



OBITUARY – MICHAEL WILLIAM GARDINER

(05.05.1935–07.12.2016)

Alan Gardiner

A LEPIDOPTERIST'S PERSPECTIVE



Mike sitting in his butterfly garden with his renowned home brew

Mike Gardiner lost his life in tragic circumstances on the 7th of December 2016.

Mike was born in India and although he had many passions associated with nature, butterfly & moth collecting was his favourite. His love for butterflies was initiated by his father, James Eric Gardiner who had a substantial Indian collection which unfortunately was destroyed during the Second World War. Although James never started another collection of his own, he encouraged Mike and would still collect specimens for him on his travels. For instance he took *Leucochitonina amneris* in the then Tanganyika (Tanzania) in February 1950. Mike came to Southern Rhodesia as a twelve year old boy and while schooling also helped his mother run a small dairy farm just outside Bulawayo, Glenville Dairy. Mike built his first house not far from the dairy and here his interest in butterflies, moths and plants grew and



flourished. Here he also built a room specifically for the collection and many collectors visited it, including Elliot Pinhey and Ivan Bampton. On one occasion, while working on the farm, he came across, without a net, a gynandromorph *Lepidochrysops glauca* and somehow he managed to hand pick it. His three children Mike Jnr, myself (Alan) & Shirley were born by his first wife, Diana, while he lived at this house. It would be myself who caught the butterfly bug and from an age of three and this commonality strongly connected me with my father until his death.

I will never forget the times, and there were many, we spent together on this passion. Some nights we would go out collecting moths with Elliot Pinhey, a good friend of his whom he would remain in contact with until Alzheimer's hit Elliot. Even after Elliot's death he continued corresponding with Nancy, Elliot's wife. Pinhey, my dad said, "was a real gentleman", unlike other collectors we have since come across. During those nights with Pinhey we would pick a spot with a good view, such as on the hills of Nymandhlovu about 40kms NNW of Bulawayo, and set up the light trap. This was a rather clumsy affair with a frame on which the white sheet was hung and the UV fluorescent tubes attached to the uppermost bar, the electricity being supplied by a noisy generator, which also often gave problems. My father and Elliot would sit in their chairs not far from the light with whisky in hand, talk and every now and then get up to investigate what was on the sheet. I had a blanket on the floor and on most occasions would not make it past midnight, this was a bit unfortunate as most of the exciting stuff occurred after midnight when the male emperors arrived. The Saturnids together with Spingids were groups Mike became very fond of and in the early 1970's he bred most of the species around Bulawayo.



Gyandromorph *Lepidochrysops glauca*

Butterflies took us to places like the Amatongas and Dondo Forests, in Mozambique, where he took *Euthecta cooksoni* in the local graveyard. He did not spend too long in the graveyard as it made him feel uncomfortable, this feeling was probably an influence of his Indian upbringing. Our family holidays were very much "collecting" trips, for instance in 1972 and 1973 we flew to Malawi, in the Air Rhodesia Viscounts, and stayed in rather nice hotels: KuChowe Inn on Zomba and the Mount Soche in Blantyre. This was great, because the non-lepidopterist family members would convince us it was fine to leave them in the comfort of the hotel while we went collecting. On Zomba the two of us swore as we watched the *Acraea epidica* on the tops of the Eucalyptus near the fish ponds, and then shouted madly to one another as we thought one would come into the reach of the other, in this way we did get a few. On Zomba, I think, we bumped into Alan Heath, I cannot quite recall this as I think my father and I were after butterflies while Alan H was after my mother.

In those days we often bumped into other collectors, some of whom we were pleased to see while others we wished would just bugger off. Some of the people Mike enjoyed meeting, and later reminisced about, were the Pennington's, whom we came across in their caravan on Mt. Selinda. I do not remember much of the talk, but was impressed by the caravan and how it was kitted out. It was parked under the fig tree at the site of the old



Barry Mee & Mike Gardiner, 1965, collecting at the Lower Outspan, Matopos



Swynnerton's homestead. Then there was Rob Pare whom we came across at Dondo, he also set his specimens in the field and was very happy to show us his *Acraea rabbaiae* and *A. cuva*, the latter he had caught near Mt. Gorongoza. On that trip Mike did end up getting a little series of *rabbaiae* and a nice series of *Graphium junodi* females.

In the 1960's Mike also got Barry Mee, my uncle, into collecting and he really enjoyed his times with Barry, as, when there was low butterfly activity, such as at night, they discussed life and the associated problems. However, with this also came the grumbling about some of Barry's antics while collecting, such as the time he organized to meet Barry and Jeff Mee in the Chimanimani's. Barry and Jeff were coming from South Africa by motorbike. They eventually found one another and on the first evening my dad was not happy with the weather conditions, another subject he was good at and made very accurate predictions about, and wanted to go find another more secure sleeping spot than the ground at Dead Cow Camp, as they had no tents. Eventually the weather started blowing in and with the onset of rain he said "if you guys want to stay you can, but I am off to find something in Melssetter town". The only accommodation he could find was the Woman's youth hostel. This did not bother him in the least



Mike, with his special bait, Barry Mee, myself and Vic Baker, at Ditchwe in 1976, Barry & Vic still holding both their weapons and butterfly nets: Mike, 30 years later, back at Ditchwe in 2006

and he convinced the young ladies to take him in, later on in the night in crept Barry followed by Jeff.

Then there was Vic Baker, again someone we both enjoyed and respected. Barry would let Vic know when we were coming to Harare and off we would go collecting together, preferably in Vic's Volvo, rather than our Peugeot 404 station wagon. One trip we did together in 1976 was to Ditchwe, the "lemon forest" near Chinoyi. After stashing our weapons in the undergrowth, as the bush war was taking place, we all went off collecting, my dad and I of course staying close together. The *Bicyclus cottrelli* and *Bebearia orientis* were out but the prize on that occasion was a wonderful *Charaxes candiope* aberration, we nearly let it go but fortunately my dad noticed it in time. We undoubtedly got it and a perfect



Mike at camp site in the Mid Zambezi Valley, 1991, note Buffalo in the bush just behind tent and with thousands of *Catopsilia florella* and *Graphium porthaon*



Charaxes penricei because of my dad's ability to always make perfect bait. Although I have tried to copy him, for some reason, I cannot get it quite right. He just had the bait making knack, which he never lost.

The places we went to and events that occurred could fill a book and maybe one day I will get around to putting them on paper. His love for nature never waned and in his later years, when he found walking difficult, aloes and orchids became subjects of his collecting. His amazing butterfly garden in his last home, 38 Edenfield Matsheumhlope Bulawayo, is testament to his love for natural history.

A couple of years ago Mike was out in the Matopos with a friend, Roy, who also collected aloes, both with nets and walking sticks. They were walking along the side of a dwala when Mike saw a butterfly of interest go past Roy and shouted "catch that", Roy made an attempt but slipped and disappeared down the edge of the dwala, my father, unable to see him, shouted "did you get it?"

Mike was a good, giving and honest person liked, by all who met him. He would always welcome collectors to his home and will be dearly missed by his family and friends.



Alan & Mike (1990) on a collecting trip to the Haroni & Rusitu river junction at the base of the Chimanimani's