

Chapter IV

Lucky Fall Botanical Garden Near Death Experience

Water Please! Exploring the Bot. Gar. Tonight's Moth

Blacklights. They're like having a child, or pet, or something. You have to take care of them and it really impedes your freedom. The blacklights ran last night, and although the macaques seem to be leaving them alone, we still need to service them every morning, as the battery packs need to be retrieved and recharged. We're heading to the botanical garden today, but it's still a slog up the hill after breakfast, which means the longer hike takes place in a slightly hotter part of the day (although it's not the couple degree difference that counts, angle of the sun is more important). Why not service the traps before breakfast? Because early morning is a time spent pinning and labeling specimens from the day before (at least for me, most everyone else collects only into alcohol and doesn't worry with dry specimens). The dragons tend to take a bit of time, too, as each is placed in its own individually labeled envelope. In Thailand the specimens of the day were treated that night, but that was because we sought shelter at a reasonable hour and didn't have blacklights to attend.

Up the hill we went. The bag on the furthest light was securely taped to a square rim that was securely taped to the metal cone. However, sometime during the night, there

occurred a horrific structural failure whereby the rim separated from the cone, and bag

and all came tumblin' down. Luckily the whole thing fell straight down, so not a specimen was lost. And it appears that the light got to run a while, as there were quite a few specimens in the bag. So a rather tame calamity



A Rather Tame Calamity



Spider in there?

The hike to the Botanical Garden takes about 20 minutes, and it's probably on the order of a mile, maybe a mile and a quarter distance. It's rather warm, not sprinting weather, and there will be a thunderstorm in the afternoon. Taking this into account means that a trek back for lunch basically destroys any hope of any real collecting

that could be done in the garden. So we arranged to not have to come back for lunch at noon. The Americans (even I) were happy to skip lunch (I had hidden some snacks about my person), but our gracious hosts insisted that they would have it delivered. So off we went, a party of 13, to the garden to do some collecting. We took the road, which winds back and forth like a lazy snake, and watched for bugs the whole way there. I spied some great blister beetles, black with a bright orange pronotum, in a culvert on the side of the road. Matt was intrepid enough to jump over and get them.



Regal 'Piller

I've been without fizzy drinks for a while now, just water and the occasional 3 in 1 coffee (No way to cool it down, so had to be served hot). Chris guaranteed me that there would be a small visitors center with, if not an actual vending machine, at least a small cooler with drinks.



The inability to reclamate can take all the pep out of a body.

Guaranteed. His word. Scout's honor. Etc. So I'm really looking forward to maybe a Pepsi, or at the very least, a Coke. On we trek, anticipation speeding my weary feet forward. We came to the official advisory sign of the park, which stated that there should be: No Entertainment, No Dumping Rubbish, No Poisoning Aquarum, and No Illegal Reclamation.

The official visitors center of the Botanical Garden is a large open air semicircle with benches all around. On the right hand side there is a small cubical for the attendant to set within. No vending machines, no coolers, not even -we were to later find out- running

water. But a very beautiful building and garden none the less.

The mowed moist ground in the parking lot and around the visitors center was populated with hundreds of round holes, all as big around as a dime.

Each was being attended to, dug out, or filled in, by a large

shining black and smokey orange wasp, known as a tarantula hawk here in the states, family Pompilidae. They dig individual burrows and fill them with paralyzed spiders. When the requisite number of spiders has been reached, they lay an egg and the larva, upon hatching, begins to eat its still fresh meal. Luckily these are not eager to sting, and generally pay no attention to the bunglings of great beasts that lumber through their territory looking for fizzy drink dispensers.

You enter the garden on a wonderful wooden trail that passes a large shelter and presently you are presented with a great pond to the left, and a mown lawn on the right. The pond is man made although true ponds do exist on the mountains of Taiwan,



Fu Shan Botanical Garden



Above the pond

to such an extent that they harbor freshwater fish found nowhere else on earth. Freshwater fish on this island surrounded by ocean seem to be more prevalent than fish in landlocked Costa Rica. This is no doubt due to the geologic history of the two land masses.

