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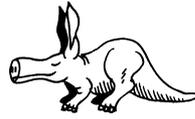
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News



David Nash

1997

Another year, another country. As I sit here, recovering from a particularly nasty attack of 'flu and looking forward to moving to Denmark in the New Year, it's time to wish everyone season's greetings once more and to look back over yet another year. I hope that 1997 has been good to you!

Christmas 1996 and Family News

Last Christmas was not the most festive I have ever spent. A week before Christmas my Grandmother on my father's side, who had recently turned 91, was admitted to hospital after suffering a fall at home. Although not badly injured, she went into a decline over Christmas, and died just after New Year. I returned to Switzerland for 10 days to sort a few things out there (such as teaching the first practical of the year), and then came back to England for a couple of days for the funeral in Chelmsford in mid-January.

In February I was back in the UK again, but this time for a much happier family occasion - my father's 65th birthday. So far being a pensioner has made very little difference to his life - he's officially been retired for more than 10 years already - if anything he's better off than before.

Switzerland in 1997

Looking back it seems that I didn't do very much in the spring of 1997, but this is probably because the blue tit and coal tit breeding season was the longest so far. The birds began collecting moss for their nests in early March, and, after a brief cold snap, their first eggs were laid in early April. This meant that a planned trip back to the UK for Easter had to be cancelled at the last minute.

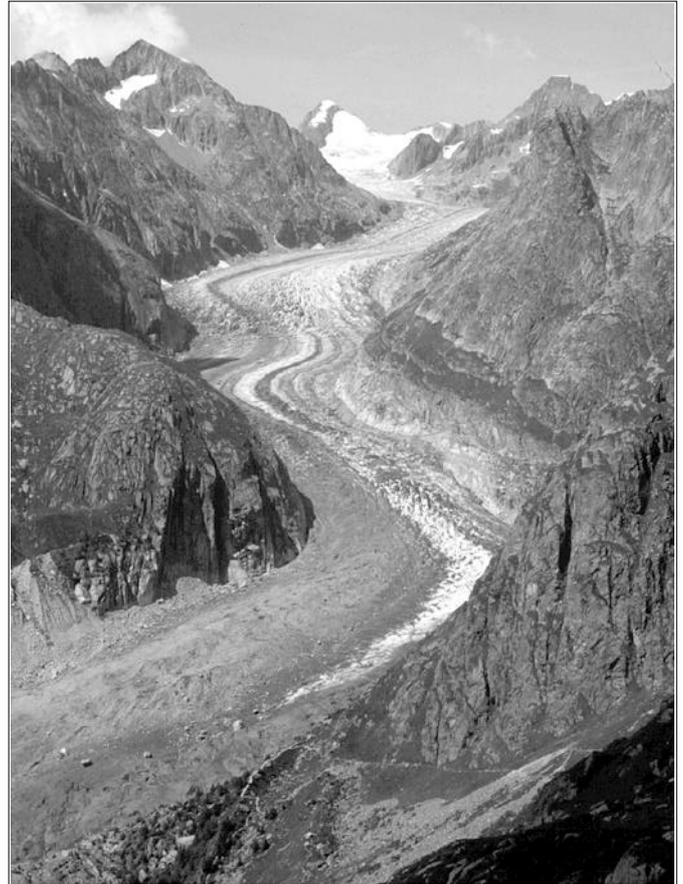
In March I became, briefly, the proud owner of 42 Japanese quails, which were intended for flea research. In the end this proved impractical, but it meant that I had an abundance of free quail's eggs. I soon got fed up with eating quail's egg omelette's, but I produced some excellent (if I say so myself...) rich cakes for colleagues with birthdays that spring.

The field season continued unabated until the end of June, and it was only in the first week of July that my last coal tit chick fledged. To round off the field season, I went down with Lyme's disease again in June, and spent a rather unpleasant fortnight on antibiotics.

It was not all work in Switzerland this year 'though, and I managed to fit in a few fun things too. It's a pity that I never managed to visit Italy while I was there 'though...

Fed up with the problems that I had been having with my bicycle since last year, I eventually invested in a new "city bike" (a mountain bike with mudguards and lights). I've still not really had a chance to put it through it's paces, and I guess its 24 gears will be a bit excessive for Denmark (where the tallest mountain is some 200m), but it has certainly made my daily journey to work more pleasant and reliable.

In early September I visited the Aletschwald together with Sarah Kraak and Willem Stenge (friends from Bern). This is a wonderful ancient pine forest overlooking the Aletschgletscher, Europe's largest glacier.



The Aletschgletscher - Europe's longest glacier

The end of September was officially the end of my contract in Bern, but I stayed on in Switzerland a bit longer. My last day there was the 1st November, most of which was spent at a very nice belated birthday party for Imelda Schmid in a wonderful location in the hills outside Bern.

I have made some good friends in Switzerland over the last three years who I will miss immensely, but overall I think it's time to move on. The next stop on life's great journey will be Denmark...

Denmark and Butterflies

At the height of the field season I heard from the EU that my grant application to go to Århus to work on *Maculinea* butterflies (extinct in Britain since 1979TM) had been successful, so I am looking forward to starting there on 1st January 1998.

This is the first time that I have had a grant funded for my own research project, so I am quite excited about the study. I will be looking at communication between *Maculinea* (large blue) butterfly larvae and pupae and the *Myrmica* ants (red ants) of which they are parasites.

The project is part of the "Training and Mobility of Researchers" programme. The "Training" part means that I will be learning some population genetics, and the "Mobility" part means that I'll hopefully be collecting butterflies and ants from all over Europe, as well as collaborating with labs in Keele (Staffordshire) and Würzburg (Germany.)



