

In memory / En souvenir de

Terry Wheeler 8 June 1960 – 25 July 2017

The entomological community lost one of its active members on 25 July 2017 with the premature death of Terry A. Wheeler at the age of 57 due to Glioblastoma multiforme, a malignant form of brain cancer. The encouragement he received from many of you kept him smiling even through the most difficult moments. Terry fought a very brave fight and would not give up hope.

Most of us remember the first encounter we had with Terry. Be it Doug Currie's first impression when he didn't quite know what to make of Terry, who was decked out in a formal-looking jacket and bowtie that would make Ed Becker¹ blush until he saw him speak about his PhD research in 1990 at the 2nd International Congress of Dipterology in Bratislava, Slovakia, and knew Terry would be a force to be reckoned with, or Julia Mlynarek's amazement when Terry first came into the Evolution and Systematics class dressed way too smartly for a biology professor but talked about the history of evolution with such enthusiasm that it automatically influenced her career choice.

Terry was born in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1960 and moved often throughout the Maritimes and Ontario in his formative years; he counted having lived in at least 20 houses. As a kid, he often spent time fishing capelin and helping on his grandfather's farm, playing music with his band and just hanging out. Entomology was not on his radar until he was in university. He completed a BSc in Biology at Memorial University in 1985, later obtaining an MSc in 1987 in parasitology and PhD in Diptera systematics (on the Sphaeroceridae) in 1991 from the University of Guelph. After encouragement from Kurt Sabrosky², Terry completed a postdoc in Chloropidae systematics at Carleton University and the Canadian National Collection. In 1995, fate proved kind to Terry when he landed a faculty position at Macdonald Campus of McGill University in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue. This was a dream position for him as he could devote time to his research on flies and teach some of his favorite topics through diverse university courses including Systematics and Evolution, Zoogeography, Systematic Entomology, Field Entomology, Desert Ecology, Insect Diversity and Phylogeny, and Evolving Earth. Terry's broad knowledge and interests would regularly contribute to colorful debates and discussions in class. He had a profound respect for students and always encouraged them to question authority. In one of his blog posts he wrote: "Some of the best ideas and innovations in science today come from students and postdocs who don't simply accept what's written in the papers or pronounced by professors. That's how science keeps moving forward. Always ask WHY?". Terry's passion for entomology, ecology and natural history was contagious and his multiple stories, anecdotes and sense of humour in class resulted in Terry becoming rapidly one of the best teachers at McGill, a fact



J. Mlynarek

Terry Wheeler on the shores of Lake Kluane taking notes for future projects, July 2016.

¹Edward C Becker was a coleopterist and longtime member of the Canadian entomological community who was famous for his large collection of bowties.

²Curtis W. Sabrosky was an American dipterist that had an inordinate fondness for Chloropidae, a fondness he passed on to Terry.

supported by the multiple teaching awards he received including the Macdonald Campus Award for Teaching Excellence and the Principal's Prize for Excellence in Teaching.

After his arrival at McGill, the "Wheeler lab" or "the Lyman lab" soon became very active with motivated graduate students taking on projects in ecology, taxonomy and phylogeny. Terry was extremely helpful and supportive to his students, always stressing the importance of building a network with the scientific community, publishing in scientific journals and presenting at scientific conferences. Terry's rigor in science was a great legacy to his multiple students (the Lymanite alumni), and it is not a surprise that so many of them now occupy important scientific and academic positions in the country.

In addition to duties associated with his academic position, Terry was Director of the Lyman Entomological Museum, one of the largest insect collections in Canada. This was a perfect combination of his love for taxonomy, museology and natural history. As Director, Terry developed an impressive collection of Diptera over his 22 year tenure; he increased the size of the collection, adding hundreds of thousands of identified specimens (mainly flies!) that he or his students collected through diverse field trips ranging from the Arctic to tropical regions. His strong networking, his presence in multiple international conferences, his scientific publications, social media communications and his Lyman Museum blog posts, all contributed to the great reputation that the museum has today. Terry will stay forever an important part of the Lyman Entomological Museum history.

