Chris Lomer 1957-2001

Chris Lomer died very unexpectedly of a brain haemorrhage on 17th October 2001, during a visit to Australia. His many contributions to the field of insect pathology, and more importantly, his joy in life, his enthusiasm and optimism, his humour and his comradeship will be sadly missed by everyone who was lucky enough to have known him. He will be missed especially by his wife Suvi, his daughter Sylvie, and the rest his family in England.

Chris was born on 16th of July, 1957 in Oxford. As Chris phrased it, he became an entomologist, because this is the most natural thing to become interested in, when you are a little boy who observes nature with open eyes. His first passion was his insect collection - which was started when he was 6 years old and consisted mostly of beetles. This collection is now housed at University of Oxford Museum, and includes specimens from all the places he visited.

After graduating in natural sciences from Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge, Chris received a MSc in Entomology from Imperial College, London in 1980. From 1980 until 1984 he worked as a research entomologist in the Seychelles. There, he started his career as an insect pathologist studying pathogens (especially baculoviruses and *Metarhizium anisopliae*) for biological control of rhinoceros beetles in palms. Being in such a remote location, he could only receive minimal help from his supervisors (Graham Matthews of IC, Silwood Park and Tom Tinsley of IEVM, Oxford), but he managed a programme which ended with the selection of a highly virulent virus strain and its dissemination across the whole archipelago. From 1984 until 1986, Chris studied the biodiversity of this virus across the world using molecular characterisation techniques whilst based at the Institute for Virology in Oxford. The *Baculovirus oryctes* work became the content of Chris' Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 1986). Soon after, Chris moved again to a tropical island. In Indonesia, Chris was responsible for a programme to control *Pseudomonas syzygii* in clove trees. This involved large-scale pesticide trials against the vector (*Hindola striata*) and the evaluation of newly discovered natural enemies, which had been discovered in West Sumatra.

Most colleagues however, know Chris in connection with the LUBILOSA Programme (biological control of grasshoppers and locusts), which he joined in 1991 and became programme leader in 1994. Together with Cécile and Sylvie, Chris came to Africa as employee of IIBC (now CABI Europe - UK) to lead the West Africa group of LUBILOSA scientists based at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in Cotonou, Benin. This is when most of us first met, whether in Africa or in UK, and became colleagues and very good friends. Many of us were new

to Africa, some of us in the tropics for the first time, but Chris helped us to take things in our stride. At that time, Africa had just recovered from its latest large desert locust outbreak, and many research groups world-wide were looking into alternatives to environmentally damaging large scale insecticide applications. What was one of many approaches at the beginning of this project, turned out to become very successful, and in 1991, Chris and the rest of the team successfully applied oil based formulations of *Metarhizium anisopliae* to natural desert locust populations in the Sahara desert in northern Niger Republic, for the first time (see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LUBILOSA).

Chris was an excellent communicator and with the introduction of e-mail at IITA, he developed links with similar programmes across the whole world. His communication skills made him an excellent programme leader for the next two phases of the LUBILOSA programme, eventually as employee of IITA. We remember talking to Chris in his office about one thing, while he was writing e-mails on a different topic, apparently without feeling this to be stressful. No secretary could type on the keyboard faster than Chris, and this is also how he talked. At the beginning, the non-native English speakers among us found it hard to follow Chris' enthusiastic and incredible rapid way of speaking, but we soon learned to keep up with him. Under Chris' leadership LUBILOSA became a very exiting and large programme, with many partners from Africa, Europe, North America and Australia. The LUBILOSA isolate of *Metarhizium acridum* (IMI 330189) is now commercialised under the name 'Green Muscle' and is probably the most intensively studied product for grasshopper and locust control, ever developed. The success of this programme encouraged Chris to develop similar approaches for many other tropical pests, including termites, banana weevil, maize stem borers and storage pests. Today, microbial control using entomopathogenic fungi has become a popular approach all across Africa. Apart from microbial control projects, Chris became also responsible for all non-IPM biological control projects at IITA. This included the classical biological control of water hyacinth, the world-wide most common water weed. At IITA, Chris was highly respected by the local staff. He helped several Beninoise colleagues to start their own international scientific careers. They admired him for his dynamic approach and the opportunities he created for everybody.

In 1999, Chris left IITA, to follow his new wife, Suvi Rautio-Lomer to Ankara, Turkey, where she managed the UNICEF office. It was also typical of Chris, that he had sorted himself out very quickly and became assistant professor at Bilkent University. This is a privately owned university mainly active in new technologies. Always keen to keep up to date, Chris started to learn molecular biology techniques, and offered his experience in a top-standard course for students. Only one year later, Suvi and Chris moved to Copenhagen, Denmark, where they bought a beautiful old apartment in the centre of town. They loved life in Copenhagen, where people care for their environment, where the bicycle is a major means of transport, which you can take where-ever you want at any time of the day. He once said: "Scandinavian cities are probably the most civilized places on earth". Danish became, we believe the fifth or sixth language Chris could at least use for basic communication. Chris was welcomed by Jørgen Eilenberg and his team at KVL, and although he did not officially hold a post at the University, he actively participated in many of the Department's research projects. He devoted his time and intellect into writing proposals for new initiatives to fund future work within the department. One of his last major activities was contributing to the harmonisation of biopesticide regulations, within the EU funded BIPESCO project on biocontrol using *Metarhizium* and *Beauveria*.

Chris was an enthusiastic supporter of SIP, and particularly enjoyed the Societies' social environment. He had this year been selected as member at large for the Microbial Control Division. He has organised several interesting seminars and symposia for SIP the last of which concerned the Environmental Impact of Microbial Pesticides (together with Heikki Hokkanen).

One of Chris' last major contributions was his summary of work on biological control on grasshopper and locusts just recently in the Annual Review of Entomology (Lomer, C.J., Bateman, R.P., Johnson, D.L., Langewald, J., and Thomas, M.B. 2001. Biological control of locusts and grasshoppers. *Ann. Rev. Entomol.*, **46**: 667-702).

Chris' enthusiasm and curiosity inspired many of us. Whenever Chris became fascinated by research topics or novel insights into life, he could hardly be stopped. Chris' comradeship and team spirit were outstanding and the basis for many successes in his professional life, but also the root for many friendships. We will miss Chris' positive approach to life, his humour and his loud laughter forever.

Chris Lomer was the first SIP member to be honoured by the SIP Memorial Fund, which bears his name. As his obituary illustrates, Chris' career was defined by his desire to bring the benefits of microbial control to the farmers and inhabitants of the developing world. For this reason, donations made to the Memorial Fund in Chris Lomer's name will be used to provide grants to support travel to SIP meetings for insect pathologists working in the developing world.