

TO MR ROBERT GAMBLES ON HIS 70th BIRTHDAY

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A short biography and appreciation of odonatological work of R.M. GAMBLES are followed by a list of new taxa he described and by his odonatological bibliography (1951-1980). Most of his work is devoted to the fauna of West Africa, especially Nigeria.



We are honoured to write this short appreciation of Mr Robert Moylan Gambles on the occasion of his 70th birthday. It is a great pleasure to bring to a wider circle of colleagues Robert Gambles' outstanding contribution to Odonatology, and to underline how much he is esteemed and respected as a scientist and as a friend. Our own odonatological studies in Africa would hardly have been possible without his generous and detailed assistance.

ROBERT MOYLAN GAMBLES was born on 16th March, 1910, at Mill Hill, London. Insects attracted him from early days, and he began collecting Lepidoptera at the age of six.

By the ripe old age of eleven he had stopped collecting insects, albeit only temporarily. At Westminster School, London, where he was a King's Scholar, he read classics until his final year, when he switched over to science. On going up to Trinity College, Cambridge, 1928-31, to read for the Natural Science Tripos, Part I, Robert's active interest in entomology returned, and he began collecting many orders in turn, but especially Lepidoptera,

Coleoptera, Odonata, Neuroptera, Psocoptera and Hemiptera.

At this time he became interested in animal parasites, and this determined the course of his professional career. He took his B.A. in 1931, and his M.A. in 1936. A scholarship from the Colonial Office enabled him to read for his M.R.C.V.S. at the Royal (Dick) Veterinary College, Edinburgh, 1931-34. At the same time he read for a B.Sc. (Vet.Sci.) at Edinburgh University, and he received this degree in 1937 when on leave from Cyprus. In Edinburgh he was chiefly interested in the helminthological and entomological aspects of parasitology, but continued to collect insects, especially Psocoptera.

Robert Gambles' career as a veterinarian commenced in Cyprus, where he was Veterinary Officer, 1935-38. After a two year spell in Palestine as a Veterinary Research Officer, he returned to Cyprus in a similar post, and remained there until 1948. It was in the summer of 1948, just before he was due to leave Cyprus, that he had a chance meeting with CYNTHIA LONGFIELD who had arrived on holiday in the island, with a letter of introduction from a mutual friend. This meeting stimulated a revival of his old interest in dragonflies, which has developed and matured to such a degree that for many years he has been an unrivalled authority on West African species.

After leaving Cyprus, Robert became Senior Veterinary Research Officer with the Veterinary Research Department at Vom, in Northern Nigeria. He spent fourteen years at Vom, becoming Principal of the Veterinary School. In Nigeria, most of his leisure hours were devoted to the study of the dragonfly fauna of that country, and such neighbouring territories as he was able to visit briefly. Vom, on the central Jos plateau, proved to be a good base from which to investigate the Nigerian dragonfly fauna. At that time Nigeria and the neighbouring territories in West Africa were practically virgin territory for collecting. Previous records were mostly haphazard ones dating from the German colonial period in Togo and Cameroons.

Robert finally returned to England in 1962, and the last eight years of his veterinary career were spent as Research Officer with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, based at the Cattle Breeding Centre, Reading, England. He finally retired in 1971 to spend his time more fully on the West African Odonata, in correspondence and consultation with other workers in the field, and in many scientific institutions.

The hallmark of Robert Gambles' work on dragonflies is a meticulous attention to detail. His classical education enables him to be particularly authoritative on questions of the origin and syntax of nomenclature, and has given him a refreshingly lyrical style in his letters. When one of us sent him the hitherto unknown female of the West African Libellulid *Nesciothemis nigeriensis*, described by him from a single male in 1966, his reply went:

"....O Wonderful one! A thousand thanks. You are beginning to take on one of the especially pleasing attributes of the Almighty, 'who knowest our necessities before we ask'..... As I set out for the B.M. this morning.... I was intending to write to you on my return to suggest that you should go to the Lake again and look out specially for a female with a longitudinal yellow stripe on the dorsum of the thorax, and see if you could crown your discoveries with the totally unknown female, which I felt sure on the analogy of other spp. would have a very conspicuous yellow stripe. And then I arrived home and find the very lady waiting for me in today's mail! It has quite made my day."

