

Orychodes sp. These beetles were always in couples. Besides the Brenthids there was a single specimen of a Cucujid beetle, *Hectarthrum heros* F. (?), and several small larvae and pupae of other *Coleoptera* which I cannot place. On opening the bark, the ants immediately took possession of all other insects, but I soon deprived them of many of their spoils. In the packing of excreta there were numerous Book-Scorpions, *Chelifer* sp., in various stages of development, but these were more frequent where the refuse was damp. In spite of the presence of ants, life goes merrily on under the bark.

In volume xli, p. 678 of the *Journal* I recorded the presence of Book-Scorpions under the wings of *Batocera rubus*. At the time (November-December) several specimens invaded the house at night, being attracted by the lights. Later in March, the Brenthids came in, but sporadically; and yet later the Elaterids appeared from time to time in rather unusual numbers. As the drying mango is about forty feet from the verandah, it is evidently the home of the insect invaders.

Of these insects *Batocera* is known to attack mango trunks; the food of the Click-beetle appears to be uncertain; the Brenthids seem another unknown quantity as regards their diet, though it is presumed they are wood-boring: the Cucujid is a carnivorous beetle and feeds on other insects and larvae.

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XXVIII.—INSECTS AT A STREET LAMP AT ANDHERI.

The desire to predict an event is common to most people, but how often do our calculations turn out as predicted? During the sweltering heat of the hot weather there are many prophets abroad anxious to forecast the break of the rains—even the Press indulges in a bit of fortune-telling! For the past weeks speculation had run high, but Nature pays little heed to mere human calculations, it generally upsets them, and so it was with the break of the rains in 1940. Heavy rain fell on the 3rd June. Some people insisted that the monsoon had burst, others held that it was just a storm. In fact, weather conditions were rather abnormal this year. Animal life is greatly dependent on weather conditions and accordingly in abnormal years animals also behave 'abnormally'. The fact was betrayed by the arrival of certain insects out of season; for example, certain Cantharids, which are abundant in August and September in Salsette, arrived in the latter part of April—much before their usual time. Turning to the ornithological field, a pair of Dhayals [*Copsychus saularis* (Linn.)] had brought up a family in a dead Date Palm, by the end of May. The young were on the wing—rather early for these birds in this area. Also, in the botanical field, an Aroid (*Amorphophallus commutatus* Engler) had miscalculated too. It came into full bloom before the end of May, before any rain

had fallen. This species usually blooms only soon after the first showers arrive. Nature seemed upset! Heavy rain continued to fall for a couple of days and all Nature responded to the climatic change.

The sky on the night of the 5th was almost cloudless, the ground was sodden and the temperature sticky. Millions of insects had waited for the rains to be released from their pupal stages, and take to wing on perhaps, life's last mission to reproduce or die as food for others. It was an exhibition of the struggle for existence. This struggle is, perhaps, never keener at any other time of the year than at the break of the monsoon. Life at this time is just one enormous 'tidal wave'. I took my stand under a street lamp at Andheri—a naturalist on the prowl, complete with net and sundry killing bottles.

The ground around the lamp post was teeming with large, winged ants. They had just emerged from the ground and gathered round in clusters, bidding farewell to their late home and taking leave of their 'nurses'—it was time for the marriage flights—the last flight for them all, some to fall victims to their fate, others, but few, to start a new colony. Away from their birth place they were now to brave the dangers of a new adventure. The lamp had attracted thousands of other winged ants, and conspicuous among them were *Camponotus* and *Cremastogaster*. The presence of the new arrivals did not seem to worry the groups on the ground: none were in a fighting mood, though at any other time the ants would never have tolerated such familiarity. The flying termites had appeared earlier in the evening, and by 9 p.m. were no longer around the lamp.

The air around was alive with insect forms, so numerous that frequent collisions brought many to the ground dazed. Small moths were in plenty, and a few large *Euproctidae*, all vainly trying to reach the burning filament. The magnetism of the light held them. Doom awaited most of them. Now and again a cricket would kick itself into the air, take to wing for a while and then fall clumsily to earth, to kick off once more when disturbed by another insect. The whirl of thousands of small wings, the constant metallic click from the lamp shade and the dull sound of a fall to the ground, were from time to time interrupted by the deep drone from the wings of some large coleopter. The zooming noise was soon followed by a crash against the light or the post, then a thud which announced that the beetle had landed on its back, and finally a shuffling sound as it made frantic efforts to right itself. Success meant a new assault on the bewildering light. All these sounds betrayed the arrival of one of the largest of the Longicorns, *Acanthophous serraticornis* Ol., quite a formidable name for a formidable looking beetle with large punishing jaws. A suitable hold on the back soon puts its 'armaments' out of action. Before I decided to retire I had secured sixteen fine specimens—five others had been crushed by passing vehicles. This was an exceptional flight, for, in all the years I have been at Andheri, I have never known this species to appear in such numbers. Subsequent enquiry showed that the flight was rather general, for

the longicorns had been seen by many other people in Andheri.

