students were busily filling in spreadsheets based on label data from lady beetle specimens.



Michelle Locke (Carleton University), Sydney Cannings (Canadian Wildlife Service, Whitehorse) and Heather Flynn (Wallis Museum), discussing and examining Syrphidae and Odonata at Wallis Museum, University of Manitoba.
(Photograph by Jeffrey Skevington, CNC.)



Joel Gibson (Carleton University) and Meghan Marriott (University of Prince Edward Island) studying Conopidae and Coccinellidae respectively at the J.B. Wallis Museum, University of Manitoba, with Dave McCorquodale (Cape Breton University) looking on.
(Photograph by Jeffrey Skevington, CNC)

It was a mix of people from experienced systematists to agricultural entomologists looking to learn about a new group they have been asked to work on. We left with a better understanding of the historical value of this collection which has specimens dating back to the late 1800s. A few more specimens were identified and spreadsheets documenting those identifications are filtering back to the curators.

The most startling memory of the evening came late. Terry Galloway, well known for his interest in arthropods that live in and on vertebrates, put a dramatic photo on his computer screen. It attracted the interest of Laurence Packer, the bee man. Where do their interests overlap? The photo was a close up of the nostrils of an eagle from Brazil. The insects in the nares were not lice, but meliponine bees foraging, presumably, for eagle snot. There are always surprises.

We hope many of you will be able to participate next year in Vancouver. It is a great opportunity to learn from experienced systematists, contribute your expertise to other collections and network with enthusiastic entomologists. As I overheard from a participating graduate student, “...entomologists are so normal and friendly”.

Dave McCorquodale