

Chapter IV

Early Escape The Magnificent Catch Meandering Blacklighting in the Bot. Gar.

Last night Matt, Erin, and I decided to skip out early this morning, before breakfast, and walk the stream we saw yesterday. Matt is hoping to come across some giant salamanders. There are three species of these beasts (in the family Cryptobranchidae). Japan and China have one species each, both in the genus *Andrias*.



Roaring to go!

And, amazingly, the third species is our own Hellbender! I'm dreaming about the multitudes of mayfly, stonefly, caddisfly, larvae, not to mention adult and larvae true bugs, beetles, etc. that I'll get from the stream. Plus a walk down a tropical stream is nothing but heaven to a dragonfly collector.

So we were up and out the door by 6:30 am. At the pond I swiped dragons while Erin had a sit down and Matt had a go at hand catching water striders. As we hiked through the Great Plains region of the gardens Matt caught a yellow dragonfly, *Pantala flavescens*. This species is found all over the world, I've seen them in Belize and collected them in Warrensburg, MO and Chiang Mai, Thailand. This is a speedy, high flying species that is just as happy 30 feet from the ground as 3 feet. Their only weaknesses are curiosity and playfulness.



Catching Striders

The stream was beautiful. Cool water and shade kept us comfortable,



Good Catch on the Great Plains

we were mostly hidden from the garden visitors, and the terrain provided for easy walking. Unfortunately, as far as beasts in the water, the stream couldn't have been more dead! I



Bridge over sterile water

sampled the hell out of that waterway, and I have some experience in these things, but came up with basically nothing. I have a couple explanations, but no real answers. While the stream felt cool, it was certainly warmer than it would have been for having traveled through the lake, so perhaps the water temperature was unfavorable. Then again streams and springs that maintain the same temperature year round tend to be



Long straight run

Otherwise the general collecting was wonderful. I got quite a few nice dragons and damselfly nymphs, along with all sorts of other beetles, etc. One catch in particular stood out. Patrolling up and down stream was a huge black and yellow dragon. I let Matt and Erin get up way ahead of me and secured a beachhead in the middle of the stream in the middle of a long straight run. This sounds like craziness, and may be, BUT I maintain that dragonflies are not only aware of a

inhabited by fewer beasts (at least in temperate areas), so perhaps there was a depauperate fauna to begin with and due to the temperature, or season, it was, for today at least, nonexistent.



Giant Deadly Water Spider



Matrona basilaris

persons presence, but what way they are facing, and if that person is paying it attention. I won't go into all of it, but this seems to pay out sometimes. If you watch a dragonfly it will often stay well away from you or buzz the back of your head, which has happened many times, but never the front. So I, the dragonfly whisperer, stood facing the shore, paying as little attention as possible, using the peripheral vision as best I could. There were two passes, one upstream toward the others, then back downstream. I waited patiently looking upstreamish as much as possible, to appear disinterested and on the next pass I spun around and WHACK! Got it! With my little 2 foot net.

Yesterday I went after one of these beasts. I cut from the trail and plunged into some brush and missed the dragon, but caught some Biting Cat. This is a hairy little plant that makes stinging nettle seem positively lovely. I just brushed the outside of my left thumb and it still hurts today. It feels like thin metal or glass has been ground into my hand. Sparky and sharp. The hairs on the stem and leaves of Biting Cat are called urticating hairs. The same term is used to



Euphaea formosa



Big male. Don't know what it is yet.

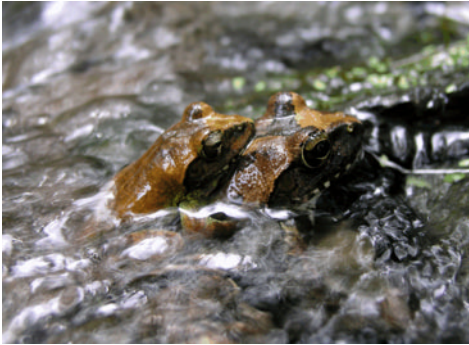


Biting Cat



A little Spiky

describe the stinging hairs of caterpillars. Generally these hairs serve to either make a caterpillar unpalatable, like our woolly bears, or offer more immediate protection by actively stinging (really pricking the skin with poison tipped hairs) the aggressor.



Mating Frogs



A lot Spiky



Pineapple Trap

We pulled up out of the stream at the dam. Half way along the boardwalk a group of tourists came by. Where are you from, what are you doing, etc. Two of them wanted their pictures taken with us. Back at the research station I processed specimens and rested my feet.

Our poor results at the blacklight the last few nights have prompted us to consider moving. The large shelter right by the lake is very tempting, so we scouted for electricity, and found a plugin 200 feet away back at the main garden building. Dinner is promptly at 7pm, so Chris and Matt volunteered to postpone dinner, lug all the equipment to the garden, and put up the blacklight. Team B would follow after dinner and bring boxed food for Team A. Also, Mike and Erin will go back up the hill to plug in the blacklights before dinner. So everyone was scurrying.

Victoria, Sue, and I left the restaurant. As I pulled the net from my belt, commenting that it might be a good evening for dragons, a huge *Anax* flew from behind over my head and I swatted it with my net. It fell to the ground in the shadows and I darted in to swat it down again, but couldn't find it. Turns out I stepped on it. Better a damaged specimen than no specimen at all.



At the blacklight: Aerial View

even temporary damage. I suggested they amputate.

We had the best fried chicken I've ever had in my life. I suggested we not put any in Matt's and Chris' dinner pale, and save that for ourselves, they would never be the wiser, but Victoria was nice. Erin did add a little something to Matt's supper. He said it was delicious:)

The Taiwanese students came down and helped collect. Dr. Lee took me to a dead tree with



At the Giving Tree

While this was happening...

Out of The Restaurant Yaw-Wen slipped on the steps and went down. Vicky Lou and Sue saw it happen. Our conversation for most of the trip to the garden consisted of diagnostic predictions concerning the plethora of ailments the poor girl will be plagued with from now to the moment of her death rattle. From broken tailbone, they can't do anything for you but give you a pillow, to broken wrist. We later found out that it was her wrist, but no

permanent or

shelf fungus on it. I must have collected 500 rove beetles, not to

mention about 100 more specimens of various types of beetles. The students loved it, and Rita took about 100 photos of various fauna we collected off the snag. Matt brought in a "glow worm," family Lampyridae, this is a beetle larvae that flashes like a lightning bug.

Slowly everyone faded back to the station until it was just Chris, Matt, and I. We packed of the equipment and stowed it in an unlocked equipment shed. The whole walk back we swept the forest and trees looking for eye shine. I have a headlamp with, among other things, a red LED. Its not much for letting you see far ahead,



Dinner- Fish head included



I'm holding it by the glowy end.



Beetle from a shelf fungus

but it does make an animal's eyes glow bright red even when they're 100 feet away. We spotted several giant squirrels and a couple barking deer.