

The Formation of the Alberta Lepidopterist's Guild

The impetus for forming the Alberta Lepidopterists' Guild (ALG) started in the summer of 1998, when several Edmonton-area lepidopterists found one another and began gathering for frequent "moth nights". At that time the regulars included John Acorn, Gary Anweiler, Dave Lawrie, Doug Macaulay, Ernest Mengersen, Louis Morneau, Greg Pohl, and Chris Schmidt. Felix Sperling was not yet living in Edmonton, but he had just accepted a job there and was already in close contact with members of the group.

The spiritual leader of the nascent ALG was Gary Anweiler, who later became the first ALG president. Gary had been collecting butterflies and moths in and around Edmonton for many years. The seeds of the ALG were probably first sown when he, Chris Schmidt, and Dave Lawrie got to know each other in the summer of 1997.

Chris grew up in Calgary, and had been an avid butterfly collector for several years. In the fall of 1996 he moved to Edmonton, to begin an M.Sc. at U of A. Around that time, he saw e-mail postings on the "Leps-L" list-serve, originating in Edmonton from one "Gary Anweiler"; they got together in August 1996 for a night of collecting in Whitemud Creek ravine, and kept in touch over the winter. At that time, Chris also looked up Dave Lawrie, whom he had met briefly in 1995 at the Nose Hill Butterfly Count in Calgary. Dave had collected butterflies all over the world, and had expanded into moths since moving to Edmonton to do a Ph.D. in physics at the U. of A. As soon as the moths started flying that spring of 1997, Chris, Gary, and Dave began collecting together in earnest. Chris also met Louis Morneau that summer, when they shared a house with several others. He and Chris soon discovered their common interest in moths, but Louis soon departed for M.Sc. work in northern Alberta.

Meanwhile, other connections were being made. Greg Pohl first met Doug Macaulay in the late 1980s, at the George Lake Field Station run by the (then) Entomology Department of the U. of A. Doug was too young to be legally employed at that time, but Dr. John Spence had set him up with a moth inventory project there, mostly as a favor to his mother, who had called him looking for a distraction for her insect-crazy son. Greg and John Acorn can also trace their acquaintance back to the U. of A, where John had studied and worked before moving on to television work and authoring books. Greg met Gary and Ernest Mengersen in the winter of 1994/95, when they each made separate trips to visit the insect collection at the Canadian Forest Service, where Greg was doing contract work, including biodiversity studies involving moths.

By the beginning of 1998, things really took off. The first "moth night" of the year saw Chris, Dave, John, and John's friend Chip Taylor over at Gary's house in May. For several years Gary had been compiling data and images, with the intention of some day updating the old 1951 Bowman list of Lepidoptera. It turned out that Chris had been independently doing the same thing, and the others were amassing large amounts of data. Somewhere in there an idea was hatched that we ought to pool our energies instead of duplicating them. Gary drafted up a set of principles of the "Lepidoptera Survey of Alberta", which were circulated at the next meeting, which was attended by Greg and Doug as well. Everyone was so busy talking and looking at moths, that Gary's notes didn't garner much discussion, but the seeds were sown.

Over the summer of 1998, further meetings were held in the Edmonton area. Gary's draft of the "Alberta Moth Survey" got discussed at a couple of these "moth nights", in between talk of moth lights, new records, and the ones that got away. In July, Ernest contacted Greg about the possibility of coming up to look at the collection (something he'd been doing every year or so since about 1995) and was promptly invited to a "moth night".

Also at this time, news arrived that Felix Sperling (then of the University of California at Berkeley) had accepted a position as Associate Professor at the University of Alberta. He had grown up in Alberta, and attended the U. of A., so he knew many people in the local entomological community. Felix would inherit responsibility for the Strickland Museum, then made up mostly of George Ball's ground beetles, but also home to Kenneth Bowman's extensive Alberta Lepidoptera collection. He would not be arriving for another year, but already that summer Felix contacted Greg and Gary to find out what was going on in Alberta Lepidoptera circles. He had big plans to revitalize the Bowman collection, and was enthusiastic about the core of Lepidopterists he would be joining in Alberta.

The winter of 1998/99 saw several more gatherings, and regular correspondence with Felix. All of us were so amazed to have found so many other Lepidopterists to interact with. Greg took hold of Gary's idea of an official Alberta Moth Survey, and relentlessly circulated plans and drafts among the others. He assembled everyone's ideas and comments, and drafted a set of bylaws. By the time Felix moved to Edmonton in June 1999, the group had agreed on a plan to incorporate a society, to be known as the Alberta Lepidopterists' Guild. Moth nights and discussions continued over the summer.

The group finally got together for an official launch in Olds, on October 16, 1999. Ernest Mengersen had arranged for a catered dinner at Olds College, and appearances by Dr. Robert Lockwood (Vice-President, Academic Services), and Mr. W.E. Souster (Dean of the Land and Horticultural Sciences Department). No less than 16 people came out to help create the ALG; the initial core of enthusiasts had been joined by several others anxious to support the group. Ernest and other central Alberta residents Charley Bird and Ted Pike were joined by a two carloads of Edmontonians on their way back from the Entomological Society of Alberta meetings in Waterton, and a couple more carloads came down from Edmonton. It took us a couple of hours to hammer out the bylaws, but with Dr. George Ball's advice ("proceed with caution") ringing in our ears, we signed the papers and voted in our founding executive: Gary Anweiler (President), Felix Sperling (Vice President), Greg Pohl (Secretary/Treasurer), and Dave Lawrie, Ernest Mengersen, Andrew Mitchell, and Chris Schmidt (Directors). As his first duty, Greg duly collected \$10 membership dues from all in attendance. After a couple of the bylaws were reworded to meet Alberta Registries requirements, the society was officially incorporated on December 8, 1999.



The logo was created in 2002, by Greg Pohl, based on an idea by Jim Troubridge.

Founding members of the Alberta Lepidopterists' Guild:

Gary Anweiler (Edmonton)

George Ball (Edmonton)

Charles Bird (Erskine)

Sherri Dunne (Edmonton)

David Lawrie (Edmonton)

Doug Macaulay (Edmonton)

Ernest Mengersen (Olds)

Andrew Mitchell (Edmonton)

Louis Morneau (Edmonton)

Ted Pike (Calgary)

Greg Pohl (Sherwood Park)

Chris Schmidt (Edmonton)

Danny Shpeley (Edmonton)

John Spence (Edmonton)

Felix Sperling (Edmonton)

Jan Volney (Edmonton)



This version of the logo was created for a T-shirt run in 2015.