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Author(s): Morgan, M. J.

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THE ENTOMOLOGY COLLECTIONS AT BANGOR

The Department of Applied Zoology at the University College of North Wales, Bangor was established after the last war as the Department of Agricultural and Forest Zoology.

In the succeeding years the number of students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level has risen steadily as also has the variety of courses on offer. The teaching is mainly in the applied aspects of entomology and parasitology and a necessary development has been the acquisition of adequate teaching material backed by museum reference collections.

In 1970 the Department was able to take over a separate building with some room for expansion. For the first time it was possible to have a small one-room museum with display cupboards where parasitology specimens, plant damage and other material could be put on permanent display. An adjacent curator's room was big enough to house storeboxes and insect cabinets with security.

The functions of the Museum are seen as fourfold: to provide exhibits and material for teaching purposes; to provide exhibits of a more general interest which expand the background of direct teaching; the conserving of rare material and specimens of particular or unusual interest, especially Welsh material; and to build up a reference collection of as many groups of British insects as possible.

North Wales has never been an area with many amateur naturalists, and entomologists always seem to have been thin on the ground, as indeed they still are today. When perusing old entomological journals it becomes apparent that references to collecting in North Wales are almost entirely by visiting entomologists from England. They stayed at Penmaenmawr and Barmouth, or Llanberis in order to climb up Snowdon, and any specimens went home with them. So unlike some museums we have not been fortunate enough to have historical or important local collections donated to us in the past.

Despite this the insect collections have been built up considerably, especially over the last twenty years. Useful additions have been made when members of staff have visited other countries in the course of their research and also through contacts with other institutions at home and abroad. Students, both past and present, have donated specimens. Very little material has been purchased.

The nucleus of the insect collection was put together by Mr. J. Hobart just after the war, mainly from his own collecting and the addition of specimens donated by NAAS, Bangor. The forest entomologist R. Neil Chrystal (author of 'Insects of the British Woodlands') donated numerous wood specimens showing insect damage and some of the associated insects, including some of his research material from Cyprus. This section of the Museum has been greatly enlarged over the years and now consists of one of the most comprehensive collections in the country of wood-damage by insects. As well as British specimens there are numerous examples of tunnels and other damage caused by Coleoptera (Scolytidae, Cerambycidae, Curculionidae etc.), Isoptera, Hymenoptera, Lepidoptera etc. from overseas.

The insect collections are made up primarily of North Wales specimens, but field work by the Curator in many parts of Britain has added large number of species which do not occur in Wales. In this respect the field meetings arranged by Mr. A.E. Stubbs for the Diptera Recording Scheme are invaluable. The Curator is much indebted to other Dipterists and, more recently, Hymenopterists, for generous donations of named specimens which have greatly enhanced the coverage of these groups.

Within Wales the Welsh Biological Recording Group had a number of successful week-end meetings from 1971 to 1978. Much new material from Welsh localities was acquired and useful information built up about little known sites. It is much regretted that these meetings have been discontinued.

One of the few donations received in the past was a 20-drawer cabinet containing foreign Lepidoptera, bequeathed to University College Bangor by a retired engineer who lived in North Wales. Nothing is known of the background of the collection which was put together by Frederick Talfourd Jones (1874-1945) and many specimens lack data.

The E.S. Lewis collection of Lepidoptera was acquired after his death at St. Asaph in 1966. Comprising 110 drawers this comprehensive collection was put together over many years by the Rev. Lewis, mostly in North Wales parishes, but also in Staffordshire. Apart from slight fading the collection which represents 60 years work remains in excellent condition. All specimens bear data labels and the information is duplicated in meticulously kept notebooks. The microlepidoptera were re-arranged some years ago by Mr. H.N. Michaelis who made many additions from his own collection to fill empty spaces. There are now 22 drawers of micros, mostly from Wales but with valuable additions from elsewhere in Britain.

