

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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8.XI.72

The Editor  
Mosquito Systematics

Sir,

Having noted your interest in the early history of entomology (Mosq. Syst. 4(1):10-15,1972) I submit for your diversion the following extract from the life of the Roman emperor Domitian, 1st century BC. (DE VITA CAESARUM, Liber V. Suetonius II, The Loeb Classical Library, Heinemann, 1920) "Inter initia principatus cotidie secretum sibi horarum sumere solebat nec quicquam amplius quam muscas captare ac stilo praeacuto configere, ut quidam interroganti, essetne quis intus cum Caesare, non absurde responsum sit a Vibio Crispo ne muscam quidem".

Freely translated this reads as follows: "Initially he (Domitian) daily spent hours alone for the sole purpose of catching flies and pinning them down with a finely pointed needle. When someone asked if anyone was with Caesar Vibio Crispo wittily replied 'NO! Not even a fly'"

Do you think Domitian might have been the first collector of Diptera? The remark of the funnyman Vibio lends credence to this view since from time immemorial entomologists have been subjected to such pleasantries.

Another worth remembering is the poet Vergil (b. 70 BC on my birthday) who wrote his famous poem "Culex" at the age of 16. The story about one incident mentioned in the poem is that he fell asleep while tending his father's flocks and that a mosquito bit him on his forehead causing him to wake and slap it hard and dead. At that moment he saw a very poisonous snake approaching and was able to kill it before it could strike. Overcome by the fact that the mosquito had saved his life he carefully gathered its remains together and buried it with full funeral rites.

I am indebted to Dr. Lamberto Bentivoglio for help in translating the somewhat archaic latin.

Botha de Meillon.