

REMEMBERING THE DREAMTIME**by Robert Angus**

The recent account of the Hydradephaga of the Khamar-Daban range in East Siberia by Pyotr Petrov (*Latissimus* 27) touched old and very fond memories of my own collecting in this region, during what the Australian Aborigines would call the Dreamtime.

It all began in Finland in the summer of 1967. I was approaching the end of the first year of my doctoral research and took my moped to Finland with a view to increasing the number of *Helophorus* species available for me to study. A particular target was *H. oblitus* Sharp, described from a single male apparently from Parikkala in south-east Finland, but which had never been taken since. Well, Parikkala is a very beautiful place, but I did not find *H. oblitus* – which I later discovered to be a mislabelled specimen of the American *H. linearis* LeConte. I did, however, meet Hans Silfverberg who was running a field course for a group of students from Helsinki University. On finding out what I was up to he asked if I would like to look at some of the unnamed Siberian material in the Helsinki Museum collection, much of it collected by Poppius. An offer I could not refuse, and one which steered me into research on the Eastern Palaearctic fauna, involving among other things study of Motschulsky's classic 1860 work, with its references to "les Alpes du Hamar-Daban" as the locality for *Helophorus timidus*. Then Jan Landin (Linköping) went on a post-congressional excursion to that area, after the International Congress of Entomology in Moscow. He sent me material of *H. orientalis* Motschulsky and *H. aspericollis* Angus (then regarded as a form of *H. brevipalpis* Bedel) from "the road to Mongolia". What achingly romantic data! Shortly afterwards I saw advertised in the Oxford Zoology Department the exchange agreement between the Royal Society and the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union – "open to non-members"! I applied to go on this on completion of my D. Phil., and was accepted. My plan was to spend the winter working on the collections in Moscow and Leningrad, then to go on an extended Siberian collecting trip in the summer. Well, the Royal Society told me, you can't quite do this, you have to visit colleagues in various institutes. They then got out an atlas and told me where there were suitable institutes. Next came the briefing about how to behave yourself and avoid trouble in Russia! I was sat at a table opposite an attractive young secretary, and given the relevant papers – serious and solemn documents from the Foreign Office. I can't remember much about it now – there was a story of someone getting into trouble with an actress in Tbilisi, and similar such cautionary tales. Trouble was, I was writing a thesis at the time and not in the right frame of mind. I began to laugh. The secretary looked up. Oh dear! "Did the others laugh?" I asked. "No" she said – but I had a feeling the humour wasn't entirely lost on her. Anyway, I chose Irkutsk (for Lake Baikal) and Yakutsk, prominent among Poppius' collecting localities. Eventually the relevant institutes in Leningrad (the Zoological Institute), Moscow (the University Museum of Zoology) and Yakutsk (the Biological Institute) replied and with these three agreed visits I set sail for Leningrad at the end of September 1969.

On arriving in Leningrad I soon settled into a pattern of work, going through all their *Helophorus* and eventually doing a total reorganisation of the collection. Still no word from Irkutsk, but I did add Novosibirsk (the legendary Academic City) to my wish-list, and this was agreed. Eventually the Limnological Institute on Lake Baikal said I could visit them for half a day, which they thought would be enough as there are no *Helophorus* in Baikal. I knew this but dearly wanted to have a look at the unique fauna of the lake. Eventually Irkutsk University came to my rescue and said I could join a group of their students on a week's field course at their Baikal Research Station at Bolshiye Koty. Brilliant!

The final piece of good fortune was that the Zoological Institute in Leningrad very kindly arranged that one of their entomologists, the hymenopterist Dmitry Rafaelovich (Dima)

Kasparyan, would just happen to be in the Irkutsk and Yakutsk areas at the same time as me, so we could travel together and I would have the benefit of his local knowledge.

