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COVER ILLUSTRATION: THE WELL-DRESSED ENTOMOLOGIST

Ronald S. Wilkinson

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This issue's cover illustration is the frontispiece to a classic work of eighteenth-century entomology, Moses Harris' *The Aurelian*, which began to appear in parts in 1758 and was published entire in 1766 (Lisney, 1960). Harris, who was the illustrator as well as the author, pictures the contemporary entomologist with part of his array of collecting equipment. (By tradition, the frontispiece is supposed to be a self-portrait.)

Until relatively recent times, proper style and deportment were more important in the entomologist's choice of collecting costume than the comfort and adaptability to the needs of the field which most of us now demand. When class standing could usually be discerned by clothing and behavior, entomologists who were of the higher classes were expected and naturally wished to dress the part (and most entomologists *were* gentlemen or middle-class persons who affected similar modes of dress, in an age when science was not yet really a popular pursuit). Entomology did not have a broad popular appeal until the mid-nineteenth century, and the prior result, at least as it affected field dress, can be traced in many other illustrated works than *The Aurelian*; a few examples pictured in earlier issues of this journal have been taken from eighteenth and nineteenth-century France (Wilkinson, 1967, 1968, 1969) and nineteenth-century England (Wilkinson, 1966).

Despite obvious shortcomings, at least some benefits were gained from more formal clothing in the field. If servants were not present to carry collecting equipment, some of it could be placed in the very commodious pockets of our ancestors' coats. Especially well formed for this were the "chip-boxes" illustrated in Harris' frontispiece and used for pinning specimens for the journey home; in *The Aurelian* he directs that they should be "lin'd within-side, Top and Bottom with Cork of about a Quarter of an Inch or somewhat less in Thickness, which should be pasted over with White Paper." (Before the days of rapid chemical agents, insects were often pinned into these boxes alive, especially those such as Lepidoptera which would not benefit from being killed in spirits, although as early as the seventeenth century, the English naturalist James Petiver advocated 'pinching' butterflies.)

The clap-net, the usual eighteenth-century English device for capturing flying insects, is illustrated in Harris' frontispiece, one folded in the lap of the seated collector, and another 'in action' at the left. According to Harris, the net could be concealed, "one of the Sticks of which may be used as a Walking-stick, and the other, may be made to take in Half or put to gather at Pleasure, by a Brass Socket in the Middle, and carried convenient . . . in a Canvas Bag under the Coat." The reason is obvious; the eighteenth-century entomologist was as sensitive to the laughter of the uninitiated and the scorn of small boys as many of his later colleagues. The necessity of keeping the net under the coat was not new to Harris' time; when James Petiver's correspondent Jezreel Jones collected at Cadiz in 1701, he wrote that he had been "suspected for one that studys witchcraft, necromancy and a madman" by the natives (British Museum, Sloane MS. 4063, f. 76r).

The use of the collapsible clap-net, so convenient to the entomologist of the eighteenth century, was described by Harris; "On seeing the Insect come flying toward you, you must endeavour to meet it, or lay yourself in its Way, so that it may come rather to the right Side of you, as if you intended to let it pass; then having the Net in your Hands, incline it down to your right Side, turning yourself a little about to the Right, ready for the Stroke; not unlike the Attitude in which a Batman in the game at Cricket stands, when he is ready to strike the Ball, only his Bat is lifted up, but your Nets must incline rather downward: When the Fly is within your Reach, strike at it forcibly, receiving the Fly in the Middle of your Net, as it were between the two Sockets of the Benders, that being the Part of the Net which best receives the Insect; . . . Having closed the Net with the Insect in it, immediately grasp both the Sticks in your left Hand, and with your Right lay hold of the bottom Part of your Net, pulling the Gause

pretty tight, giving that also to the Gripe of the left Hand, this confines your Fly on one Side, and bringing the Top of your Forefinger on his Body, and with your Thumb on the other, squeeze him gently, then lay your Nets on the Ground, and take out your fly by a Horn or a Leg, and holding him in an advantageous Manner by the Body in your left Hand, run a Pin thro' the thick Part of the Body, or Chest, perpendicularly, and put it in your Box."

