

Editorial

Intrepid Explorers

Several wide-eyed, late elementary-aged students huddle around a large white tray, intently exploring the contents within. Their conversation consists of exclamations of “I found another one!”, “What do you think this one is?”, “Oooh, watch it move!”, and “Can I use the magnifying glass now?!?” Several minutes later, the students reluctantly leave the tray behind, after receiving several prompts from their teacher that they must move on. As the group walks away, I hear one of the students proclaim, “That was the coolest thing ever!” Mission accomplished, I think to myself!

As part of one of the projects I am currently involved in, (shameless plug, check out *Bugs Below Zero* at: www.bugsbelowzero.com), this past year has brought more opportunity for me to engage with students, teachers, and families, sharing with them the world of aquatic insects. Whether exploring trays filled with insects hiding beneath leaves and organic debris, exploring the intricacies of a particular specimen under a microscope, or learning of unique adaptations, young learners typically leave with a look of excitement in their eyes. While most of these students probably will not go on to study insects, hopefully they will have a greater appreciation for them, and look for more opportunities to continue to explore the insect world on their own.

Many of us likely remember some of our first insect explorations. My introduction to aquatic insects was on what I recall to be a cold, blustery November afternoon when I was about twelve, tasked with collecting data for a school science fair project. Dressed in waders that were a few sizes too big, and dip-net in tow, I headed out with my Dad to a nearby stream – really, not much more than a ditch flanking a farm field. Despite cold hands and feet, it was exciting to search for and find the aquatic insects that accumulated in our net (many of which were probably chironomids!). That early exploration event led to several more years of science projects, and eventually graduate study.

Along with the title of “scientist,” we should also consider ourselves as “explorers.” Whether our time is spent exploring lakes or streams, exploring contents of samples, exploring morphological or molecular specimen attributes, exploring datasets, or exploring the literature, *exploring* is how we spend much of our time. Arguably, the continued desire to “explore” is what hooked so many of us.

This year’s issue of *CHIRONOMUS* again highlights some excellent “explorations” made by our colleagues. These include descriptions of new species (Andersen et al. 2024) and previously undescribed life stages (Caldwell and Jacobsen 2024), redescription of previously known species (Li and Tang 2024, Martin 2024, Tang and Cranston 2024), and critical examination of differences between species (Martin and Epler 2024, Skála 2024).

We hope the year ahead brings a chance for you to continue exploring, as well as to share the excitement of those explorations with others.

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