So, in mid May I set off on my travels, first to Novosibirsk and the Karasuk field station on the steppe (see *Newsletter 25* (1982) for an account of my revisiting this area), and then, at the beginning of June, to Irkutsk and the Holy Ground! And to add to the thrill of the whole experience, I had three springs, all exhilarating, that year – first in Leningrad, then Novosibirsk, and now Irkutsk. I duly met up with Dima, and we arranged with the people at Irkutsk University that Dima and I would "amuse ourselves" for the first two weeks, then join the staff and students for the field course after that. Splendid!

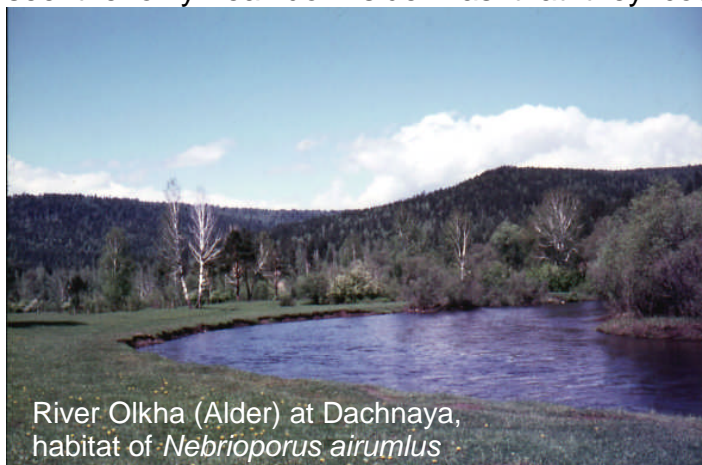


Train to Dachnaya



Dacha at Dachnaya

Dima had relatives in Irkutsk, and he and they arranged that we would begin with a few days at their dacha out of town. A dacha! This really sounded very exciting – images of Tolstoy, but in fact it was a cabin they had built in a cabin-cluster at a place called Dachnaya – the local equivalent of a caravan site. We took the train and I was fascinated by the view – it reminded me of Speyside! "Hey, this is like Scotland!" I said to Dima. "Don't get too excited" was his reply "the beetles might be like Scotland too." Well, not quite, but I did find the most eastern known localities for *Helophorus granularis* (L.) and *H. strigifrons* Thomson. The dacha was very good. We sat and drank tea outside, with the Trans-Siberian railway passing at the other side of a sloping field. And then a train – and it really did say "Vladivostok-Moskva"! Then we turned on the shortwave radio – and got Australia! I knew we had come a long way, but really! Anyway, the collecting was very good and a fantastic beginning to my East Siberian experience. One evening Dima's cousins came down and we had a drink or two. After a while the inevitable question "How do you find Russia?" Well, I was loving the place (I still do!) and said that as far as I could see the only real downside was that they couldn't travel abroad, adding, somewhat incautiously, that it made their country a sort of prison. A pause, then the next question "So, what did Scotland Yard tell you about coming to Russia?" My mind flashed back to the attractive secretary in the Royal Society. "Well" I said, "they told me not to drink too much and to leave your women alone", adding "I haven't touched your women, but the bottle's empty!" "Hm!" grunted Dima "they tell us to clean our shoes." The second planned trip was to the Tunkinskaya



River Olkha (Alder) at Dachnaya, habitat of *Nebrîoporus airumlus*

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Dolina, a tectonic depression just west of Lake Baikal. We were to be based in the village of Tibelti, and could stay in the village "rest-house". Dima organised all this, and also procurement of our food for the eight days of our trip. We were to go out on the bus, and back by train from Slyudyanka, on the western shore of Baikal. We arrived at Irkutsk bus station eager for the trip. But something was amiss – no bus! "Oh dear" I said, "Do you think it has broken down?" "Driver probably has a hangover." was the reply. Nothing for it but to wait and hope.