This particular pond was home to a roving gang of grass carp, each in the 20 to 30 pound range, another fish, endemic and orange finned, that swam by the hundreds

in the clear cool current of the spring feeding the pond, mandarin ducks, and the wonderful Little Grebe. We had seen pictures of these grebes during the presentation of the previous day, but it turns out they really



Fish in the current

are little. One could sit if your cupped hands. They are fantastically cantankerous and will quarrel with one another at the slightest provocation, sometimes fly-swimming nearly half way across the pond to engage in battle. They are also, in the fashion of their breed, wonderful submariners. Plop under they go only to come back up 50 or more feet from where they descended.

I do not have the pleasure of specializing on any particular group of insects, or mode of collection. I am, for all of the schooling, still a general collector. Not everything catches my eye, but I dabble in a little of it all. So as we descended on this beautiful pond, my gaze was first captured by dragon and damselfly that gilded its edges. While hiking the road Dr. Lee handed me a brilliant metallic green damselfly, *Matrona basilaris*, which looks very similar to our smaller Ebony Jewel Wing. At the pond he handed me a medium sized dragonfly with dark brown wings, *Rhyothemis regia regia*. Here were two species I have never collected, nor even saw on the walk!



Rhyothemis regia regia



My big female *Anax*

I collected commoner stuff around the pond but my big catch was a huge green dragonfly with clean wings, genus *Anax*. This looks very similar to our own Common Green Darner but holds special significance to me, because this is a genus I saw, but was never able to collect, in Thailand. These are big strong flyers, catching one is kind of like trying to catch a goose with a net. But they have two weaknesses. First, they tend to patrol. Where a good pond edge can be found they will fly up it and down it, back and forth, and while they are weary of wood-be

collectors standing at the waters edge, delicate subterfuge can entice them to come close enough for a swipe. Their second weakness has to do with mate guarding and egg laying. At times two or more males will fight over a female and become oblivious to the whereabouts of the featherless stork with the short beak. Females must land on the lily pads or duckweed, then extend their abdomen under the water, and insert an egg into the stalk of a plant, which leaves them vulnerable to the net. One such female fell prey in such a way, and will now, in death, live longer than any of her sisters.

Now I mentioned that I am a general collector, which means that all the while I was collecting dragons I was drooling at the possibility of getting into that pond with my dipnet (yes, carried that on my side the whole walk down, I also have an aspirator if I wish to go sweep netting or tearing up dead trees, bags etc. for collection of whole items such as mushrooms, a very fine net for dealing with bugs in fine sand or small tree holes full of water, AND only Victoria and I brought killing jars). So I spied a nice spot of the shore, next to a small tree where I could lean my pack while I swept the water for any number of things it might conceal. About two feet from shore, what should I see in the very spot I was planning on planting my weary bum, but a beautiful green viper curled in the grass, just waiting for a fat frog to come by.

Well I got my pictures, and it never wavered. Called Matt over to take his pictures, and it never wavered. By now some tourists had caught on that the round eyes had something of interest cornered, so they (about a hundred of them) came over and started taking pictures. And it never wavered! Good thing it was a calm snake, or everyone would have gotten bitten, including me!



Snake in the Grass

I went a little further down and dipped all I could, but catchings were sparse. I got my share of tourists, though. I don't know what it is, but tourists seem to be, well, nicer to deal with in other countries. Maybe its because of the language barrier. But while foreign-afield



Very Veiled Viper

no one pulls back in horror at the site of an inch long damselfly larvae, and that has nothing to do with language. When I would collect dragonflies near gawkers, Mr., Mrs., and Baby General Public will generally come forward, take photographs, search (and generally find!) the English word- "Drrragun Fies?" and be generally awed by the intricate beauty of the thing. In the states I get, "What do you want to collect those for?" and, "Are you a Scientist?" The children of course, provided they're young enough to be unpolluted by the imbecilic prejudice of their parents, are the same the whole world over- generally awed, inquisitive, and ready to learn.

I'm dripping and down to the last inch in my water bottle, but lunch will bring a respite. I had only ventured to the end of the pond and got some pictures of turtles on logs when the appointed hour of noon arrived, so I headed back to the large shelter and lunch, in Yummy Yummy boxes had arrived. It was rather good, and quite filling, but they could have served my slop or steak for all I cared. Believe it or not, there was nothing to drink! Not even that horrible tasteless, sugarless, colorless water!

