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NEWS 2017

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2017 has been a tough year for me, dominated by two main things. The first was that my mother died on the 9th of March. This was not unexpected, as the breast cancer from which she had been in remission for nearly 10 years, was found to have metastasized in mid 2016, but still leaves an unfillable void. Of course, it has left even more of a gap in my dad's life, and I've been impressed at how well he has coped, and how the family have pulled together. I am grateful that I managed to visit my mum and the rest of the family several times during her last few months and spend some (but inevitably, not enough) time with her.



Mum at Jane and my wedding in 2008

The other thing that has changed my life this year is that at about the same time I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. I'm treating this as a new adventure, which has caused some modest changes in lifestyle and an increased awareness of my own health. It is well under control, with a mixture of medication, diet and exercise, but it also means that life is a bit more difficult and staying on top of things has been a bit of a (albeit usually a successful) struggle.

Partly because of these, travelling this year has been a bit less extreme than usual, although I have taken many more short trips to the U.K. in the first few months of 2017, about most of which I won't go into in detail, but which culminated in my mum's funeral in late March. I was in Copenhagen for the rest of the spring and early summer until the scattering of her ashes, which took place in mid-June at Whitecross green nature reserve, about 15km from my parent's house. In mid-July I spent a week doing

fieldwork on Jutland with my MSc student Majken Grundso Hansen, visiting some field sites that I hadn't been to for at least 5 years, and at the end of the month I was back in the U.K., this time for a short workshop on butterfly genomics in Cornwall. I have rarely been that far west in the U.K., and it afforded me an opportunity to visit and stay with my old friend and PhD office-mate Thais Martins, who I had not seen for 20 years – it was great to catch up all too briefly.



Under the Arc de Triomphe

In early August, Jane and I took a trip to Paris to attend the International Puzzle Party (a sort of conference for puzzle enthusiasts), which was an oasis of relaxation for 6 days where we also managed to see many of the sites of Paris, as well as visiting Patrizia d'Ettorre in her new flat on our way back to the airport.



Jane at the Café George V, on the Champs-Élysées

The following week there was more fieldwork with Majken, this time on the island of Læsø, where I was happy to be joined by

one of my dearest friends, Mischa Dijkstra, as well as getting assistance from Pol Lannes and Dina Mostafa.



Digging for ants on Læsø with Majken, Mischa, Pol and Dina

After a week of recovery and preparation I then ran the international PhD course on European ants for the third time at the end of August, and was once again joined in this enterprise by Christos Georgiadis from Athens, and this time around by Riitta Savolainen from Helsinki, who made a very effective team.



Ant course participants 2017

Since then, apart from manning a stand at this year's Copenhagen culture night, it's mostly been nose to the grindstone teaching courses at the university.



Showing ants to the public at Copenhagen Culture Night

I am, however, back in the U.K. as I write this, attending the annual meeting of the North-West European section of the IUSSI, which this year is in York. I spent the weekend in Islip

with my dad, and we had a very enjoyable pre-Christmas family get-together on Saturday.



Pre-Christmas panorama, with Sue, Ken, Dad, Paul, Pete, Carys, Marion, Chrissie and Alison.

Christmas itself will be in Denmark this year, and I'm looking forward to a Danish Christmas with Jane and her mum on the 24th, followed by a British Christmas with Jane on the 25th. On boxing day I'll go back to the U.K. again to spend the rest of the week with my Dad and meet up with more Nashes.

What does 2018 have in store I wonder? Well, there are many things to look forward to – I will hopefully catch up with old friends from Bath and other parts of Europe when I attend the Butterfly Conservation Meeting in Southampton in March, and should also travel a bit further afield next summer, with international meetings in Naples and Brazil, for both of which I am organizing symposia. I'm also looking forward to a lot more fieldwork in Jutland, in Sweden and on Læsø following the award of a grant from the Danish Culture ministry to allow me and Thomas Simonsen from the natural history museum in Aarhus to carry out a project looking at the changes in phenotypic and genetic diversity of Alcon blue butterflies over the last 50 years. I will also celebrate a host of other decadal anniversaries in 2018; Jane will turn 50, and we'll join one of the concerts for Jethro Tull's 50th anniversary. Jane and I will also celebrate our 10th wedding anniversary, and it will be 20 years since I moved to Denmark, and 30 years since the publication of my first scientific paper. That only leaves a 40th anniversary to celebrate from my lifetime, so I'm looking forward to the new "Hexagonal phase" of the BBC Radio 4 series of the hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy.



Emily, defending "her" MacCatbed Pro

In the meantime, I continue to enjoy life with Jane tremendously, and am looking forward to many more decades together. Emily the cat continues to delight us, as well as making sure that we get out of bed early.

I hope that you have had an easier 2017 than I have, and that 2018 will be a great year for everyone!

David