To pass some of the time I taught Dima the old Rugby song of the Engineer's Wheel. Much appreciated and resulting in one of our battle-cries at the end of a good bit of collecting "I'm satisfied!" Then the bus came and we all clambered aboard (which took some time as the locals, who knew the game, were in no hurry and chose seats with their friends, etc.). Then we were off – and it really was the road to Mongolia! The scenery became much less Scottish, with large-coned Siberian Pines, and occasional clearings with Susliks (ground-squirrels) scampering about. And so to Tibelti, a village on the bank of the Irkut River, set in beautiful alpine scenery. We got ourselves established and I then asked Dima where the toilets were. "Ah" said Dima "I found the place, but I'm not letting you see it – no Englishman should see a thing like that in Russia, we'll use the forest". We did – there was plenty of forest, so no problem.



Tibelti on the bank of the Irkut River

Next morning we began collecting – mainly in the forest near the village. Fascinating – the spruce trees narrow and with down-pointing branches to shed the snow. And bee-flies (*Bombylius* – two species I think). I have always been rather fond of bee-flies – their perfect hovering and lightning-quick response if disturbed. I didn't see how anyone could catch them. Dima cracked it – you bring the net slowly below the hovering fly, and strike upward. We walked back to the village along a track surfaced with the local stone – not crushed limestone – "quarry bottom" as here, but crushed marble which glittered in the sunlight. The effect was magical. "This is Heaven", I said to Dima. "And you called it a prison!" was the reply. I shook his hand. "One – Nil", as he would have said! We spent most of our time near the village, but we did three forays a little further afield. The first was back towards Baikal, where the land rises and gets wetter, by the river Malaya



In the forest,
Tibelti

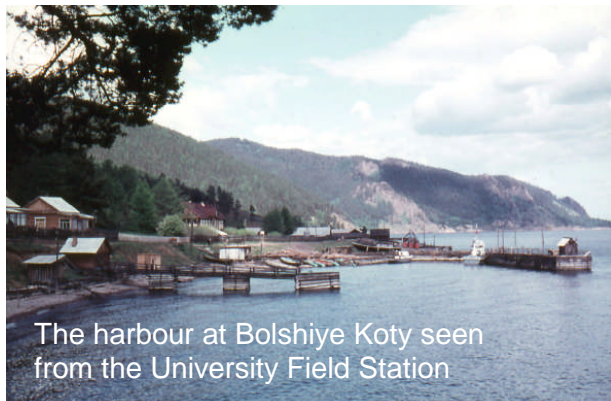
Bystraya (Little Swift River). Here there were late *Rhododendron dauricum* flowering in cold spots. The second trip was further along the valley, to near the village of Arshan, source of a mineral water. The valley is drier and sandier here, and it was here that I collected the type series of *Hydroporus angusi* Nilsson – not that I knew it at the time! Our third trip was across the Irkut River and along a forest trail to a forester's cabin.



