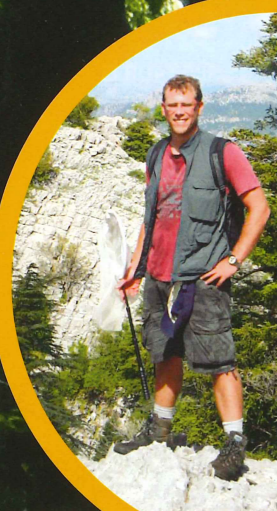
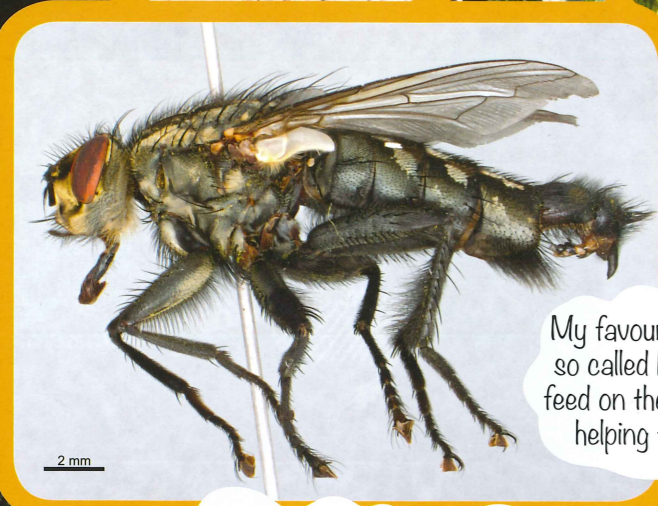


# ADVENTURES IN THE FIELD



Hi, I'm Daniel Whitmore and I help care for the Museum's fly collection. Last year, I travelled to Italy to collect some of my favourite flies.



There are about one million insect species in the world. Flies come in all shapes, colours and sizes and each species has an important job in nature. I became fascinated by flies whilst studying insects at university.

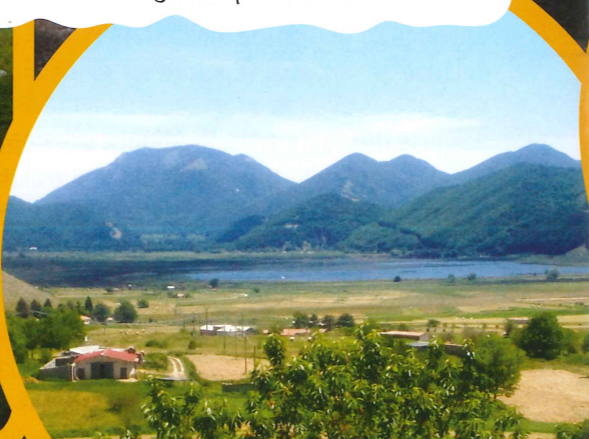
My favourite flies are flesh flies, so called because their maggots feed on the flesh of dead animals, helping to break them down.

Flesh flies are found everywhere. They are easy to collect using a special large insect net made of a fabric with very fine holes, but you do need to swing the net very fast to stop them from escaping.

Some flesh flies have an interesting habit of gathering at the top of hills, which makes them easier to find than other flies.

A few years ago I discovered that one of the most common European flesh flies looks a bit different in Italy. I thought it could be a whole new species that scientists were confusing for the common one because they look so similar.

I decided to catch these flies so I could study their DNA to work out if it was a new species. I packed my collecting gear and a few clothes and planned my Italian road trip from north to south along the Apennine Mountains.



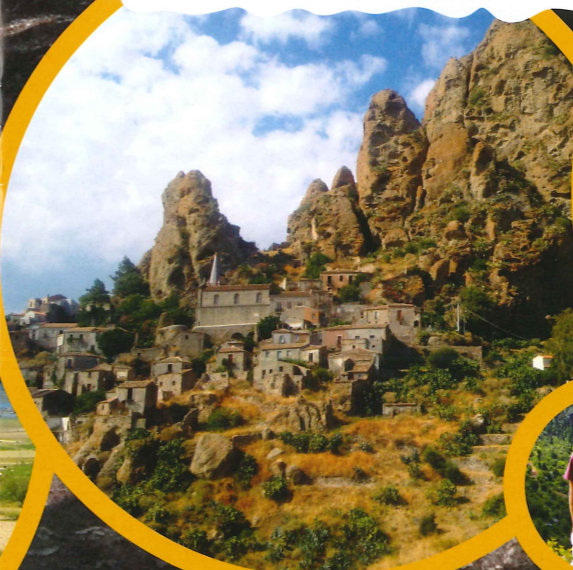
I was excited to go back to Italy. I first visited there on a summer holiday when I was eight years old. It was very hot compared to England and the air was full of the exciting smells of Mediterranean plants. I saw animals that I had never seen before, such as the European green lizard and the western whip snake. My parents liked it so much that we moved there, and I lived in Italy for many years.



Beginning my journey in Tuscany, I drove to the big, flat Po Plain, before slowly making my way to the tip of Italy's boot, collecting flies as I went. I put them in ethanol to preserve their DNA or pinned them to a special foam using insect pins.



I also went exploring, visiting the tiny abandoned village called Pentadattilo. The villagers were forced to leave in 1783 after it was hit by an earthquake. They built new homes further down the hillside and it has remained empty ever since.



Back at the Museum, I'm studying the DNA of the flies I collected to help solve the riddle of the mysterious Italian fly. Watch this space...

Flesh fly, western whip snake and European green lizard images courtesy of Wikipedia