

Entomology

By Serena Nicoll

I have learned many things in entomology like how to catch butterflies, how to hold a net, the process of getting the insect ready for the display and how to beat the bushes to find insects. The trick to catching butterflies is to wait until the butterfly lands and then sneak up and drop the net over the butterfly. The same thing works for dragonflies.

The way to hold a proper net, not one of the small handled ones that won't catch anything, is to hold the middle of the handle in one hand and hold the end of the fabric in the other, so you can use the method of sneaking up and dropping the net on the insect.

This is what you have to do afterward to kill the insect: Get the insect to jump or fly to the top of the net and then very carefully gather up the fabric around the insect until it can't flutter around and break its wings. Then you must have a prepped killing jar to put the insect in. The killing jar consists of a layer of cotton balls and then a piece of cardboard on top so the insect does not get cotton in its mouth. Then you spray ether into the jar right before you put the insect in. After the insect is dead, you have to spread the insect. For cicadas, locusts, and praying mantis, you spread the right side only. For butterflies and moths, you spread both sides of the wings. First you pin the insect in the middle of the thorax on a spreading board. (Beetles, however, get pinned off to the right.) Then you carefully slide the front wing into a right angle and the bottom wing barely touching the front one. Then you have to spread the legs, and believe me, that is the hardest part! You get its legs into the position for standing and then you wait until rigamortis sets in.

You have to type up 2 labels. The first one has to have the insect's name, where found, date, and collector's name. The second one has the order. After that the insect is ready to go in the case.

Before I learned to beat bushes, I had to learn the different types of nets. The net with see-through fabric is used for catching butterflies, bees, and dragon flies. The net that has solid fabric is used for beetles and true bugs. The way to beat the bushes is easy! You sweep the net back and forth over the bushes for a little bit and then you see if you have got anything in the net. If not, you move on to a different section and if you have, you put it in the killing jar.

Here are some tips for those of you who are interested: Dragonflies are super fast in the summer because of the sun, so it is wiser if you wait until fall to catch them. Any other insect you can catch in the summer. If the insect is fresh out of the killing jar, it is easier to spread. When pinning ladybugs



you have to pin them off to the side, otherwise their wings don't stay together. When you are labeling the insect, if the male and females look different, be sure to list which one it is. Do not try and catch insects while they are flying. Sometimes if you find a caterpillar you should look up the type and raise it so you don't have to go chasing a butterfly. You could also use entomology as a photography project. For example if you were raising a caterpillar, you could take some pictures of it and then exhibit them!

I hope this helps those of you who want to start on entomology!