

# The Great Lakes Entomologist

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Volume 7  
Number 1 -- Spring 1974 *Number 1 -- Spring*  
1974

Article 4

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March 1974

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### Recommended Citation

Wilkinson, Ronald S. 1974. "The Genesis of A.R. Grote's "Collecting Noctuidae by Lake Erie"," *The Great Lakes Entomologist*, vol 7 (1)

Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/tgle/vol7/iss1/4>

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**THE GENESIS OF A. R. GROTE'S  
"COLLECTING NOCTUIDAE BY LAKE ERIE"**

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Since its serial publication in *The Entomologist's Record* during 1895, Augustus Radcliffe Grote's "Collecting Noctuidae by Lake Erie" has become a minor classic of entomological literature. This brief but compelling reminiscence of two and a half months under canvas has long been considered one of the finest of the many accounts which have been written about the pursuit of Lepidoptera, and it is especially treasured by those collectors who, like Grote at Lake Erie, have used the method of 'sugaring' to capture moths. Surely much of the essay's appeal is due to Grote's facile and unusually colorful literary style; as P. B. M. Allan (1948) has observed, "it is given to but few of us to paint like that."

Although Grote's account was not published until 1895, his spring sojourn near Lake Erie dated from almost two decades earlier. He did not mention the year in his essay, but evidence in several of his other papers indicates that it was 1877. Grote was then director of the museum of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences (Wilkinson, 1971), and in his spare time was collecting widely in the Buffalo area to add to the museum's holdings and augment his own collection of Lepidoptera, then on deposit at the Society. The local list of his friend E. P. Van Duzee (1891) gives some idea of the scope of Grote's efforts near Buffalo, although the Grote collection had gone to the British Museum long before Van Duzee's paper, and its data were not available to him.

Toward the end of April, 1877, Grote made his way from Buffalo southwest through Erie County to Evans Township, where upon "the inner of the two over-lapping, high and wooded, sandy ridges which run parallel with the south shore of Lake Erie," he pitched his tent "before the new green had fully clothed the trees" (Grote, 1895). Although Grote did not indicate the exact locality of his camp, references to the nearby town of Angola and the presence of a creek enable identification of the approximate area on a map (Fig. 1). We may suppose from the evidence he gives that his routine was fairly regular; each evening he chose a succession of trees and 'sugared' them with a mixture of beer and molasses, afterwards making his rounds with a bull's-eye lantern, net and wide-mouthed collecting bottles with corks, periodically emptying his captures into a larger cyanide-charged store jar and, after the late nineteenth-century fashion, fully mounting his moths in camp the next day.

The bare scientific chronology of his activities gives little indication of the flavor of the essay which he eventually wrote. Grote's first captures were from such early genera as *Lithophane* and *Eupsilia*, and on the first of May he took his first *Habrosyne scripta* (Gosse) (Thyatiridae), "a tiny three-cornered bit of fluffy pinkness"; it was followed by another Thyatirid, *Pseudothyatira cymatophoroides* (Guenée), of which he captured a good series. As the early spring Noctuids gave way to those of May, *Apatela*, *Agrotis*, *Mamestra*, *Xylena* and other genera appeared, and he became much more particular as his spreading-boards filled. On June 8 Grote, who could not long withhold information from his favorite journals, sent a brief communication from his lakeshore locality to *The Canadian Entomologist*, announcing that "Entomology can be pursued with great success when camping out," and listing fifteen species of Lepidoptera which he had recently taken at bait, including four Sphingids. Grote was especially charmed by *Darapsa versicolor* (Harris), of which he took one and saw another, quoting Marcus Aurelius to characterize the moth: "that which is beautiful is beautiful in itself; the praise of man adds nothing to it" (Grote, 1877a).

In June *Septis lignicolora* (Guenée) and *S. arctica* (Boisduval) were especially common, the latter becoming "a decided nuisance" (Grote, 1895), and they were soon joined by a number of Deltoids, which especially interested Grote. Of these he took a *Zanclognatha* which at first appeared to be a new species, but he later decided it to be an extraordinary variety of his own *laevigata*. Like many American collectors after him,

