

OBITUARY

LAURENCE REMINGTON RUPERT (1902-1978)

In 1977, we wrote to Laurence R. Rupert to request historical information on the Southern Silvery Blue [*Glaucopsyche lygdamus* (Doubleday)] locality which he had discovered near Horseheads, Chemung County, New York, 30 years before. Over the next several months we had a regular correspondence, in the course of which Mr. Rupert told us much about his life and Lepidoptera collecting experiences. Rupert died soon after, and since he was a charter member of the Lepidopterists' Society and remained a member until his death, we prepared this brief (and certainly incomplete) biography, drawing heavily from his own letters written on the dates indicated at the end of quoted passages. Occasionally we add explanatory insertions in square brackets.

Laurence Remington Rupert was born southeast of Buffalo, at Sardinia, Erie Co., New York, on 2 July 1902. His parents were Clara Remington Rupert and Asahel Rupert. He grew up in this area, and early became interested in Lepidoptera:

When I was about twelve years old—in 1914—I got the idea that is not rare among boys of that age, that I would like to collect butterflies. I had no sponsor, and had no real idea how to go at the job, but my father bought me a copy of Holland's *Butterfly Book*. I managed to acquire a rather messy collection of about 35 species of butterflies that were more or less common here at the time. But I lost interest when I seemed unable to get any more species, and when the collection I had fell prey to Dermestids.

However, I did get quite well acquainted with those 35 or so species, and was able ever afterward to identify them. I could not get interested in skippers, for I was rarely able to identify them from Holland's plates. . . .

By the early 1920's I was in college in Albany. (I graduated from the then N.Y.S.C.T. in 1924 [now State University of New York at Albany].) I was not collecting butterflies nor moths, but was, as always, interested in hiking over the country (12 July 1977). The sand barrens west of the city [now known as the Albany Pine Bush] were pretty much intact, and there were vast acres solid blue with lupine [*Lupinus perennis*] blossoms. . . . There were occasional plants interspersed with white or pink flowers. . . . I probably saw more blooms of it at once than I ever saw of any other flower (15 June 1977).

Several years later I went back to Albany for some graduate work and I was by that time collecting moths, Geometridae in particular. I became acquainted with Al Frederick at that time and went with him a few times to the area where the lupines grew. But he was interested in daytime collection of butterflies, and I was not collecting butterflies. I do have perhaps half a dozen geometrid moths in my collection that I took there, but nothing really special, only species that I later collected on the acid soil hills at Horseheads. One of those species is *Catopyrrha coloraria*, which tells me that there must be *Ceanothus* growing among the lupines (12 July 1977). [*Ceanothus americanus* is frequent in the Pine Bush.]

In 1933-1934, Rupert attended Cornell University Graduate School in Ithaca, New York, where he studied mathematics. During this time he met W. T. M. Forbes and John G. Franclemont, and in spring 1934 he and Franclemont collected together in the Sixmile Creek gorge near Ithaca. Later that year he journeyed to Mount Washington:

In the summer of 1934, Al Frederick accompanied me on a collecting trip to Mt. Washington. I got a few nice moths there, and I believe he was quite successful with the butterflies he sought. . . . Later our communications gradually faded out, for we really had little in common (12 July 1977). [Frederick's collection is in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City—Rindge (1967).]

In autumn 1934, Rupert started working at the Horseheads High School in Horseheads, New York, where he taught mathematics until 1950. His collecting of moths continued regularly, but he also discovered a butterfly there that has been rarely encountered in New York, *Glaucopsyche lygdamus*:

At Horseheads I was collecting almost exclusively at night. But now and then, possibly on a Sunday afternoon, I would explore new areas by day, looking for possible new collecting spots, and it was on one of those trips [in 1947] that I stumbled into the area where the *Glaucopsyche* were flitting about. Somehow I thought they looked a little odd, although I wasn't sure. So I took a few and showed them to Dr. Forbes the next time I went to Ithaca. He identified them, said they were a very nice thing. . . . At one time or another I picked up quite a few, for I found there were a few moth collectors with whom I was regularly exchanging, who wanted them. [See Dirig & Cryan, in prep., for details of *Glaucopsyche lygdamus* in New York.] Those are probably the only butterflies that I have collected in over 60 years [except for some on a 1950 trip] . . . in New Brunswick and the Gaspé, which I gave to the Cornell University Collection (12 July 1977). (See Ferguson & Rupert 1951.)

During his years in Horseheads he also discovered *Lambdina cantitiara* Rupert. This new geometrid moth was described from four males and a female taken at Horseheads between 1938 and 1943 (Rupert 1944). Rupert described the type locality as follows:

They were all taken along the base of the next hill north of the Latta Brook, east of the southern end of Horseheads Village. I am sure that the entire area is now occupied by Route 17. However, it seems as if there must be other spots among those Southern Tier hills where the species must occur. It did not seem to be an area unique in any special way. The hill was well wooded, but the trees became scatter[ed] at the base, and there was a small swampy area near by, where there were alders [*Alnus* sp.] and cattails [*Typha* sp.]. I used to get *Tacparia deterrentata* there and *Sthenopsis argenteomaculatus*. I do not believe that the swamp area had any connection with the *Lambdinas*. All the known species of that genus have either oak [*Quercus* sp.] or pine [*Pinus* sp.] as the larval food, and most related genera do too. Moreover, I never found the moths in the swamp, but possibly 100 feet east, toward the hill (8 August 1977).

Mr. Rupert was particularly interested in Geometridae, subfamily Ennominae, and published three additional papers on this group: "A Specific Revision of the Genus *Mettarranthus*" (1943), "A Revision of the North American Species of the Genus *Plagodis*" (1949a), and "Notes on the Group of Genera Including *Lozogramma* Stephens and its Allies" (1949b). New combinations were made and several new species were described in these papers.