Maculinea arion in the Engadin, Switzerland, 1996

Friends and Foreign Trips

It's been another good year for travel and visiting friends, 'though no-one actually came to visit me in Switzerland this year. Hopefully Denmark will prove more attractive...

In March I was invited to a birthday party by Carmen and Stefan (friends from Silwood days) in Düsseldorf, and I took the opportunity to visit Waseem Baloch (a friend from college) too, as he'd recently moved to Essen.

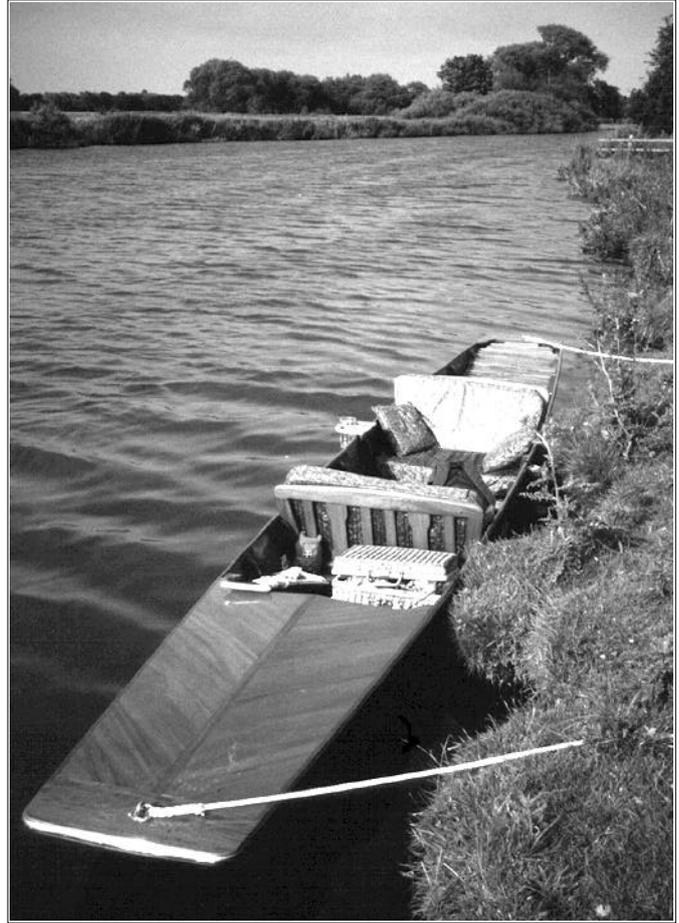
Travel was obviously out of the question during the field season, so I decided that after my last bird had fledged I deserved a 3-week visit to the UK. This was pretty packed. In the first week I managed to fit two scientific meetings into my schedule as well as celebrating my remaining grandmother's 92nd birthday and attending the Silwood Park summer ball. The ball was a bit disappointing in the end, so it will probably be the last time that I go, 'though it was good to see various Silwood friends. Between these activities I went on a couple of punting trips on the Cherwell and Thames in Oxford with Steve Mott and Julie and Jonathan Beale (friends from college days), on board a wonderful homemade punt, built by Jonathan.

I also managed to visit both my brothers in London. Paul is still living in Merton, doing library work and also printing his own books at the "Strawberry Press". Pete is still working as a technician for the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, but is now living on a canal boat on the river Lee in Limehouse, on which I spent a pleasant evening cruising through London.

The following week I flew to Scotland, where I managed to visit a host of friends who have moved North, and met Thaís Martins' and Matthew Evans' children - Isabel and Sam - for the first time. I then flew down to Bristol from where I went on to Rhossili Down to take part in a five-day project looking at the distribution and abundance of the rare bog ant (*Formica candida*) with Glenda Orledge and Guy Blanchard (friends from Bath). The next day I flew back to Switzerland, and collapsed in an exhausted heap!

In late August I went to the European Evolutionary Biology meeting in Arnhem (Netherlands), and took the opportunity to visit Robert Esnouf (a friend from school who I've known for some - gulp - 22 years) who is now, together with Iris, in Leuven (Belgium). On the way back I called in on Stefan Garzarolli in Düsseldorf again.

Early September saw another trip to the UK for a conference on insect/bird interactions in Reading, followed by a meeting in Würzburg as part of the European social insect network in late September. After a brief visit to Århus to organise a few things (eg. my Danish e-mail account is now active - I can now be reached at david.nash@biology.aau.dk), I finally took my leave of Switzerland, and returned to the UK.



Jonathan Beale's homemade punt on the Thames

My last overseas trip of the year was a five-week excursion to Harvard (Cambridge, USA), to visit Naomi Pierce, my former DPhil supervisor. This was great fun, as well as being productive and stimulating. I managed to catch up on the research activities that have been going on in Naomi's lab for the past five years (the last time that I paid a visit), and now feel that I am getting back into lycaenid butterfly research in time for my move to Denmark. In addition I spent quite a lot of time with Naomi, Andrew and their twin daughters, Kate and Megan, who are now 9 months old. I flew back to England on the 14th December, having gone down with a terrible bout of 'flu that afternoon, so it was one of the least pleasant flights I've had. Since then I've been at home in Islip, nursing myself back to health, which is where I'll stay over Christmas.

I look forward to receiving visitors in Århus, where I will have a proper guest room for the first time. I will be subletting from a couple of post-docs at the address at the top of this newsletter initially, and then taking another sub-let from March 'til September, so my work address may be the best way to contact me.

I hope that you will be having a good Christmas by the time this reaches you (slightly late, I'm afraid), and that you'll have a great 1998!

David