Robert Gambles has a wide general interest in biological matters, as witness his Fellowships and keen attendance at meetings of the Royal Entomological Society of London, the Zoological Society of London, and the Linnean Society of London. In 1974 he was appointed Honorary Associate of the British Museum (Natural History) in recognition of his valuable work on the Odonata, and in particular on the collections in the Museum.

*Robert's most recent work has involved the painstaking revision of a large part of the difficult genus *Macromia*, and the resolution of the problem of the *Lestes pallidus* group. However he has a horror of being considered as merely a 'Museum wallah', and his published work on larval life histories, on geographical distribution, and on aspects of behaviour is no less interesting or important than his contributions to taxonomy. Indeed he has in no way retired from field work, having a trip to the Gambia planned for later this year.*

Many younger odonatologists stand in Robert Gambles' debt for his generous encouragement and advice. One of the authors' childhood memories include his readiness to drive around the Vom station and kindly and patiently inspect any specimen, however common it might be. His laboratory at Vom, filled with what seemed to be innumerable storeboxes, as well as larvae in every size of dish and pot, was a source of wonderment and fascination.

To colleagues in many parts of the world, Robert's correspondence is as much valued as his published work. His kind and detailed letters reveal a wealth of knowledge of the West African species going far beyond what he has already committed to paper. He has long planned a comprehensive book on the Nigerian dragonflies, and indeed several chapters already exist in draft form. We must all hope that he will soon turn again to this major task and bring it to a triumphant conclusion in the not too distant future.

Throughout the years he has been ably sustained by his wife, MARGARET, whose talents for botany and gardening have provided an admirable foil for his own interests. Their two sons, JONATHAN and ROBIN, are both practising in Britain, in Veterinary Medicine and Law respectively, and now have families of their own.

Members of Societas Internationalis Odonatologica and dragonfly workers world wide offer Robert Gambles their congratulations on the

occasion of his 70th birthday, and all good wishes for many years of good health and odonatological research.

NEW ODONATE TAXA DESCRIBED BY Mr. R.M. GAMBLES (up to June, 1980)

Coenagrionidae

Pseudagrion sjoestedii nigeriensis 1975a: 118-120, figs. 18, 20, 22, 24

Megapodagrionidae

Nesolestes nigeriensis 1970: 53-61, figs. 1-4

Chlorocyphidae

Chlorocypha centripunctata 1975a: 105-108, figs. 1-5

C. selysi nigeriensis 1975a: 115, figs. 12, 14, 16

Gomphidae

Lestinogomphus minutus 1968: 281-284, figs. 1-2

Aeshnidae

Acanthagyna nigeriensis 1956b: 194-196, figs. 1, 3-5

Heliaeschna longfieldae 1967: 200

Corduliidae

Macromia amicornum 1979b: 390-395, figs. 8-10, 13, 17, 19, 22, 24, 25, 28

M. nigeriensis 1971a: 177-182, figs. 1-7

Libellulidae

Nesciothemis minor 1966: 161-167, figs. 2, 6

N. nigeriensis 1966: 167-173, figs. 3, 7

Orthetrum camerunense 1959: 44-46, figs. 2, 5, 7.

ODONATOLOGICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MR. R.M. GAMBLES (1951-1980)

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- 1956b. A new species of *Acanthagyna* Kirby, 1890 (Odon., Aeshnidae) from North Nigeria. *Ent. mon. Mag.* 92: 194-196.
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1970. A new species of megapodagriid dragonfly from Continental Africa. *Entomologist* 103: 53-61.
- 1971a. A new species of *Macromia* Rambur 1842 (Odonata: Corduliidae) from Nigeria, and the hitherto undescribed female of *M. pseudaficana* Pinhey 1961. *Entomologist* 104: 177-189.

- 1971b. Dragonfly dormitories. *Niger. Fld* 36: 166-170.
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- 1975a. A new species of *Chlorocypha* Fraser 1928 (Odonata: Chlorocyphidae) from Nigeria, and some new or little known Nigerian subspecies of forms better known from the Cameroons. *Ent. mon. Mag.* 110: 105-121.
- 1975b. To Miss C.E. Longfield, F.R.E.S. *Odonatologica* 4: 55-59.
- 1975c. To Mr D.E. Kimmins on his 70th birthday. *Odonatologica* 4: 61-64.
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Portrait on p. 279 dated November 22, 1979.