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FREEZING LEPIDOPTERA FOR TEMPORARY STORAGE

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Frequently the lepidopterist is faced with the problem of mounting an inordinately large number of specimens taken on a field trip. Most butterflies and larger moths may of course be pinned or papered and relaxed at leisure for mounting, but this method does not work well with smaller moths, which even if pinned immediately should be mounted quickly before drying occurs. Even a specimen as large as an average-sized Noctuid is not really a satisfactory subject for spreading after drying and relaxing. The recent republication of Tindale's 1962 observations on the ability of chlorocresol to retard drying (Tindale, 1973) has again called attention to this very useful method, but all investigators do not have ready access to chlorocresol. Another method of retarding the drying of specimens during storage is that of freezing.

The procedure is relatively simple. Specimens which will receive identical locality labels can be packed together after collection in wide-mouthed screw top bottles or cylindrical cardboard cartons with snugly fitting tops. Larger insects should be carefully layered between loosely fitting discs of absorbent cotton (cotton wool) or similar material, and ideally should not touch each other. Pertinent data should be written on or affixed to the containers, and if some time will occur before freezing, chlorocresol crystals may be introduced temporarily. Very small specimens should not be layered, and chlorocresol is hardly necessary if the insects will be frozen promptly upon returning from a day's or evening's collecting.

The containers may be stored in a freezer or the freezing compartment of a refrigerator. Cardboard cartons can be wrapped in aluminum foil to maximize retention of moisture. The writer has kept Noctuidae frozen for several months according to this method, and is now collecting data for a study of the effect of varying periods of freezing. Upon opening the containers, the specimens thawed very quickly, were perfectly relaxed, and appeared as fresh as when killed. The practice is ideal for entomologists who have little time for mounting, as the cartons may be removed from the freezer individually and their contents thawed as occasion permits. Even the collector who captures relatively few specimens at a time will find the method useful if he does not wish to attend to mounting the next day, and students of certain other orders may well want to adapt freezing to their own needs.

LITERATURE CITED

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