

## Michael (Mike) Spironello (1977-2006)



The Canadian entomological community lost a rising star with the untimely passing of Mike Spironello. In the final year of his PhD program at the University of Toronto and Royal Ontario Museum, Mike had made tremendous progress in his study of the speciation process in black flies. What set him apart from most other researchers was his versatility — his ability to use a combination of morphological, cytological, and molecular approaches in his analyses of black fly evolution. The death of someone with such promise and vigor, and at such an early stage in his career, is a major loss to our community.

Mike was deeply engaged in both the Entomological Society of Ontario and the North American Black Fly Association (NABFA). He was Secretary of the latter organization and designer of their website, serving as web master until the time of his death. He was also a charter member of the fledgling Canadian Society for Ecology & Evolution, giving a presentation of his research at the April 2006 organizational meeting in Montreal. Mike was highly productive throughout

his graduate career, contributing numerous publications and conference presentations (cf. bibliography). He also contributed towards the success of the University of Toronto's undergraduate program, having served as a Teaching Assistant to several cohorts of students in Introductory Biology and Entomology.

In addition to excelling in academic pursuits, Mike was equally gifted as a musician and athlete. When he wasn't in the lab he enjoyed making music, racing his bike, or teaching one of his beloved 'spinning' classes. Spinning involves the use of stationary bicycles in a classroom setting, and Mike was famous locally for his musical theme nights. So popular were his classes — in which he sometimes dressed up as a cowboy, a disco king, or even Madonna — that he was the subject of several newspaper and magazine articles. Spinning was created in the 1980s by an ultra-endurance athlete, and participants are intended to set goals based on their heart rate. Ironically, despite the fact that Mike was in outstanding physical condition, he succumbed to heart failure while teaching one of his classes. The cause of death was myocarditis, an uncommon infection that weakens the heart and is responsible for 20% of all cases of sudden death in young adults. Mike was unaware that he had contracted the disease.

Despite his many accomplishments as scholar, musician and athlete, Mike will be remembered most for his outstanding human qualities. He had a charisma about him that attracted friends and admirers from his many walks of life; yet through it all he remained humble to a fault. The fact that his funeral attracted more than 600 people is testimony to the number of lives that Mike touched during his 28 years.

On his death, Mike's family requested that donations be made to two institutions that were near and dear to his heart: the Entomological Society of Canada and the Wildlife Research Station in Algonquin Park, Ontario. This was apropos given Mike's enthusiasm for insects, and his particular fascination with black flies. He was among the few people I know who willingly shared northern Ontario with the vernal hordes. In fact, Mike returned from a northern fishing trip just a day before his death. He marveled in his final e-mail message to me that he "was swarmed by vennies [*Simulium venustum*] in Cochrane!" His message concluded "Very north and very early for those little buggers". Others might have used less temperate language to describe these noxious pests.

To honor his memory the North American Black Fly Association has established the Mike Spironello Award, which is presented each year to the student who gives the best talk at the annual meeting. And as a further tribute to Mike's contributions to simuliidology, Doug Craig (University of Alberta), Fiona Hunter (Brock University), and I have joined together to formally name a new species of black fly after him (Craig et al., 2006). I think he would have appreciated that.

- By Douglas C. Currie

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## **MICHAEL SPIRONELLO PUBLICATIONS**

### **Refereed Publications**

Bidochka, M.J., C.N. Small, and M. Spironello. 2005. Recombination within sympatric cryptic species of the insect pathogenetic fungus *Metarhizium anisopliae*. *Journal of Environmental Microbiology. Environmental Microbiology* 7: 1361-1368.

Craig, D.A., D.C. Currie, F.F. Hunter and M. Spironello. 2006. A taxonomic revision of the southwestern Pacific subgenus *Hebridosimulium* (Diptera: Simuliidae: *Simulium*). *Zootaxa* 1380: 1-90.

Spironello, M. and F.F. Hunter. 2005. Polytene chromosomes of an archipelagic subgenus, *Inseliellum* (Diptera: Simuliidae). *Genetica* 123: 217-226.

Spironello, M. and F.F. Hunter. 2004. An intra- and interisland study of the polytene chromosomes of *Simulium exasperans* (Diptera: Simuliidae). *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 82: 808-816.

Spironello, M. and D.R. Brooks. 2003. Dispersal and Diversification: macroevolutionary implications of the MacArthur-Wilson model, illustrated by *Simulium* (*Inseliellum* *Rubstov*) (Diptera: Simuliidae). *Journal of Biogeography* 30: 1563-1573.

Spironello, M., F.F. Hunter, and D.A. Craig. 2002. A cytological study of the Pacific black fly, *Simulium cataractarum* (Diptera: Simuliidae). *Canadian Journal of Zoology* 80: 1810-1816.

### **Published Abstracts**

Cywinska A., M. Spironello, and F.F. Hunter. 2006. DNA barcoding for constructive taxonomy and diversity evaluation of black fly populations from Manitoba. *Ontario Insects* (in press).

Cywinska A., M. Spironello, and F.F. Hunter. 2006. DNA barcoding for constructive taxonomy and diversity evaluation of black fly populations from Manitoba. Abstract volume 4th annual meeting of the North American Black Fly Association.

Spironello, M. and D.C. Currie. 2006. Grades, clades, and the *malyschevi* species group: a total evidence approach. Abstract volume 4th annual meeting of the North American Black Fly Association.

Spironello, M. and D.C. Currie. 2005. Good species behaving badly: apparent paraphyly in the *Simulium arcticum* complex (Diptera: Simuliidae). Abstract volume 3rd annual meeting of the North American Black Fly Association.

Spironello, M. and D.C. Currie. 2004. Good species behaving badly: apparent paraphyly in the *Simulium arcticum* complex (Diptera: Simuliidae). Abstract volume 141st meeting of the Entomological Society of Ontario.

Spironello, M. and D.C. Currie. 2004. Evolutionary transformations in the structure and function of black fly wings (Diptera: Simuliidae). *Ontario Insects* 9: 37.

### **Non-Refereed Contributions**

Spironello, M. 2006. Report on the Annual Meeting of the North American Black Fly Association. *Fly Times* 36: 2-3.

Spironello, M. 2005. Report on the Annual Meeting of the North American Black Fly Association. *Fly Times* 34: 4-6.