VOL. 1 · MAY 2026

SPPIRIT NEWSLETTER

Official Newsletter of the SPPIRIT Network

MAIN FEATURE

BRITISH SOCIETY FOR PARASITOLOGY 2026

The British Society for Parasitology (BSP) Spring Meeting 2026 was held at the University of Glasgow and hosted by the Glasgow Centre for Parasitology.

The meeting brought together researchers across parasitology to share recent advances and foster collaboration. Professor Lilach Sheiner and Dr. Joanne Power led the event and played a key role in its organisation and success.

A notable highlight was the conference branding, designed by Shannara Smith, a PhD student at the University of Glasgow. Her logo featured across conference materials, including t-shirts, bags, and the abstract booklet, and was widely appreciated for its creativity and quality.

Also in this issue:

Contributions: Mukul Rawat, Marketa Novotna (SPPIRIT Forum)

Professor Keith Matthews and Professor Andy Waters receive Career Scientific Achievement Award from the British Society of Parasitology

Professor Keith Matthews and Professor Andy Waters have received the Career Scientific Achievement Award from the British Society of Parasitology. The award recognises their outstanding and sustained contributions to parasitology research over many years.

Both have made significant advances in understanding parasite biology and host–pathogen interactions, shaping the direction of the field and influencing ongoing research. Their work has also supported and inspired the next generation of parasitologists.

This recognition highlights their long-term impact, leadership, and dedication to advancing parasitology and addressing key scientific challenges in the field.

KEITH MATTHEWS
UNIVERSITY OF
EDINBURGH

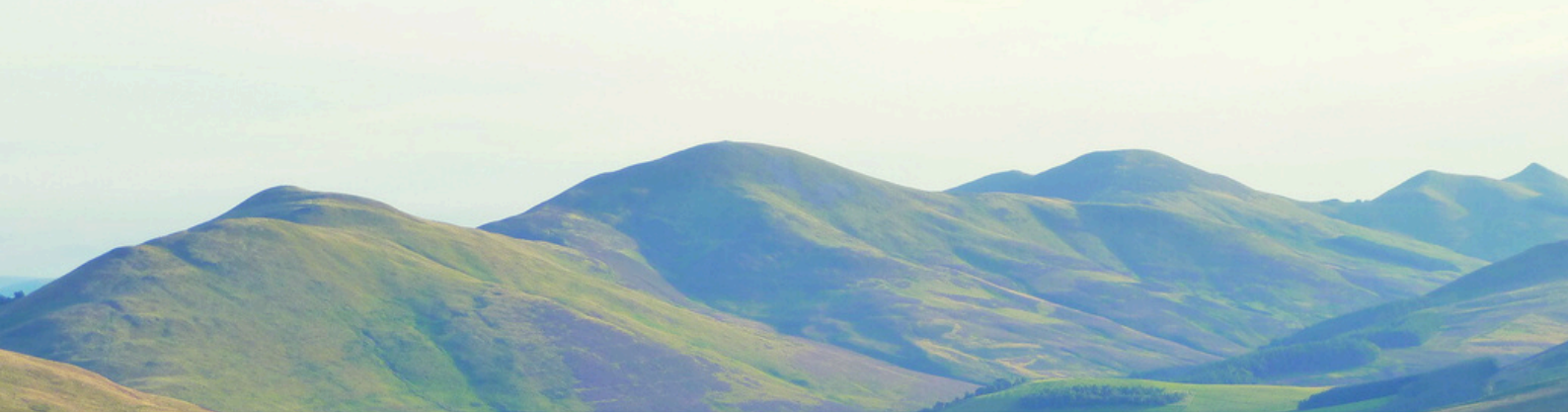
ANDY WATERS
UNIVERSITY OF
GLASGOW

SPPIRIT at BSP 2026

Alongside many SPPIRIT committee members volunteering at BSP and others presenting their work, SPPIRIT was also represented with a booth. The SPPIRIT booth provided an excellent platform to engage with researchers and students across the community.

The booth attracted strong interest, offering opportunities to share information about SPPIRIT initiatives, discuss ongoing research, and foster new collaborations. It also created a space for informal conversations, helping connect early-career researchers with the wider network.

Overall, the booth contributed to a vibrant and interactive conference atmosphere, highlighting the importance of community and collaboration in advancing parasitology research.



