

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING NATURAL HABITATS—NOW

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It was with real interest that I read the presidential address to the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the Pacific Slope Section of the Lepidopterists' Society presented by Frederick H. Rindge, entitled "The Importance of Collecting—Now" (1965, *Jour. Lepid. Soc.*, 19: 193–195).

I share with him a deep concern for the disappearance of native habitats. However, I cannot share his pessimism concerning the possible ultimate extinction of the remaining wildlife habitats.

Most certainly overpopulation is the biggest problem facing mankind today. It is true that many wildlife habitats are being transformed into new subdivisions for our ever increasing populace or converted to farmland. It is true that pesticides and herbicides have taken a toll of insects in particular and wildlife in general.

While this is all true, there are many encouraging things being accomplished, and much more can and will be done to preserve our wildlife habitats.

The problems of overpopulation throughout the world are making a serious impact upon the governmental policies of many nations. The indiscriminate use of powerful pesticides and herbicides with persistent residues are being strictly curtailed. In Wisconsin, in particular, the State Conservation Department is now prohibiting the indiscriminate use of DDT and other persistent insecticides. Federal legislation has resulted in more strict control of the sale and application of these materials. Unfortunately, progress is slow.

In America, farming practices and agricultural research have shown that even though our population is rising it takes less acreage to produce a surplus of food. Marginal farm lands in some states are slowly and steadily being abandoned. Secondary succession will eventually transform these to forest, but it will require many years.

A great deal of native habitat remains undisturbed. Some of this land may be expensive but there is still time to preserve these areas if action is taken soon.

It has been my good fortune to be associated as legal counsel with several organizations that are dedicated to the preservation of wildlife habitat. One of these organizations, in particular, should be of great interest to members of the Lepidopterists' Society as well as to other citizens interested in the preservation of wildlife. This organization is

called "The Nature Conservancy." Legally it is a non-profit corporation organized under the laws of the District of Columbia. There are active chapters in many states. The national organization has funds which are lent without interest to the local state chapters for their efforts to purchase wildlife areas for permanent preservation. When land is purchased, title is turned over to a local educational institution. The University of Wisconsin has many branches throughout the state which have the responsibility of the management of these tracts. Almost every piece of land purchased is near a branch of the University. Title then goes to the University Regents, who preserve the area as a scientific area. To prevent the land from being used for purposes other than those originally intended for the land, a "reverter" clause is inserted in the deed conveying title which automatically "reverts" to The Nature Conservancy, or some similar organization such as the National Audubon Society.

The Wisconsin chapter is extremely active. Within the last two years we have, among other projects, purchased land by popular subscription to establish an arboretum for the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. This purchase is adjacent to land previously purchased by the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, completing an undisturbed area of over a thousand acres. This arboretum is presently being expanded and is almost within the metropolitan area of the City of Milwaukee.

What is especially interesting to lepidopterists is that the rare and beautiful saturnid moth, *Hyalophora columbia* (Smith) occurs here. This is one of the few places in the United States where this moth is found. Of interest to the botanist is the rare and diminutive ramshead lady slipper, *Cypripedium arietinum* R. Br., which grows only here and one other place in the State.

Among the other projects contemplated by this organization is the purchase of a small acid bog in Door County in which *Lycaena epixanthe michigenensis* Rawson and the recently described dayflying arctiid, *Holomelina lamae* Freeman have been taken.

There are many local habitats harboring rare and unusual Lepidoptera which might be preserved through efforts by members of the Lepidopterists' Society. For example, action might be taken regarding isolated swamps in which *Euptychia mitchelli* French is found. Another worthwhile project would be the preservation of the prairie locale in Clay County, Minnesota, where *Hesperia dacotae* (Skinner) is found.

I believe it should be possible for members of our society to raise funds, with the aid of the Nature Conservancy if necessary, to protect and preserve some of the habitats of localized species of Lepidoptera, where their narrow distributional limits are in danger of engulfment by urban sprawl or other forms of human "progress."