At times wayfarers stopped and took stock of me, perhaps wondering what on earth the 'sahib' was doing at that hour of the night under the light, covered with insects, and armed with a butterfly net and several bottles. They watched me, and when they saw me make a dash for this or that insect and quickly consign it to one of the bottles, they were satisfied, though curious as to what would be the fate of the insects—were they eatable or medicinal? Any way they evidently doubted my sanity and moved off commenting. They were villagers and did not understand. Motorists hooted at me as I hastened across the road to retrieve a specimen; heads popped out to have a look—the general consensus of opinion must have been—a lunatic at large! It was not the first time that my identity and intentions have been mistaken. When following natural history pursuits, I have been often pitied as a case more suitable for a mental asylum! A naturalist must be prepared for such comments from the uninitiated, but let me return to my lamp and its fauna.

Insects spell food for many animals, so I soon discovered that I was not the only watcher under the light. The recent rain had deluded the Bull Frog (*Rana tigrina* Daud.) from its retreat. They had come up to breed, but the rain was insufficient for breeding purposes, so they hopped about the countryside in a vain search for puddles. The chorus of their sonorous voices lifted in 'prayer' for more rain, was in vain. Some of them were in their wedding garb of yellow, but not as bright as it should be—a dirty greenish yellow. Though not quite intent on food at this time, they still 'lapped' up an insect here and there. Some of the unfortunates had been run over by cars—an enemy Nature had not counted on—and were now just 'grease spots' or mangled forms. On the lamp-post were a couple of geckoes (*Hemidactylus flaviviridis* Rüppel). They had soon eaten their fill and now looked longingly at the insects they could not eat. What would they have not given for a more elastic stomach! At last, tired of looking on at the feast before them, and the constant rain of falling insects on their bodies, they decided to move off. The ground was alive with spiders, large and small, preying on the insects as they fell. Among the spiders was a single *Mygale*. The spiders too were constantly disturbed by the rain of insects, which made them retire to suck their meal in peace. Sneaking along the edge of the drain was a shrew (*Suncus* sp.) with its long snout vibrating like the free end of an agitated spring, seeking this or that 'dainty'. Now and again it would make short sallies into the arena, seize an insect and retreat to make a meal of it, only to return for another. A little way off a gentle crackling noise drew my attention, so I switched on my torch to discover a Bandicoot (*Bandicota malabarica* Shaw) gnawing at a big Longicorn (*Batocera rubus* L.) The bandicoots lurked in the shadows, and seldom came into the light. Several centipedes (*Scolopendra* sp.) moved about in the throng of insects in the drain taking toll here and there. There were numerous carabid beetles

(*Pheropsophus catcirei* Dej.) hurriedly seizing their prey and retiring immediately to deal with it. How many other insect feeders were lurking around, is difficult to imagine. Some bats occasionally visited the light, but there was evidently enough food in the air without hovering round lamps.

Flying ants seemed to predominate. Beetles, perhaps came next in numerical order, most of which were minute. Of the less minute forms the cockchafers (*Melolonthidae*) were there in their hundreds. The *Carabidae* were well represented particularly by a black species commonly found under stones. A straggler among the *Coleoptera* was a Rhinoceros Beetle (*Oryctes rhinoceros* L.), but its life was short for a passing car reduced it to a 'flat skin'. The moths were well represented by a large number of *Microlepidoptera*. Among the larger forms were specimens of *Euproctis* sp. and a few of the peculiar family *Hepialidae*, moths with long heavy bodies and clumsy flight (*Phassus* sp.). The *Orthoptera*, grasshoppers and Grillids, were fairly plentiful. The mole Cricket (*Gryllotalpa* sp.) a member of the 'under world', also hung around. The *Rhynchota*, or garden bugs and members of the *Homoptera*, mostly minute, were present in goodly numbers. A curious point about the Cotton Bug (*Dysdercus cingulatus* Fab.) is that though during the day thousands are about in the neighbourhood, very few were attracted by the light.

Near midnight I decided to retire; so I collected my belongings and went to bed after ridding myself of as many insects as I could. Next morning I visited the scene of the previous night, but there was nothing to betray the activity that had taken place. On arrival at the office with my 'bag', the insect department foresaw a busy day, there were over a hundred specimens to set. Of course, I could have multiplied this figure an hundredfold, but it would have meant much duplication.

It will not be out of place to compare the catch of this night with that of the next. Except for a considerable reduction in flying ants, most of the insects mentioned above were there. There was a noted increase in the number of cockchafers and scarabs. Of *Acanthophorus* only one turned up. A pair of beetles closely allied to *Acanthophorus* was also secured. They were *Macrotoma crenata* Fabr. This was the first time I secured this cerambycid in Salsette. Small mantids were occasional. As the weather was drier the frogs seemed fewer in numbers. The shrew was back accompanied by friends; the Bandicoot lurked in the shadows.

The 'Dance of Life' around a street light at the break of the rains and for some time after is mingled with jubilation and tragedy. Jubilation because it is the setting free of millions from the pupal life, tragedy because the majority perish—they have hardly begun life when it is snatched away from them.

BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,

C. McCANN.

BOMBAY,

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