Awards and Recognitions

Prof. Sir Michael Ferguson

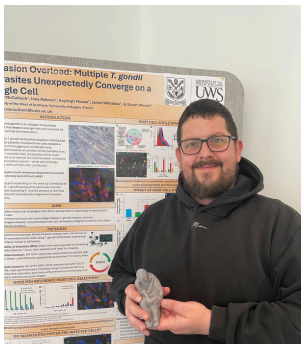
Congratulations to Professor Mike Ferguson on receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Scottish Life Sciences Conference and Awards, and on being honoured with the prestigious Leeuwenhoek Medal from the Royal Society last year.

Congratulations to Professor Susan Wyllie on her election to the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Congratulations to Anders Erlandson (University of Glasgow) on winning Best Oral Presentation at BSP 2026 for his work on *Schistosoma mansoni* infection dynamics, to committee member Anthony MacCulloch (University of the West of Scotland) for securing third prize in the poster category with his study on *Toxoplasma gondii* invasion, and to Kevin Kidambasi (University of Edinburgh) for receiving the Microbiology Society-sponsored prize for his work on *Trypanosoma congolense* transmission biology.

Prof. Susan Wyllie

Anders Erlandson



Anthony MacCulloch

Kevin Kidambasi

New committee member- Vivien Shek

Vivien completed her PhD in Immunoparasitology at the University of Dundee in 2024 under Henry McSorley, focusing on helminth immunomodulatory molecules.

She is now a postdoc in Andrew MacDonald's lab at the University of Edinburgh, studying how *Schistosoma mansoni* shapes gut immune responses. Her research examines the crosstalk between immune, epithelial, and stromal cells, with the goal of understanding how parasite-driven immune modulation can inform therapies for inflammatory disease.

HELMINTH ECO-HEALTH HUB LAUNCH

The BBSRC funded Helmint Eco-Health Hub has officially launched! This network will primarily support helminth research across the UK but membership is open to members from around the world.

The network will foster new UK and international collaborations, support future large grant applications (partly through issuing seed funding), publish position papers/review articles to influence policy and improve public awareness of helminth diseases/research.

Members will benefit from seed funding opportunities (for UK-based or partnered researchers), free annual in-person symposia (first meeting: 22–23 September 2026, Liverpool), regular online events, training days with a focus on early-career researchers (ECRs), and dedicated ECR networking activities.

The network will be guided by researchers at six research centres but we are seeking members from across the UK to quickly grow.

If you want to know more, please email us (helminthhubuk@qub.ac.uk)

Visit our website - https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/helminth-hub/ (new website in progress).

Written by - Dr Paul McCusker
Helminth Eco-Health Hub Network Coordinator

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council

SPPIRIT FORUM

On 20 March, the SPPIRIT Forum hosted a “Get to Know Your Parasite” session with three speakers covering different areas of parasite biology and research approaches.

Jack Hanna (University of Glasgow) discussed *Cryptosporidium* and *Toxoplasma*, Rebecca Edgar (University of Dundee) presented on *Plasmodium*, and Jennifer Ann Black (Universidade de São Paulo) spoke on kinetoplastids and compared research environments in Brazil and Europe.

The session featured lively discussion, and the next SPPIRIT Forum will be a journal club with an invited speaker in June.

INSIDE THE JOURNEY

ANDREW MACLEAN

MRC RESEARCH FELLOW
INSTITUTE FOR IMMUNOLOGY AND INFECTION RESEARCH
SCHOOL OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Can you briefly introduce yourself?

I'm a molecular parasitologist who recently (March 2025) established my research group at the University of Edinburgh. My lab focuses on how intracellular parasites, such as *Toxoplasma gondii*, acquire nutrients from host cells, with a particular interest in sulfur-containing metabolites. Prior to this, I spent six years at the University of Glasgow studying parasite mitochondria. During that time, I was also involved in SPPIRIT, which proved valuable when applying for independent positions.

Was there a defining moment that confirmed this path?

As I said above, there wasn't one particular moment that started it. My first first-author postdoc paper was an important point, as it was a project I initiated by applying techniques from my PhD to a parasite system. It showed me that I was able to have an original (ish) idea and follow- through on it, which gave me confidence going forward.

What kept you motivated during difficult phases?

Motivation is a constant issue for anyone going through a tough period in the lab where experiments aren't working out. Fortunately, in the lab there are a few different projects on the go, so there is usually something positive to distract me when other things aren't working. It's also important to have other things outside the lab to enjoy, to keep you going and look forward to when progress is slow.

What inspired you to start your own research group?

There wasn't a single defining moment, I've consistently aimed for an independent research career since university. I've worked across diverse model systems, including mammals, yeast, plants, and protists, and I'm particularly interested in unusual biochemistry beyond textbook models. Parasitology offers a great balance of exploring unique biology while contributing to improving human health.