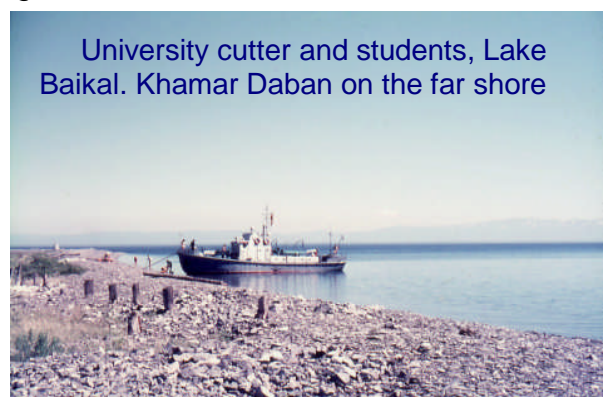
Tea by the Malaya Bystraya

Dima had worked for the Forest Service, so knew the score. His first question to the locals – is there a bear in these woods? The reply was yes, but only a small one. Make plenty of noise and it will avoid you. It was an interesting experience to be in a forest where man is not "top dog". The Russians have a well-placed respect for bears – they refer to the local bear as the host – you are the visitor to his territory. Well, we didn't meet the host, and it was a very beautiful place, with an abundance of dragonflies engaged in their curious, almost helicopter-like flight. *Dytiscus dauricus* Gebler in a log-filled pool, and, joy of joys, *Helophorus niger* Sahlberg in a pool in a frost-hollow where the vegetation had yet to green up. This is a northern species and I was very pleased to find it – the more so as I have since seen the related *H. khnזורiani* Angus from the neighbouring Tuva mountains. It demonstrates rather clearly that these are distinct species. The return to Tibelti occasioned one of life's shocks. We arrived at the river bank and shouted for someone to come over in a boat. For a long time there was no response (we later learned that there was some local festival and the whole village was rather drunk). However, eventually an old lady rowed across – somewhat the worse for wear! Then, seeing that I was a foreigner she said "I'm sorry I'm drunk but I lost my husband and both my sons in the war liberating your land – so what else is left?" Hastily Dima explained that I was an Englishman and an ally in that war – but I was stunned. So far across Siberia and still that level of tragedy.

The journey back to Irkutsk involved getting (I can't remember how – bus or hitching) to Slyudyanka where the Trans-Siberian trains stopped. Dima went to the ticket office. "There's no room" he was told. "There has to be – I'm escorting a foreigner" was his effective reply. We found seats in the Dining Car and settled down to enjoy Russian "Portwine". I arrived back in Irkutsk with a splitting headache!



The harbour at Bolshiye Koty seen from the University Field Station



University cutter and students, Lake Baikal. Khamar Daban on the far shore

The final trip was to Lake Baikal. We all (Dima and I plus the University staff and students) took a bus to Listvyanka, which is where the Angara River flows out of the lake, and from there took the University "cutter" (the Russian word – I think cutters are a somewhat different type of ship in England) to Bolshiye Koty. The uninitiated pronounce this word "Koty", with the stress on the *ý*, meaning "Big Tomcats". However, in this case it is "Kóty" with the stress on the *ó* and refers to the wooden shoes (clogs) made and worn by the convict-exiles who lived there in Tsarist times.

The field station was well set up, and the director was Olga Mikhailovna Kozhova, whose father M. M. Kozhov had written the English language "Lake Baikal and its Life" which had so inspired me as a student. The lake is incredibly beautiful, the water as clear as a tropic sea so that you could peer down 10 metres or so on to groves of candelabra-like *Lubomirskia* sponges, which resembled miniature Saguaro cactuses! And always the view of the snow-capped Khamar Daban mountains across the lake. We spent the week collecting and identifying specimens from various parts of the lake, and I was able to assemble a nice little collection for Oxford University Museum. The students, like students

everywhere, were a great bunch – working hard and really enjoying the field course. Of course, there were relaxed moments – on one occasion one of them said to me "We read in George Bernard Shaw that in England there is a State employee whose job is to come to the assistance of men who are "reproductively challenged" – is this true?" Well, I've never read any G. B. S., but managed the reply "It's not quite like that. The service is free and the operative is called the Milkman." That seemed to satisfy him – and shortly afterwards I overheard one lad teasing another "Oh! You Milkman!"

All too soon it was time to leave. The three and a half weeks in the Irkutsk region were a truly fantastic experience. Next was Yakutia – Land of the Great River (the Lena) – but that is another story. The list of beetles and a few comments follow, so now it is time for thanks. Of course to Dima and the others who helped me so much, but also to all those Russians I met in the course of my 10-month stay in the Soviet Union. I came and lived among you, young, very green, at a time when the international political situation could politely be described as bad – and you gave me the Year of my Life!

The beetles The table below gives a list of all the water beetles I collected, as well as Pyotr Petrov's (2010) list for comparison. Pyotr only lists Hydradephaga, but tells me he encountered very few palpicorns. The main reason for this is that he collected in July, by which time many palpicorns (especially *Helophorus* which make up the bulk of my list) have gone to ground. The whole East Siberian area is included in Volume 3 part 1 of *Keys for the Identification of the Insects of the Far East of the USSR*, ed. P. A. Ler (1989). The Hydradephaga section is by G. Sh. Lafer, the Hydraenidae and Palpicorns by A. G. Shatrovskiy. Nearly all the Dytiscidae have been identified by Anders Nilsson, and the *Hygrotus* by Hans Fery (only *H. impressopunctatus* in this part of my collecting). The Hydraenidae were identified by Manfred Jäch and the *Laccobius* by Elio Gentili. I thank them for the determinations. Comments on individual species follow the table.

