

SKAPHION

The Weekly Newsletter of the *Platygastroidea* Planetary Biodiversity Inventory

Ukoyika Grillerige Goggas*

by Simon van Noort, *Iziko Museums, Cape Town, South Africa*



Iziko stand at the Kirstenbosch Bio Expo. Dawn, Nokuthula, Aisha and Norman in the center surrounded by images of enthralled high school learners and staff.

For those suffering from arachnophobia the annual four day **Biodiversity Expo** held at *Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens* (Cape Town, South Africa) in May this year was a good opportunity to cure any innate or learned fears of those things that go crawling in the night. The Bio Expo is a major outreach initiative with on-hand experience of biodiversity being afforded to a vast array of learners from a diversity of backgrounds, and once again the Iziko exhibition on insects and spiders was a major draw card. Norman Larsen (Iziko's associate arachnologist) was on hand with his live spiders to get the goosebumps running up the backs of unsuspecting visitors. Shrieks of horror were elicited when large Baboon spiders (Theraphosidae) were brought out of their cages, but many a young learner's fear of creepy crawlies was soon cured. After digging deep for inner courage, a process that was often assisted by large doses of peer pressure, numerous learners had the profound life-changing experience of allowing a very large hairy spider to crawl up their arms! Visitors were also

challenged to find insects in all their guises of camouflage and mimicry and had opportunity to experience the magnificence and detail of brightly colored and bizarre insects under the microscope. Over the weekend the clientele metamorphosed into curious members of the public, with many of the adults being subtly pressurized to follow their children's brave example of going through the ritual of desensitization to creepy-crawlies. A perfect Mother's day present, since this day of celebration coincided with the final day of the expo. Many thanks to Dawn & Norman Larsen, Aisha Mayekiso and Nokuthula Mbanyana (Entomology Department, Iziko South Africa Museum) for the time and effort that they once again put into making the Iziko stand at the Biodiversity Expo a success.

Finally, congratulations to both *Aisha Mayekiso*, for her recent appointment to the position of Assistant Collections Manager in Entomology, and to *Dawn Larsen* who was promoted to Collections Manager on Margie Cochrane's retirement. Aisha's skills and dedication to the identification and curation of platygastriid wasps under the auspices of the **PlatyPBI** project will not be lost, as this curatorial component still forms part of her tasks in her new position. *Nosiphiwo Goci* is still flying the **PlatyPBI** flag, slogging away at processing samples from Simon's recent South African inventory survey program, and *Mmamotswa Mosweu* continues digitization of the platygastriid collection.



Mmamotswa, Aisha and Nosiphiwo (left to right) processing platygastriids in the lab.

Our databases have recently been converted to Specify6, allowing linkage of images to digitized records. To date 14,007 platygastriid accessions have been digitized. An accession comprises all specimens with the same collecting data and as such these accessions include approximately 35,000 point mounted specimens. Representatives from longer series are still housed in ethanol and are not included in this total.

*The title is an amalgamation of Xhosa and Afrikaans translating to "Scary creepy crawlies". *Photos by Simon van Noort* ♣

Answer to the *Odontacolus* puzzle

It looks like Alejandro has been trying to play with our minds. Here is his answer to the question he posed in the last issue of **Skaphion**:

"From the pictures you cannot find five good differences, just two (more if you were able to see the whole series of specimens). If you saw a lot of differences, maybe you should have a cold beer or soda as punishment!

Currently, after looking at the whole series, I recognize two species: the completely dark type is sp. 1 and the other two are sp. 2. *Odontacolus* sp. 1 shows a more ornamented occipital carina, and the ornamentation is more extensive (along the carina the whole carina and not just in the upper third.) Apart from the body color, there is a small difference in the density of body setation (somewhat visible in the pictures). For *Odontacolus* sp. 2 the only difference I found among specimens is in the color. The sculpture, body size, and setation as all the same to my eyes. The body color varies a little bit on the head and mesosoma in some specimens (they are more brown instead of the typical yellow.) Also, in the full yellow form the last three exposed metasomal terga are dark brown.



Odontacolus sp., head, anterior view

Even after all this time and considering everything I've seen so far, I still have doubts about the whole thing!"

Calendar of Events – Updated May 2011

2011

- ◆ **Evolution 2011.** Annual Meeting of the Society of Systematic Biologists. Norman, Oklahoma, 17–21 June 2011.
- ◆ **iEvoBio 2011.** 2011 Informatics for Phylogenetics, Evolution, and Biodiversity. Norman, Oklahoma, John Q. Hammonds Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center, 21-22 June, 2011.
- ◆ **Second Entomophagous Insects Conference,** Antibes, France, 20-23 June, 2011. Contact: Wajnberg@sophia.inra.fr.
- ◆ **2011 TDWG Annual Conference,** Astor Crowne Plaza Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana, 16-21 October, 2011.
- ◆ **GBIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facility) 18 Meeting,** Buenos Aires, Argentina, 18-Oct-2011 to 20-Oct-2011.
- ◆ **Entomological Society of America Annual Meeting,** Reno, Nevada, 13-16 November, 2011. Contact: ESA Annual Meeting, 10001 Derekwood Lane, Suite 100, Lanham, MD 20706, phone 301-731-4535, fax 301-731-4538.

*Please help keep our calendar
updated in 2011!*

Skaphion is the weekly newsletter of the **Platygastridae Planetary Biodiversity Inventory Project (PlatyPBI)**. The term *skaphion* [Gr. *skaphion*: a small bowl or basin; a bowl shaped like a boat; a hemispherical vase], refers to an anterior subdivision of the mesoscutum which is unique to the Scelionidae.

The **PlatyPBI** is funded by a grant from the **US National Science Foundation** (<http://www.nsf.gov/>) to Norman Johnson (*The Ohio State University, USA*) and Andrew Austin (*University of Adelaide, Australia*).

The 3 broad objectives of the project are:

- **species description,**
- **collecting** in areas where fauna of Platygastridae is poorly known,
- and **phylogenetic analysis** of a monophyletic group.



PlatyPBI Collaborators, Graduate Students, Associates & Staff (July 2010):

AUSTRALIA: Andrew Austin, John Jennings, Roger Burks, Sarah Mantel (*University of Adelaide*); Marc Downton (*The University of Wollongong*); **BRAZIL:** Alexandre Aguiar (*UFES*); Beatriz Coelho (*INPA*); **CANADA:** Lubomir Masner (*Canadian National Collection of Insects, Ottawa*); Chris Darling, Antonia Guidotti (*Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto*); **ENGLAND:** Andrew Polaszek (*Natural History Museum London*); **HUNGARY:** István Mikó (*@North Carolina State University*); **INDIA:** Rajmohana K. (*Zoological Survey of India, Calicut*); **ITALY:** Ferdinando Bin, Eric Conti, Roberto Romani, Giancarlo Salerno (*University of Perugia*); **NEW ZEALAND:** John Early (*Auckland Museum*); **SOUTH AFRICA:** Simon van Noort, Aisha Mayekiso, Beryl Goci (*Iziko Museums of Cape Town*); **USA:** Norman Johnson, Hans Klompen, Luciana Musetti, Alejandro Valerio, Elijah Talamas, Charuwat Taekul, Sara Hemly, Joe Cora; *Undergraduate student associates:* Brian Crenshaw, Laura Shaffer, Elizabeth Alvarez, Emily McDermott, Mike Cassidy (*The Ohio State University, Columbus*); Matt Buffington (*Systematic Entomology Laboratory, USDA, Washington, DC*); Matt Yoder (*North Carolina State University*); Hans Clebsch (*Cleveland Museum*).

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