A more recent collection of macros consists of 48 drawers built up by the Curator over the last 20 years. Many, but by no means all, of the specimens have been collected in North Wales and all are carefully documented.

Two cabinets with a total of 20 drawers of Lepidoptera were donated to the Department some years ago by Mr. I.A. Edwardes-Evans of Colwyn Bay. These had been collected in North Wales by his son David who was killed in the last war. This collection is kept in the Museum where it can be consulted by students.

Most of the insect groups are now reasonably well represented, though there are still few Collembola, Thysanoptera and Homoptera. The aquatic groups are being built up but coverage of immature stages is scanty. There is a representative collection of Hemiptera Heteroptera, enhanced by K.C. Side before his death in 1979 with many species from the South of England.

The Coleopteran families are mostly well represented and occupy 24 large store boxes. The Carabidae were recently re-arranged in 6 drawers and all doubtful identifications checked by Dr. M.A. Luff.

The Hymenoptera are well covered in some groups, especially the Tenthredinidae, following the donation by H.N. Michaelis of his collection of sawflies, including some good material from Scotland. Apart from these 6 drawers, attempts are being made to improve the coverage of other families. The Formicidae consist chiefly of North Wales specimens and are mainly stored in alcohol.

Considerable attention has been given to the Diptera in the last 6 or 7 years and while some families are scarcely represented there is now a good coverage of Tipulidae (5 drawers), Brachycera (6), Syrphidae (4) and some of the Acalypterates. The Calypterate families have patchy representation but it is hoped to add to these gradually.

There is a good collection of Neuroptera, mainly the result of field work by Mrs. M.J. Morgan in recent years, most of it being Welsh material. Some named lacewings could probably be made available to other Museums if requested, as specimens continue to be accumulated from light traps and other sources in connection with distribution mapping of the Neuroptera in Wales.

While being unwilling to make an estimate of the actual number of specimens in the collection, some indication of the holdings is that there are 312 cabinet drawers and 119 storeboxes. A considerable amount of material is also kept in spirit and this includes tropical species, larvae and immature stages of many groups, research material, duplicate material not required in the main collections and other Arthropoda. These last include some Arachnida, Myriapoda and Isopoda.

One 16-drawer cabinet of foreign insects, contains material from many parts of the world. Though many are unidentified, data labels indicate the country of origin etc. and specimens of Orthoptera, Coleoptera, Diptera etc. display the striking modifications, brilliant colours and size range to be seen in warmer regions.

A small collection of pressed leaves showing insect mines and other damage has been built up in recent years.

Apart from the actual material mentioned above, the other important feature of the Museum is the large file of record cards which become increasingly valuable as a research tool. Contained in 24 drawers, cards are filed under insect Orders sub-divided into vice-counties (i.e. using the Watsonian vice-county system). Virtually all known records from the six North Wales counties have been written on individual cards and this is continually added to and kept up to date. All past entomological literature (i.e. from the mid 19th century onwards) has been searched for published records and the relevant journals are perused regularly and any records extracted onto cards. This card index is being increasingly consulted by other workers from Universities, Museums, NCC and other bodies as well as individual collectors. There are estimated to be about 30,000 individual cards at the present time.

M. JOAN MORGAN, Curator

Department of Applied Zoology, University College of North Wales, Bangor, Gwynedd.

MORE RIDICULOUS FOLKLORE

One of the more amusing incidents of a natural history nature (the others do not bear repeating) during a french holiday concerned spiders. On a tour around several chateaux of the Touraine, we were solemnly told in one that the roof timbers constructed of "Chestnut" had the useful property of repelling spiders. The vaulted ceiling was too high to check but we were equally adamantly assured by a different but equally charming guide that the oak beams of the next building were similarly endowed with the mystery repellent. However, there were multitudinous webs to be seen with the unaided eye in this example.

I thought perhaps Jean Henri Fabre's Life of the Spider might provide the source of this "well known fact" but cannot find any mention and I don't know of any other french naturalists who may have perpetuated such a story.

E.G.H.