

O21. Human proxies: entomological and taphonomic aspects of non-suspicious deaths for application in the forensic context

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This paper outlines the results of a pilot research project undertaken in Scotland between 2010 and 2011 that aimed to enhance post-mortem analysis in Scotland by the recovery, identification and preservation of invertebrates of forensic importance using standard international crime scene protocols, from human bodies whose deaths were not suspicious, and offer knowledge of these invertebrates and associated contextual and environmental data as a benchmark to inform interpretation in the forensic context.

As well as accumulating baseline forensic data concerning invertebrates for the geographical area of Lothian and Borders, other data, such as time, season, manner and cause of death was collected simultaneously. As the study involved empirical research of death scenes, human cadavers and the recovery of entomological specimens, the data is directly applicable to the forensic context and therefore of potential practical value to pathologists and forensic practitioners.

The acquired data and invertebrate specimens are being curated with a view to forming a reference collection of cadaver-attendant fauna to provide a teaching resource to aid understanding of insect ecology, identification techniques, taxonomy and invertebrate succession. The research data is also being made available to inform future forensic cases and as comparative material for research and teaching of crime scene personnel and students of the forensic sciences.

As the study coalesces several disciplinary approaches its strength lies in the potentially mutually reinforcing nature of the data and conclusions drawn from the research and its applicability in a educational and forensic context.