Most exciting part of running your own lab?

The most exciting part of running my own lab has been the unpredictability of research and the freedom to explore new directions. Compared to being a postdoc, being a PI allows greater flexibility to follow curiosity and pursue unexpected opportunities. For example, a brief conversation at a conference led to a collaboration on a topic I hadn't worked on since my PhD, outside my current research focus. Revisiting mitochondrial disease and mammalian systems required some learning, but it has been both refreshing and highly rewarding.

How do you manage pressure, uncertainty, and workload as a new PI?

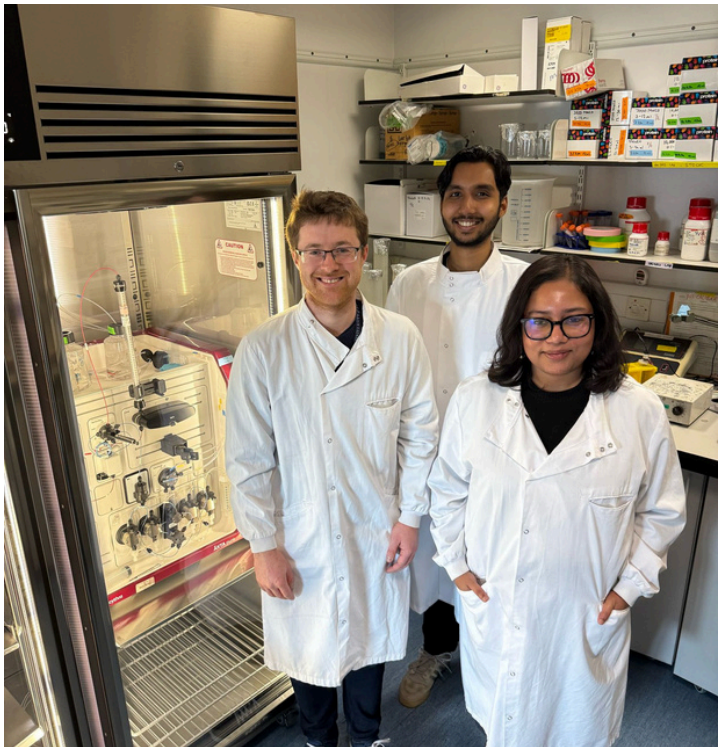
The pressure, responsibility, and workload have increased significantly since my postdoc. I prioritise sleep and exercise as non-negotiable, as maintaining physical and mental health is essential for handling stress. Being well rested makes it easier to manage unexpected deadlines. I also focus on efficient time management, using a colour-coded calendar to stay organised and keep track of tasks.

Advice for early career researchers?

Start thinking about independence early, as it can take years to find the right host institute, build your CV, define a research niche, and identify suitable funding opportunities. Developing a strong niche is key—this could come from expanding a side project or combining skills and interests from different stages of your career. Bringing together unique techniques, questions, or model systems can create a solid foundation. Most importantly, make a positive and informed choice, an independent research career is challenging, so it should be something you genuinely want to pursue, not something you feel obliged to do.

What has been the toughest hurdle in the first year of independence?

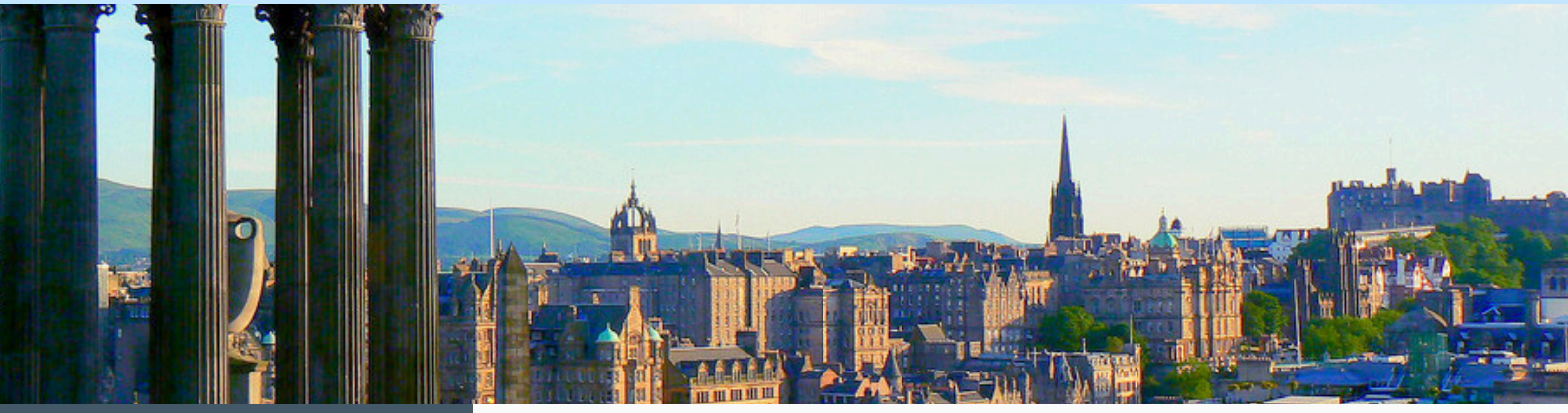
The toughest hurdle has been establishing workflows and ways of working in the lab, it takes much longer than expected. Unlike joining an established lab, setting up your own means building everything from scratch. This involves many small but essential decisions, from lab notebooks and safety procedures to ordering systems and standard protocols. My first lab member was a great help in setting things up, but the process still required far more time and effort than initially anticipated.