Table Recording around Lake Baikal. The Khamar Daban records are by Petrov (2010) the rest by the author in 1970

Beetles	Khamar Daban	Bolshiye Koty	Dachnaya	Tunkinskaya Dolina
Halipidae				
<i>Haliplus sibiricus</i> Motschulsky				+
Dytiscidae				
<i>Bidessus grossepunctatus</i> Vorbringer	+			
<i>Hydroglyphus geminus</i> (Fab.)			+	
<i>Hyphydrus ovatus</i> (L.)				+
<i>Hygrotus impressopunctatus</i> (Schaller)	+			+
<i>H. pectoralis</i> (Motschulsky)	+			
<i>Nebrioporus airumilus</i> (Kolenati)		+	+	
<i>Oreodytes alpinus</i> (Paykull)	+			
<i>O. sanmarkii</i> (Sahlberg)	+			
<i>Boreonectes griseostriatus</i> (De Geer) s.l.	+			
<i>Hydroporus angusi</i> Nilsson				+ (types)
<i>H. erythrocephalus</i> (L.)	+			
<i>H. geniculatus</i> Thomson	+			
<i>H. nigellus</i> Motschulsky				+
<i>H. notabilis</i> LeConte			+	
<i>H. incognitus</i> Sharp ¹	+			? (1♀)
<i>H. lapponum</i> (Gyllenhal)	+			
<i>H. morio</i> Aubé	+			
<i>H. palustris</i> (L.) ¹	+			? (1♀)
<i>H. striola</i> (Gyllenhal) ¹	+			? (1♀)

Beetles	Khamar Daban	Bolshiye Koty	Dachnaya	Tunkinskaya Dolina
<i>H. submuticus</i> Thomson				+
<i>Agabus adpressus</i> Aubé	+			
<i>A. angusi</i> Nilsson				+ (types)
<i>A. clavicornis</i> Sharp	+			
<i>A. clypealis</i> (Thomson)	+			
<i>A. congener</i> (Thunberg)	+			
<i>A. costulatus</i> (Motschulsky)	+			+
<i>A. elongatus</i> (Gyllenhal)	+			
<i>A. fuscipennis</i> (Paykull)				+
<i>Agabus pallens</i> Poppius				+
<i>Ilybius angustior</i> (Gyllenhal)			+	+
<i>I. chishimanus</i> Kôno	+			+
<i>I. balkei</i> Fery & Nilsson	+			+ (types)
<i>I. poppiusi</i> Zaitzev				+
<i>I. subaeneus</i> Erichson			+	
<i>Colymbetes dahuricus</i> Aubé	+			+
<i>Rhantus notaticollis</i> (Aubé)	+			+
<i>R. suturellus</i> (Harris)	+		+	
<i>Acilius canaliculatus</i> (Nicolai)	+			+
<i>Graphoderus zonatus</i> (Hoppe) ²	+			+
<i>Dytiscus dauricus</i> Gebler	+			+
Gyrinidae				
<i>Gyrinus aeratus</i> Stephens	+			
<i>G. marinus</i> Gyllenhal ³				+
<i>G. minutus</i> Fab.	+		+	
<i>G. opacus</i> Sahlberg ⁴	+			+
<i>G. pullatus</i> Zaitzev	+			
Hydraenidae				
<i>Ochthebius hungaricus</i> Endrödi-Younga ⁵			+	
<i>Hydraena riparia</i> Kugelann			+ (1 ♀)	
<i>Limnebius glabriventris</i> Shatrovsky				+
<i>L. parvulus</i> Herbst			+	
Helophoridae ¹²				
<i>Helophorus sibiricus</i> Motschulsky				+
<i>H. bergrothi</i> J. Sahlberg				+
<i>H. niger</i> J. Sahlberg				+
<i>H. aspericollis</i> Angus		+ (types)	+ (types)	+ (types)
<i>H. nanus</i> Sturm			+	+
<i>H. oblongus</i> LeConte				+
<i>H. poppii</i> Angus ⁶			+	
<i>H. pumilio</i> Erichson			+	
<i>H. strigifrons</i> Thomson			+	
<i>H. orientalis</i> Motschulsky		+	+	+
<i>H. praeanus</i> Łomnicki (<i>jacutus</i> Poppius)				+
<i>H. kryzhanovskyi</i> Angus				+ (types)
<i>H. timidus</i> Motschulsky				+
<i>H. browni</i> McCorkle ⁷			+	+
<i>H. lapponicus</i> Thomson			+	+
<i>H. granularis</i> (L.)			+	
Hydrochidae				
<i>Hydrochus elongatus</i> (Schaller)			+ (1 ♀)	