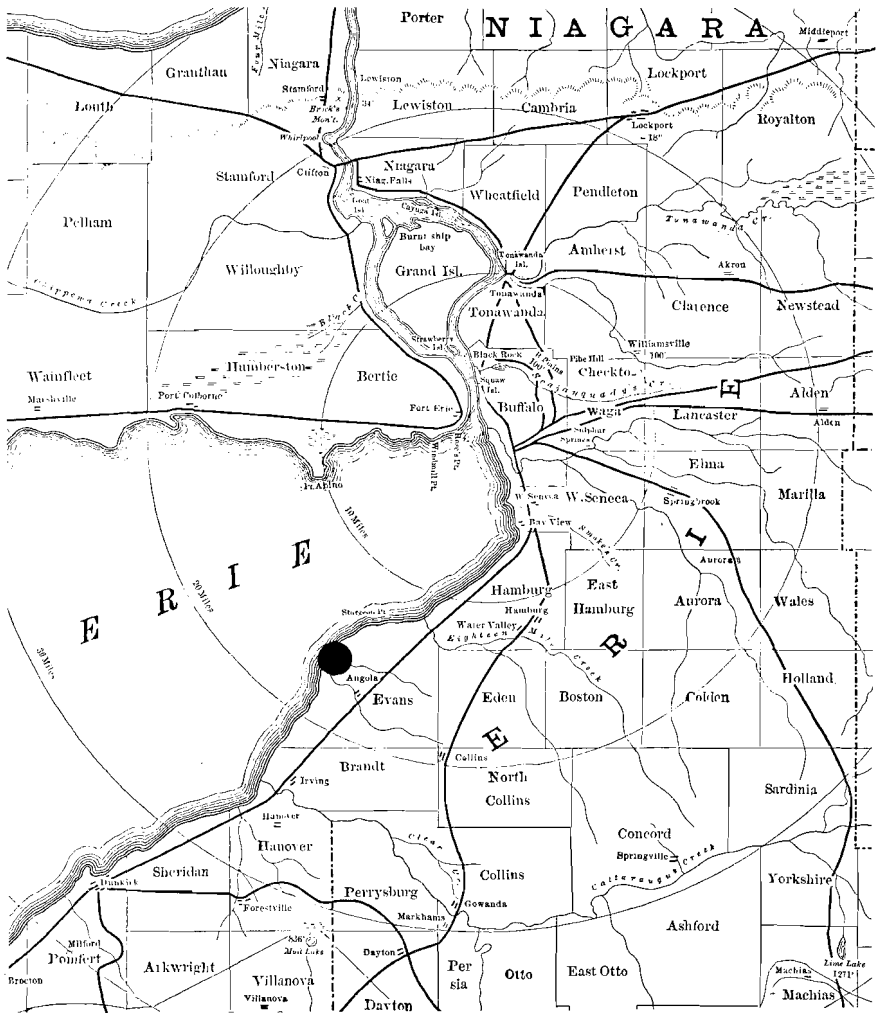


Fig. 1. The approximate location of A. R. Grote's 1877 camp near Lake Erie. From a nineteenth-century map of the Buffalo, N.Y. region, in the collections of the Library of Congress.

Grote was amused by the antics of flying squirrels at his bait, and he captured several with his net and kept them in a box-cage for several days. The genus *Catocala*, an old favorite of Grote's, began to appear in late June, and in July the underwings "swarmed like bats" about his camp. Beginning with *clintoni* Grote, he took eighteen species of *Catocala* in his restricted locality, over half the number reported by Van Duzee (1891) for the greater Buffalo region.

As a happy finale to his expedition, Grote captured at the light of his tent some Noctuids, then rare in collections, which did not come to his bait; he considered the best to be *Panthea acronyctoides* (Walker), *Oncocnemis riparia* Morrison and *Plusia thyatryoides* Guenée. In mid-July he had to return to Buffalo with his specimens and notes, and the first of a half-dozen of his captures to be described as new species was

reported to *The Canadian Entomologist* in October; it was *Pallachira* (now *Hormisa*) *bivittata* (Grote, 1877b). In the same month he revisited the site near Angola, and later described the scene in a passage which well illustrates the style of "Collecting Noctuidae by Lake Erie": "It was a lovely late October day, the leaves all ripely floating to the ground amid a stillness broken only by the noise of dropping chestnut burrs. The air itself was saturated with hazy light, the memory of summer days. Some autumn Spanner moths were lazily fluttering about, coloured like the yellow leaves. . . ." (Grote, 1895).

The vivid language of "Collecting Noctuidae by Lake Erie" might suggest that Grote's essay was written soon after the event, but this was not the case, for in it he quoted passages from an unidentified work, the "latest. . . on the British Musuem 'types'," in reality John B. Smith's *Catalogue. . . of the. . . lepidopterous superfamily Noctuidae, found in boreal America* (Washington, 1893), continuing his protracted disagreement with Smith over Francis Walker's types and his own names. He attacked the new catalogue for "the animus which has guided the whole enquiry, and which has resulted in cutting down the nearly 800 species of North American *Noctuidae*, originally described by me, to about 650." Grote, who had left the United States in 1884, was residing in Bremen, Germany when Smith's catalogue was published (Wilkinson, 1971), and he first referred to it in print in his "Notes on nocturnal Lepidoptera," in the March, 1894 *Canadian Entomologist*. Grote's censure of Smith in "Collecting Noctuidae by Lake Erie" indicates that the essay was written in 1894 or early 1895.

Grote's mood during his German years often turned to reverie, and at times he recalled his happier American experiences as would a man in exile; the word itself even appeared in his publications (e.g. Grote, 1886), although the decision to emigrate was his own. As early as 1886 he had recalled his old camp, and written that "by the Lake at Buffalo, Time, winged with happiness passed by and, feigning that he would be thus everywhere, lured me away. . . the ridge by the Lake side where, of a June evening, I caught the rare 'Particolored Hawk' (*Ampelophaga versicolor*) I would also have remembered out of my own experiences, the Canada shore in the distance and all about me the lovely scenery of Western New York" (Grote, 1886). When he finally put his memories to paper, quite probably Grote had his 1877 notes at hand, as the specimens mentioned in the essay had long since left his possession, and even his unusual sense of recollection could hardly account for the precision of detail. Transformed by Grote's literary skill, the result has given delight to those who have had access to the original in *The Entomologist's Record*, or have read the abridgement in Patrick Matthews' *The Pursuit of Moths and Butterflies* (London, 1957).

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