Andrew (left) during his postdoctoral days at the University of Glasgow, pictured with Amiyo Haider (centre, now a PhD student in Andrew's lab) and Shikha (right), another postdoctoral fellow.

In this new section, we will share inspiring stories from early-career researchers who have recently started their independent journeys, aiming to motivate those considering academic paths. We welcome your feedback and suggestions on topics you'd like to see covered in the newsletter.

Email us: sppirit.network@gmail.com



RESEARCH FROM OUR NETWORK

HAVE A NEW PAPER TO SHARE? GET IT FEATURED IN OUR NEWSLETTER — EMAIL US!

RECENT PARASITOLOGY PAPERS

Ridgway, Melanie, et al. (2026) PLoS Pathogens. Acoziborole resistance associated mutations in *Trypanosoma brucei* CPSF3.

Ridgway, Melanie, et al. (2026) PLoS Pathogens. Genetic origins and proteomic consequences of kinetoplast loss in trypanosomes

Simone (left) and Cesar (right)

Altmann, S., Mendoza Martinez, C., et al. (2026) Nature Communications. Decoding efficacy and resistance space at a drug binding site

At Dundee University Life Sciences, we developed a scalable multiplexed oligo-targeting gene editing approach to study and predict drug resistance. By integrating high-throughput editing, sequencing, structural biology, and computational modelling, we mapped hundreds of mutations around a proteasome drug target in African trypanosomes, identifying over 100 resistance-associated variants. Our findings show that resistance is constrained by fitness, structural requirements, and mutability, and the tools we developed can accelerate drug discovery, resistance surveillance, and the design of more durable therapies.

Kyriaki Neophytou

Neophytou, Kyriaki., et al. (2026) EMBO Reports. An Argonaute protein traffics from nematode to mouse and is a vaccine against parasitic nematodes

Gene regulation is controlled by Argonaute proteins and small RNAs inside cells, but their role outside cells is not well understood. In this study, we show that the mouse parasite *Heligmosomoides bakeri* secretes an extracellular Argonaute protein (exWAGO) that carries small RNAs and can enter host cells. Vaccination with exWAGO provides partial protection against infection and produces antibodies that block its uptake by host cells. Because exWAGO is conserved across related parasites, it may be a potential vaccine target for human and livestock infections.

EVENT FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Neglected Vectors & Vector-Borne Diseases Symposium
12 May 2026 at The Roslin Institute

2nd Biennial Cryptosporidium Meeting Edinburgh
24-26 May 2026

BioMalPar XXII: biology and pathology of the malaria parasite
27- 29 May 2026

GRC Biology of Host-Parasite Interactions
7-12 June 2026

18th International Congress on Toxoplasmosis (Brazil)
14-17 June 2026

16th International Congress of Parasitology (ICOPA XVI)
15-21 August 2026

POSITIONS

PARASITOLOGY VACANCIES

Postdoctoral Research Associate - Molecular Microbiology
Washington University Medical Campus
Dr. Usheer Kanjee Lab

Postdoctoral Research Associate
Department of Biology at Texas State University, San Marcos, TX
Dr. Sumit Mukherjee Lab

Postdoctoral Research Associate - Drug discovery and resistance in eukaryotic parasites
Florida State University
Dr. Anthony Ruberto Lab

Interested in volunteering with SPPIRIT?

We'd love to hear from you!
Email us at: sppirit.network@gmail.com
Follow us on X and Bluesky for the latest updates @SPPIRITnetwork