We've noticed that the natives don't drink much (or anything) with their meal in "The Restaurant", but its melting out here, 'long ways from the faucet, and here is a meal of, among other things, rice- a starch consisting of long chains of glucose which must first be separated via hydrolysis using WATER!

Douglas Adams wrote a wonderful article one time explaining that whenever you travel you must first find out what are the rules of the place you are at, because

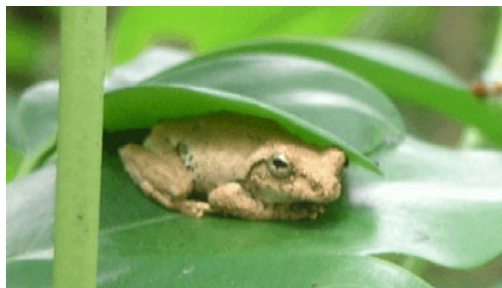
some places make no sense at all. He pointed out that you may parallel park with or against traffic on a British street, but parking against traffic in the US will render you in violation of the law. We should not have taken it for granted that drink would be served, even though every other place we've collectively traveled, especially hot locations, are fanatical about making sure everyone has LOTS of water. We ventured up to the attendant and he had enough water to refill most everyone's bottle, but I stayed back with Erin's and my own while two of the girls took a scooter to the headquarters to fill the pot with more water. Yes, they only have one pot, and well more than 100 people come here on a good day, but they either must not need much, or bring their own.

After my bottle was filled, I drained it. They filled it again and I drank half of that, too. I hate water, but sometimes it's the best thing in the world.

The official duties of the day (lunch at noon) done, it was now time to explore the Bot. Gar. (as my labels say) unfettered. Apparently, Matt spied an unknown snake and felt the best course of action to take when faced with an unknown tropical snake on an island with over a dozen venomous snakes was to rush into the bushes and catch it. By the time I happened on the scene, Chris had taken possession of the serpent and the credit for its capture.



Chris and the snake "he" caught



Peek-a-Boo

Further back into the garden there was a large mown expanse with sparse tree cover. In some areas of the world you plant a bunch of trees so people can have a look at them, and in other places you clear a bunch of trees away. It all depends on what one has to start with. There was a wonderful bamboo garden, although rather than a bamboo forest as Matt had envisioned, it consisted of round clumps of various varieties of bamboo plunked into the mown field. While not all together aesthetically pleasing, this had the added advantage of allowing the observer the opportunity to comment on the overall figure and stance of the particular cane.

Matt, Erin, Chris, and I hiked to the top of a levee that curtailed the stream exiting the lake. I spied a brilliant blue bullet of a dragon, *Rhyothemis triangularis*, perched on a small tree at the side of the stream. As they blundered along blindly I held a steady eye on it until it flew, never closer than 20 feet away, it was soon lost into the infinity of the sky. But presently I found the most beautiful blue long horn beetle sitting on a bush. We all started watching bushes and succeeded in capturing 4 specimens, including one that I saw in flight, Chris tracked to a branch, and Matt jumped to catch!



Erin has this habit of constantly winking and batting her eyes, which sends into a fury young men and photographers alike.

The afternoon rain began slowly then picked up, coming down harder and harder. We sought shelter in a wonderful gazebo with the rest of the gang. As the rain waned, but certainly didn't stop, we set out again. Walking to another section of park Chris set out towards a large dead log, announcing that sometimes stag beetles perch on those very logs and can be easily collected. I was about ten paces behind him and rang out, "What about this one," as I stooped to collect a male stag beetle perched on a small bit of dead branch over which Chris had nearly stepped.



Bats, not quite, in a belfry

We visited a gazebo full of bats, the floor heaped with guano, then winded our way back through the garden and the rain for the long trek home.

That night, after a hot shower and a cool drink, we went back to our gazebo blacklight. The prize of the night was a very angry four inch long long horn beetle. Chris showed us his newest collection improvisation- the "Buprella" an umbrella used to collect beetles in the family Buprestidae who are reportedly attracted to purple. The flanges on the side are fly paper. Unfortunately this breakthrough method of design and function has provided less than desirable results.

The moth of the night was mirror silver with bright metallic gold edges. Sorry the camera can't capture it all, but some things just can't be caught on film.



Our intrepid narrator on the road home



Buprella in action!



Lep de jour