

## PRACTICAL BUGWATCHING

by AL GLASS\*

For years we've heard about bird-watchers. Now there's a new kind of watcher — the bugwatcher. Bugs are not as easy to watch as birds which may account for the fact that there are no bugwatching clubs (there are of course many learned entomological societies). Some insects such as crickets and cicadas are "vocal" but most go about their business in a more or less silent fashion (at least to our ears). Birds, on the other hand, are noted for song.

A birdwatcher and her/his binoculars are seldom far apart. If binoculars are symbolic of birdwatching, let me advocate that a magnifying glass be symbolic of bugwatching. A bugwatcher does not go madly dashing about the countryside waving a butterfly net to acquire a good selection of "cabinet specimens". Instead he wants to pry into the secret lives of insects to learn of their fascinating ways.

The bugwatcher does his collecting with a camera. Photographing bugs can be quite a challenge especially if they are to be photographed "wild and free". There exists a group of "nature photographers" who actually take pictures of dead insects — for shame! Some people advocate putting the insects into a refrigerator to "slow 'em down". How much more fun it is to stalk insects. A useful set-up for capturing insects on film is the combination of a 105 mm. lens, bellows unit and electronic flash. This allows you to fill a good portion of the picture with the subject and the flash gives good depth-of-field and stopping of action. This method has proven to be very effective in photographing butterflies.

One place you will often see the modern bugwatcher is in a flower

patch. Here he can see and study beautiful creatures like the hummingbird moth, bee fly, and syrphid fly (a fly that looks like a wasp). In the flower patch the bugwatcher will be astonished at the various kinds of mimicry. You think you're looking at a wasp when actually it's a moth. Mimicry is the protective similarity of one species with another. There are examples of one of the two species being distasteful and where both species have similar warnings. Look for bugs that resemble ants, moths that resemble wasps and beetles that resemble bumblebees. After you get to know a little about this "masquerade party" you will want to impress your friends. Pick up a syrphid fly on the end of your finger and show them how you can pick up a *wasp* and not get stung. You can be like one naturalist who found a "beastie" and proudly announced, "Watch me pick up this *wasp*." In his smug confidence he thought to himself, "Heh! Heh! They think it's a wasp but it's only a fly." Right in middle of explaining the difference between a wasp and a fly to a gathering of people the naturalist was stung on the finger. His finger wasn't the only part of him that turned red.

Bugwatchers are very fond of following ants about and trying to make some sense of what appears to be chaos. If you take up "anting" don't give up in despair; just remember it takes a lot of patience. In the summer a good place to look for ants is on young cottonwood trees where you will frequently find them "milking" aphids. You will watch in fascination as the ants stroke the aphids to obtain the sweet liquid called honeydew. Understanding ants may lead you to a new kinship with nature.

We can't fight bugs — there are over a million different kinds! Only a few of these million could be called real pests and with a little understanding maybe we could learn to love the rest.

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