

BOG COLLECTING IN CENTRAL MAINE

by LIONEL PAUL GREY

The sphagnum-heath bogs in central Maine provide richer collecting than do the scattered pockets found elsewhere in New England, for here such bogs often are large in size and remain as undisturbed wilderness areas. It is incredible how rapidly they are vanishing; during boyhood I roved many an open bog which now is choked densely with young growth. Also there are many hundreds of acres here, now heavily forested but with the tell-tale plant vestiges and traces of a sphagnum rim attesting that only yesterday these, too, were bogs. Our forty-odd inches of annual rainfall seem insufficient either to explain or to maintain our extensive lakes, and since a bog requires a surfacing of the underground water table, these retreating bogs also bear mute witness of how largely we in New England have been living on a gift of glacially outpoured waters now dwindling away. In my youth the bogs were wet all summer, but now even in abnormally wet years one can pass through most of them dry-shod, after the spring run-off.

A nostalgic marker of rapidly changing times and one I now miss in the remaining open bogs are the gaunt skeletons of the old larch, now mostly fallen; these spoke of an earlier page in history when these trees were of much economic value, the boles and dug-out main roots furnishing the "juniper knees" to frame the tall clipper ships built along our coast. Also, there is the curious reflection that the tiny insects, the casebearers and sawflies which abruptly destroyed the primeval larch rims around these bogs, were rather directly the cause of the retreat of the caribou, and, with them, the wolves, for the caribou depended on larch for winter browse. Despise not the lowly "bug"!

Having been asked for notes regarding the well-known Passadumkeag Bog region near my home, I have a melancholy duty to report that collecting there has deteriorated greatly during the past quarter-century although remaining worthwhile from the point that here are accessible roadside areas where even the oldsters may enjoy thrills of bog collecting without undue exertion or discomfort. In general, the best places now require strenuous trips, or, even if near the roads, as in the instance of the famous "Dead Stream Bog," would be unsafe to venture into. Bogs and burned lands are, of all places, to be shunned by the uninitiated; even a compass is useless to an inexperienced or bewildered man; woodsmen rely more on land contours.

In the past I have guided visiting entomologists into the nearby bogs, and as long as I remain here I shall continue to be delighted with any prospect of having companions on weekend jaunts, given due notice. But if I were not available, the geodetic topographic maps are very detailed and the ordinary road maps sufficient to locate the places hereinafter described, with a bit of inquiry.

The town of Lincoln, fifty miles north of Bangor on U.S. Route Two, is a logical headquarters. From there, the best roadside spots are about

fifteen miles south, proceeding first to Enfield and thence southwest toward Passadumkeag on a backwoods road which forks about two miles below Enfield. The left-hand fork swings steeply up on to a horseback ridge; this is known as the Gould's Ridge Road, from which may be had a tremendous panorama of meadowland on the left, which is rather barren as a collecting ground. There is some chance of fair roadside collecting and the drive is especially recommended both for the striking wilderness views and because this horseback is a particularly famous one, often mentioned in geology texts as a classic example of an esker, a formerly ice-walled glacial stream bed. But it is just where the road forks that the visitor had best leave his car and explore the bog on the west side of the highway. Early in June, a trip around the rim tangle is almost certain to result in flushing a few *Ceneis jutta* Hübner, this being the most productive known colony, one which perhaps has yielded more material than all other northeastern localities combined. In mid-July this same bog is the best place I know for *Lycæna epixanthe* transitional to *phædrus* Hall, best collected late in the afternoon. This is an exceptionally fine bog, complete with a small pond "eye." Collecting may be done here safely, if not in comfort; those whose interests include the small biting insects can have a real field day.

The right fork runs direct to Passadumkeag, first through low forest growth and then through partly grown-in bogs; this is the "Old Caribou Road" which in earlier days often was impassable except with a high-axle car but now has been much "improved" so that the roadside collecting has nearly perished, as it always seems to do before the crunching bulldozer and the rumbling asphalt truck. This, added to narrowing in of the bogs, plus the extensive pulpwood operations which have mangled the forest, now leaves only forlorn traces of what once was a veritable woodland paradise. The endemic species still remain, but now put on a feeble show compared to the earlier grandeurs; it might even be termed fair collecting yet, the difference being that one must hope only for short series whereas formerly there was such an abundance of many choice things that the net seldom was idle.

The rarer moths, particularly the day-flying noctuids have been scarce in late years, but this whole area still remains extremely productive for general moth collecting. The State of Maine forest insect program maintains numerous trap stations, widely scattered, and the one at Enfield usually yields the most extensive and varied material. On suitable nights the ordinary funnel-type light traps work unattended to bring in moths quite literally by the quart, and in surprisingly excellent condition.

Collectors familiar with northeastern collecting will appreciate that it is futile here to attempt to say just what will be taken and just where to go; we never know that, ourselves, but put in our days tramping and exploring. The numerous places we visit for special things often are areas the size of a kitchen floor, so to speak, and quite useless to detail, for who else could find them? But the law of averages will work for the collector patient and assiduous enough to keep slogging.