

The fauna and flora of the Insect Limestone (late Eocene), Isle of Wight, UK: Preface

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The Insect Limestone of the Isle of Wight, UK is remarkable for the exquisite preservation of insects and spiders. Over the past decade, a multi-national INTAS-funded project has enabled the thorough study of these fossils, and the results will be presented in two volumes. This is the first volume, comprising papers on the history and geology of the Insect Limestone and the fossil plants, molluscs, spiders, dragonflies, damselflies, barklice, thrips, caddis-flies, wasps, bees and ants that have been preserved within it.

This project commenced in 2004, thanks to the award of a grant of €149,998 from INTAS (The International Association for the Promotion of Cooperation with Scientists from the new Independent States of the former Soviet Union), which unfortunately no longer exists. The project was entitled *The terrestrial fauna and flora of the Insect Bed, Isle of Wight: interpreting the climate near the Eocene/Oligocene boundary*. AJR was the co-ordinator of this project.

When the project commenced, 33 scientists were involved, mostly Russians, with additional members from Poland, France, Germany, Spain and the UK. Since then, additional co-authors with specialist knowledge have been invited to help study the specimens. The funding enabled the 33 scientists to visit the UK for one or two weeks to study the Insect Limestone collections in the Natural History Museum, London (NHM), the Booth Museum of Natural History (Brighton) and the Maidstone Museum & Bentsliff Art Gallery. However, given the high volume of specimens of some insect groups in the NHM collection (particularly Coleoptera, Diptera and Hymenoptera), some of the scientists spent the entire time at the NHM. The project enabled the insects in the NHM collection to be identified, curated and re-organised. It also provided the opportunity to re-unite the parts and counterparts of specimens that had been separated and registered under different numbers.

A week-long field-trip to the Isle of Wight was organised for May 2005 and 28 of the project members were able to attend, with assistance from staff at the NHM. During the course of the week, the party visited Thorness Bay, Burnt Wood, Gurnard Bay, Node's Point and Bembridge Foreland, as well as studying specimens in the Museum of Isle of Wight Geology. During the trip, about 150 insect specimens were recovered, which were deposited at the Natural History Museum.

Sadly, two project members died during the course of the project – Professor Mikhail ('Misha') Kozlov of the Zoological Institute (St Petersburg) (Medvedev *et al.* 2007) and Dr Vadim Grachev of the Paleontological Institute (Moscow) (<http://palaeoentomolog.ru/Personnel/grachev.html>). Misha was studying the proctotrupomorph wasps in the Insect Limestone and found a wasp that was only 0.3 mm long! Vadim was studying the weevils, one of the most diverse and abundant beetle groups in the Insect Limestone. This volume is dedicated to them.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Emma Ross for taking the photograph of the field-trip participants (see Frontispiece opposite); to INTAS for funding this project (No. 03-51-4367); and to various staff of the Natural History Museum for assistance.

Reference

Medvedev, G. S., Tobias, V. I., Emeljanov, A. F., Rasnitsyn, A. P., Richter, V. A., Kononova, S. V. & Belokobylskii, S. A. 2007. To the memory of M. A. Kozlov (1936–2006). *Entomological Review* **87**(5), 621–30.