After leaving his teaching position in 1950, Rupert returned to Sardinia, where he grew gladioli commercially for a number of years. He also worked for an electronics company at Arcade, New York, a few miles east of Sardinia. Throughout this time he continued to collect moths, but a heart ailment curtailed his activities somewhat in later years. In summer 1977 he still had half an acre of gladioli, and exhibited at the annual picnic and early seedling show of the Empire State Gladiolus Society in West Elmira on 7 August. At that time we planned to meet, and he described himself as "easily identifiable. I am 75 years old, 5 ft. 4 in. tall and weigh about 110 pounds" (25 July 1977). He was also the organist in the United Methodist Church in Sardinia.

When we asked him about patronyms, he answered

Yes, Franclemont's form *ruperti* of *Catocala cerogama* is named for me. So is the species *Chytonix ruperti* of the Noctuidae, which was described by Jack Franclemont from a series of over 60 specimens that I took at Versailles, N.Y. [west of Sardinia]. These are distributed in museums pretty well over the country. Dr. McDunnough also named a variety of *Zale helata* with the same name *ruperti*, and along with it he named a similar looking variety of *Zale duplicata*, *franclemonti* (12 July 1977).

Mr. Rupert died on 13 November 1978. His moth collection is now in the Cornell University Insect Collection. Franclemont facilitated its acquisition, and told us that it was housed in ca. 125 Cornell drawers, of which 60 were noctuids. There were no butterflies in it at the time of Rupert's death, these having been given to Cornell via Forbes years before. The Cornell Insect Collection has recently been moved to the new John H. and Anna B. Comstock Hall, within a compacterized arrangement of cases, and is being reorganized. Rupert's specimens are still in units throughout the series, awaiting

incorporation by species. Franclemont has a map of Rupert's favorite collecting areas (J. G. Franclemont, pers. comm., 10 March 1986).

In communications with us, Rupert made some notes on collecting sites, and reflected upon changes in habitats and the moth fauna during his lifetime:

A great number of specimens in my collection are labeled RICHMOND GULF, SARDINIA, N.Y. Richmond Gulf is a deep ravine about seven miles west of the village, but in the Town of Sardinia. It is not more than a quarter of a mile long. Today it is heavily wooded, and I find it very unproductive in recent years. But in the [19]30's and [19]40's it was much more open and produced a lot of fine moths. . . . All specimens labeled EAST CONCORD, N.Y. were taken on a sphagnum bog easily located on a map. Also, those labeled EAST ARCADE, N.Y. were taken on another bog about ten miles northeast of here, or were taken on an unusual, dry, acid soil area adjacent to the bog, and I know which are which. For example, on the dry area there are acres of black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) which supports a population of *Catocala praeclara*, so far as I know the only . . . colony in the state west of the Hudson valley and Adirondacks. I also have a few other records from there of species that I have never seen elsewhere in western New York.

One odd record that I have is for *Merolonche doli*, which I took on the ceiling of my classroom in Horseheads. We had had a "Parents' Night" on a hot evening in May, and I had all the windows open. When it was all over I noticed the strange moth on the ceiling. I scared up a stepladder and captured it. So far as I know it is the only record from upstate New York. I also have a specimen of *Callopietria floridensis* taken on the front wall of the YMCA Building in Binghamton, the only New York State record, I believe. This was almost certainly a stray, for it was taken in October when certain strays are common.

There was much of interest in *Atala* [volume 4]. I was definitely interested in two moths mentioned [by Hessel (1976)]. In 1936 I found a female *Sphinx luscitiosa* on a fencepost at Horseheads. It was so battered and worn that it could not be identified except by genus. I put her in a sack and she deposited about a dozen eggs before expiring. I had to try all the known foods of the genus, but when the young larvae started to eat willow [*Salix* sp.], I knew what species I had. I reared six moths, four males and two females, the only ones in my collection. I have never seen the moth since. An interesting thing about the larvae was that part of them were green, as one might expect sphingid larvae to be, but the rest were vivid purple! *Callosamia promethea* used to be, apparently, our commonest Saturniid [at Sardinia], but I haven't seen a cocoon for years. However, a friend of mine, who lives some three miles northwest of town, told me last fall about the horrible creatures that were eating up his lilac [*Syringa vulgaris*] bush, and that he rapidly demolished all of them. His description sounded like *promethea* larvae, although they may have been [*Hyalophora cecropia* (18 August 1977)].

My own collecting experience has shown me how collecting spots have changed over the years, with the old plants and trees increasing in size, and new ones crowding in. Sometimes as those changes occur, moths formerly common disappear entirely. Other species, once quite common, seem to have disappeared everywhere. I can give an outstanding example in your family of butterflies. When I was a kid the second commonest butterfly around here was the one Holland called *Chrysophanus hypophlaeas*. . . . It was *everywhere* in gardens, fields and roadsides. I haven't even seen one now in many years. *Pieris rapae*, of course, was the commonest, and still is (15 June 1977).

It has been of interest to me that in recent years I have seen no signs of a number of species that were common, or even abundant [in my youth at Sardinia]. Using the nomenclature in Dr. Forbes' *Lepidoptera of New York and Neighboring States*, these would include *Papilio cresphontes*, the *Lycaena phlaeas americana*, . . . the similar but larger species *thoe*, *Euptoieta claudia*, *Brenthis selene myrina*, *Aglais l-album j-album*, and *Aglais milberti*. On the other hand, at least two species that I looked for in those days and never saw became quite common in later years, *Limenitis archippus*

and *Lethe portlandia*. This latter one was probably here all the time, for I have seen it only on bait spread for moths in early evening (12 July 1977).

Mr. Rupert's sister, Florence Rupert, still lives at Sardinia, New York.

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