

New Convenor of the Nematology Group: Dr Jonathan Pickup



I graduated in Zoology from Oxford University in 1979 and went on to gain my Ph.D from Liverpool University in 1985 - in those bad old days when everyone tried to cram more into their thesis than any of their predecessors. The subject of my thesis was the feeding ecology of damselfly larvae and largely involved identifying prey items from the harder body parts that survived digestion and

were finally egested from the body. By the time my thesis was examined, I had been working for the British Antarctic Survey for nearly a year and was due to leave the UK for what turned out to be a 28 month stay on Signy Island in the South Orkney Islands investigating the survival strategies of nematodes in a cold and dry environment.

On returning to the UK, I saw an advertisement in *New Scientist* for a Nematologist/Entomologist required by the Agricultural Scientific Services of the Scottish Office, located at East Craigs in Edinburgh. Recognising that a Nematologist/Entomologist was what I had become, I realised that this was my one chance to get a 'proper' job and, despite the absence of any previous training in agriculture, this has become my work for nearly all of 20 years. My job involves managing service delivery for diagnostic laboratories providing information on the presence of potato cyst nematodes in soil samples prior to seed potato production, the incidence of aphids in suction trap catches and the amount of potato viruses in seed potato crops. We also carry out surveillance work

regarding pests of plant health significance and provide diagnoses of bee diseases. As well as managing three labs: Nematology, Entomology and Virology, I provide advice to the Scottish Government's policy makers. In recent years a lot of my time has been taken up with the new European Union Control Directive on Potato Cyst Nematodes. I was involved in the expert working groups responsible for recommending revisions to the previous Directive - adopted in 1969 - and remained involved in the process right through to the submission of the final text to the Council of the EU.

During my time in Edinburgh, Agricultural Scientific Services became the Scottish Agricultural Science Agency (SASA) in 1992. SASA relocated from East Craigs to its farm on Roddinglaw Road at the start of 2006, so we are now a little further away from the city as you approach from the west. After 16 years as a government agency, SASA returned to being part of core government on 1 April 2008 and, whilst we are still known as SASA, the abbreviation now stands for Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture, a division of the Scottish Government.

Prior to taking over as Convenor of the Nematology Group, I had been a member of the Group for more years than I care to remember. The Group provides a unique focus for nematologists that are predominantly UK based. An annual meeting 'Advances in Nematology' is held in mid-December at the Linnean Society of London in Piccadilly, providing an opportunity for discussing recent developments within nematology in a convivial atmosphere - most of us have lunch in a nearby pub. This is always a very lively and relevant meeting with presentations ranging from those from invited speakers with extensive experience to research students often making their first presentation at a formal meeting (a fact recognized and encouraged by a student presentation competition). We are also planning further nematology meetings including a 2nd International Symposium on Nematodes as Environmental Bioindicators (June 2010) and a 3rd Symposium on Potato Cyst Nematodes (September 2010), as well as providing a nematology input into other AAB conferences. If you have any suggestions regarding conferences, workshops or any other activities that you think the Group should be involved in, then please let me know.

Jon Pickup

Post-graduate Competition

We are pleased to congratulate the winners of the post-graduate competition for the best poster, held at the University of Nottingham, Sutton Bonington on 10 September.

The winners were Lucy Alford, University of Birmingham for her poster entitled 'Scandinavia to Spain; do aphids feel the temperature strain?' and Diego Monoz, University of Nottingham for 'In vitro techniques for micropropagation and genetic improvement of *Gomortega keule*'. Both winners received a cheque for £75.