Beetles	Khamar Daban	Bolshiye Koty	Dachnaya	Tunkinskaya Dolina
Hydrophilidae				
<i>Hydrobius fuscipes</i> (L.) ⁸			+	+
<i>Crenitis apicalis</i> Reitter ⁹				+
<i>Laccobius minutus</i> (L.)			+	
<i>L. cinereus</i> Motschulsky				+
<i>Enochrus quadripunctatus</i> (Herbst) ¹⁰			+	+
<i>Berosus fischeri</i> Schödl ¹¹				+ (1 ♀)

¹These three ♀♀ were given tentative identifications by Anders. Since all three species are included in Pyotr's list there seems no reason to doubt their identities.

²Pyotr records his material as the form *verrucifer*, but I have only males from this area. I have *verrucifer* from Yakutia.

³This appears to be new to East Siberia. The specimen is male, with a needle-sharp aedeagus and black tarsal claws, so its identity is clear.

⁴A good series, males and females, all lacking elytral reticulation. F. Balfour-Browne (1950) mentions non-reticulate *opacus* from Iceland, Greenland and North America, all areas where the reticulate form also occurs. Bo Svensson has seen the material and I have a note from him thanking me for the sight of this interesting material. It is not *G. pullatus*, which I took in Yakutia! Pyotr tells me his Khamar Daban material is reticulate.

⁵Females of the *O. rugulosus* complex cannot be identified to species, but Manfred Jäch tells me he has seen only *O. hungaricus* from the Baikal region.

⁶This species includes males with both short and long aedeagal struts, but which otherwise appear morphologically identical. I am unclear about the taxonomic status of the two forms, but the Dachnaya males all have long struts.

⁷When I published the description of this species (1970, Acta Zool. Hung. 16: 249 – 290) I carefully quoted and acknowledged McCorkle's thesis description, based on Canadian material. Subsequent authors, including Shatrovskiy, accepted McCorkle as the author of this species, but Michael Hansen (1999) attributes it to me in his Catalogue. Readers must take their choice!

⁸None of my Siberian material appears to be *H. arcticus* Kuwert.

⁹My material, 11 ♂♂ and 5 ♀♀, length 3.2 – 3.7 mm, is slightly larger than is given by Shatrovskiy, but the aedeagus matches precisely that of a male from the Khabarovsk sent to me by Franz Hebauer.

¹⁰All the material listed here is female, but matches precisely Norfolk females. A male from Yakutsk has a normal *quadripunctatus* aedeagus and more extensive pale areas on the head.

¹¹This species was described for the Eastern Palaearctic material initially referred to *B. spinosus* Steven. The elytral interstices are more heavily punctate than most *B. spinosus*.

¹²My field notes for the Tibelti area record *H. oblongus* and *H. timidus* as only in the forest (as also the single *H. niger*), *H. sibiricus* and *H. praenanus* as only in the fields, and "*H. browni* etc." as "general".

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