

## History and development of the Malloch Society

by Kenn "Hoverfly" Watt

In June 1988 the Malloch Society was formed. The founding members had attended the Scottish Entomologist Gathering at Tarradale House Field Centre on the Black Isle, near Inverness, 17–20 June 1988. At the end of that meeting Iain MacGowan suggested to the dipterists in the group they were welcome to travel onwards to stay at SNH's field centre at Anancaun, beside Loch Marie & Beinn Eighe NNR, near Kinlochewe.

The group contained Kenn Watt, Graham Rotheray, Iain MacGowan, David Robertson, David Horsfield, Steve Hewitt, & Geoff Hancock. At the Kinlochewe Hotel over an evening meal and drink we discussed the fact that the lepidopterists and water beetle enthusiasts had their own specialist groups and perhaps a few Scottish-based dipterists functioning as a group ought to have a name. One proposal was the Grimshaw Society, Percy Grimshaw having been a well-known entomologist in a Scottish context. Although he had Yorkshire roots his career was in National Museum in Edinburgh as the entomological curator with a particular interest in Diptera. An alternative candidate was the Scotsman John Russell Malloch, a self-educated dipterist from Bonhill, near Glasgow. He developed his expertise on a world stage when based at The Smithsonian, Washington, DC, and it was agreed that the society should be named after him.

Graham offered to organise a winter meeting in Edinburgh when we could discuss plans for the following year. This took place in the museum followed by an evening meal in the University Staff club. It became an annual event that later included a formal AGM when a bank account was opened for which a society constitution was necessary. It was agreed that the society should be mainly restricted to entomologists working in Scotland with an interest in the Scottish Diptera fauna and that we would be a small research group rather than a membership organisation. The main interest was in field work with 2 or 3 weekends per year oriented towards finding rare or little known flies and discovering their ecology.

The annual meetings moved to Perth, being geographically more central and the museum was able to provide a venue for talks, reports and the AGM. The Salutation Hotel was used for accommodation and our annual dinner after which we indulged in some light hearted fun by nominating one of the group for the DOTY Award (Dipterist Of The Year) who, the following year, had to give the toast to Malloch and was asked to embroider (but did not always deliver) some image on our society's flag (a giant sized sweep net) with a Diptera motif. Malloch's birthdate, 16 November 1875, usually coincided with the event.

In the beginning saproxylic flies were targeted as Scotland had three RDB hoverfly species, *Blera fallax*, *Hammerschmidtia ferruginea* and *Callicera rufa* which were not [then] known from the rest of the United Kingdom, and their breeding ecology unknown. It took about 10 years to achieve this goal for the three species. The research method, concentrating on finding and rearing larvae, has meant on several occasions our members have used ladders to climb trees in search of species in rot holes rather than collect adults by net.

On several occasions other dipterists were invited including Alan Stubbs, Francis Gilbert and Roy Crossley. Occasionally, a well-known international dipterist was in the country and was able to attend our gathering such as Chris Thompson from the Smithsonian Institution and Dick Vockeroth from the National Collections Museum in Canada. The latter joined us in the field in his best evening shoes, not having any other footwear, while maintaining a non-stop

barrage of Diptera facts and his life story in insect collecting. Roy Crossley from Yorkshire gave an entertaining after dinner speech on his life as a dipterist and fly-themed anecdotes.

At our initial meetings the question arose of how we might finance the field trips. Individual members would contribute freely their time and expertise and it was suggested that research grants could be sought from Scottish Natural Heritage for proposals with clearly defined aims. Commissioned surveys from the RSPB and Forestry Commission built up a research fund that paid out travel expenses to members and covered accommodation and meal costs.

Kenn suggested that a small annual subscription should be levied to fully constitute our society. It was agreed that this could be £5.00 that has remained unchanged; surely the only society whose membership subscription has not increased since its establishment. Over the years our society has researched montane flies, Diptera from coastal sites of Fife; the autecology of the saproxylic limoniid, *Lipsothrix* spp. from woodland streams and the fauna of exposed riverine sediment habitats. The saproxylic work that began in Caledonian forest and lowland deciduous woodlands in Scotland resulted in invitations to join with fellow European dipterists in their countries including Sweden, Finland, Russia, France, Greece and Poland. A particularly fruitful and mutually beneficial relationship was built up with colleagues in the University of Alicante, which embraced not only Spain but Neotropical research in Mexico and Central America.

Each member's individual interests means that a range of families are covered. New species have been added to country lists and several new to science. With hoverflies featuring as a consistent thread in the society's work, Scotland was the host country for the Sixth International Hoverfly Conference in 2011, administered by Geoff Hancock, University of Glasgow. From all this dedicated field work and research we were honoured with the Marsh Prize, administered by the Royal Entomological Society, in 2014 for contributions to the study of Diptera.

As a final comment, let us not forget three original members who have passed on. Ian Christie, a sheep farmer who paid the ultimate price for his work and field studies, dying from Lyme Disease. Borelliosis was often undiagnosed before its symptoms and impact were more widely understood. Philip Entwistle with his many entertaining sagas and studies on the insect galls associated with Juniper and David Robertson, a keen syrphidologist and treasurer of the Malloch Society.

I hope this memory walk through the history of the Malloch Society will help explain how, although small in numbers, it became highly productive and knitted together long-standing friendships.