Outside the lab, he would often reconnect with other entomologists and dipterists at scientific meetings and was an active member on the Scientific Committee of the Biological Survey of Canada (Terrestrial Arthropods), which he joined in 1997 and where he remained active for 20 years. He was also an active member in the Entomological Society of Canada since his grad school days. In 1999, Terry won the C. Gordon Hewitt Award. He made sure the ESC-SEQ JAM 2006 in Montreal was a success. He rarely missed an ESC meeting and usually made sure his students also attended. He was always present at the AGMs making sure students and diversity were at the forefront of the issues discussed because he truly believed that students and a diverse membership is the future of the Society. Terry was the Society's President in 2015-2016. He became ill at the end of the tenure and was very disappointed he couldn't attend the ICE 2016 to pass the gavel to Neil Holliday.

He also continued to be active in research until he became ill, jotting down ideas for new projects in his notebook wherever he went. His last big project was with fellow Scientific Committee members of the BSC (Doug Currie, Chris Buddle and Donna Giberson) on a successful NSERC Strategic Project Grant titled "Ecological Structure of Northern Arthropods: Adaptations to a Changing Environment". With multiyear funding in place from NSERC and other partners, the Northern Biodiversity Program was launched in 2010 to systematically quantify arthropod diversity at 12 sites across northern Canada. There was one site in particular (Banks Island) that became memorable for all involved and best demonstrates the kind of human being and renaissance man Terry really was. In July, 2011, a Twin Otter transported our 6-person field crew from Inuvik to Aulavik National Park, where we would remain isolated from the outside world for more than 2 weeks. Everything we needed to sustain us during that period was jammed onto the plane, including tents, sleeping bags, food and the like. In addition to the usual array of life-sustaining goods, Terry brought supplemental items that made this particular trip extra special: biscuits, crackers, fine cheeses, and a remarkably diverse selection of Scotch and Irish whiskies — all freely shared with other members of the field crew. He brought a guitar to plunk out tunes, and even composed a hilarious song about our wilderness toilet, attached tenuously to the tundra by guy lines strapped to boulders. One day, Terry brought out a set of watercolor paints to capture the pastel tones of the arctic landscape. On another, he composed

Haiku poems (of which he was especially fond) to memorialize their experiences. Perhaps the most enduring memory from that trip was of Terry traipsing about the tundra in a kilt — even though that strategy risked injury from mosquitoes. The kilt somehow reminded Doug of that fellow he met 20+ years ago, decked out in a formal jacket and floppy bowtie. The Biological Survey of Canada’s 2016 BioBlitz in Carmacks was Terry’s last trip to the Yukon. He was thrilled to be up north again and was looking forward to a well-earned sabbatical.

Although Terry’s reputation of not always replying to his emails or returning his phone calls will remain legendary, most learned that the best way to get a hold of him was simply to drop by his office for a chat (or through a tweet for long distance correspondents!). He would always make time for an in-person conversation no matter how busy he was.

It seems inconceivable that such a vigorous and diversely-talented colleague would be taken from us so quickly and just over a year after his final trip north. From the numerous messages and tributes that were posted after he left us, it is unquestionable that Terry had a great impact on people. Terry’s wit and wisdom will be sorely missed, but it’s comforting to know his legacy lives on through his students, colleagues, collaborators, collections, scientific publications, blog posts, and Tweets. Fly free Terry!

Julia Mlynarek (Harrow), Stephanie Boucher (Montreal), and Doug Currie (Toronto)

An ode to Terry Wheeler (written as a series of non-strict Haikus)

By Julia Mlynarek

With hope and big smile
Sharing knowledge and love of nature
A person can inspire

Tiny flies, rocks and more
On mountains, in deserts, and tundra
He found beauty in all

Teaching us to think
Talking of science and art
Making connections

Insects, mostly flies
Species and communities
Forging an alliance

Devoted to students
Wrote three lines about six legs
No need to say more