Despite the onslaught of the bag-net, the clap-net was used by some die-hard traditionalists as late as the end of the nineteenth century. And, there was another sort of folding net, which appealed to the shy Victorian collector and remained in vogue well after 1900; it was an especially designed bag-net which flattened out neatly and in its retracted form looked very much like a closed umbrella. The hesitant entomologist could reach the collecting site in safety, change his supposed umbrella into a net, and disguise the device again for the journey home. The clap-net has apparently perished; diligent searching by a number of investigators has revealed no surviving examples, but two well-preserved folding bag-nets of the umbrella type, with differing handles meant to simulate those of the contemporary umbrella, are in the author's collection of historical apparatus; early examples of such nets are among the rarest of entomological antiques.

The well-dressed entomologist had other ruses to conceal his net. Although a *real* umbrella could hardly be used to collect flying insects, it could be put to good use when beating trees and shrubs (indeed, this was one of the sources of our modern beating tray). The young Raymond Ditmars, who would become a distinguished herpetologist but was then an assistant in entomology at the American Museum of Natural History, attended a field meeting of the New York Entomological Society at which the prominent business man Otto Dientz "was attired in a gray summer suit and looked as well tailored as if he had stepped from a bandbox. That was always the way with Dientz. He could collect all day, flick the dust from his shoes with a handkerchief, and look ready to step into a smart hotel lobby. . . . On all his trips he carried a tan silk umbrella, slipped into a cover which made it look like a cane. Arriving at the area of operation he would open his umbrella, stroll leisurely along a wood road, and coming to certain bushes invert the umbrella, then tap the branches with a stick" (Ditmars, 1932). Banks (1909) pictures an umbrella with a jointed handle, and describes its use in beating.

On the same field trip in the eighteen-nineties, Ditmars noted seemingly netless lepidopterists whisking small nets from their hip pockets. Today, the English firm of Watkins and Doncaster will supply a very convenient bag-net with a socket handle of several inches and a ring of spring steel which will coil neatly (the bag being folded) to fit in the hip pocket. Such nets appeal to some who, like Harris' collector, do not have the aplomb of such entomological showmen as W. J. Holland, whose account of a youthful pursuit of a magnificent *Speyeria diana* (Cramer) past the well-populated windows of a girls' boarding school is familiar from being printed in *The Butterfly Book* (1898), but who demonstrated the same uncanny fearlessness in later years; in *To the River Plate and Back* (1913) he related that at a formal dinner which he attended as one of the honored guests, "the attention of the throng of fashionably dressed ladies and gentlemen was attracted to a large moth, brilliantly colored, which came fluttering about the tables. I slipped into the hall and seized my net, and as the gay insect came by, with a quick stroke captured it; I was greeted with a salvo of applause from the assembled guests." One wonders what the reaction would have been had he missed the moth.

As for dress, at least some concession was allowed as early as 1826, when the fourth volume appeared of Kirby and Spence's *An Introduction to Entomology*, then the standard general work in English. The authors recommended that "the plain fustian jacket with side and other pockets used by English sportsmen will very well suit your purpose; only let the pockets be sufficiently ample." Styles had changed considerably, and one need only see a plate of fashion from the era of Beau Brummell to appreciate the wisdom of Kirby and Spence. The authors thought it necessary to reassure the timorous collector; "With all your implements about you, you will perhaps at first be stared and grinned at by the vulgar; but they will soon become reconciled to you, and regard you no more than your brethren of the angle and of the gun. Things that are

unusual are too often esteemed ridiculous; and the philosopher whose object is to collect and study the wonderful works of his Creator, is often regarded by the ignorant plebeian as little short of a madman." Cold comfort indeed!

As we know from other sources, all collectors did not discard more formal attire for the purposes of the field; an earlier cover illustration (Wilkinson, 1966) provides an example which seems rather extreme by modern standards. And, the tall-hatted entomologist did not fail to improve upon his new appendage. As early as 1690, Petiver suggested that specimens could be carried by pinning them to the hat (Sloane MS. 3332, f. 2r-v); the new commodiousness of that article in the nineteenth century led Kirby and Spence (1826) to hint that "the cavity of a modern hat, if lined with cork, might be made a very useful receptacle for these animals in a long excursion," although considering the possible popular reaction, they could not "recommend such an exhibition in a civilized region." William Swainson (1840) wrote that when in tropical countries the entomologist would often "be compelled to bring home the remainder of his game stuck both on the inside and outside of his hat" when other containers were filled, but by mid-century, collecting dress was rapidly changing, partially due to growing popular participation. There would always be those like Otto Dientz who aimed for well-tailored ideals wherever he went, and many European collectors wear coat and tie in the field today. Most of us have lesser sartorial standards, but perhaps we are at least more comfortable.

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