

## A 'GI' REVISITS PACIFIC TO COLLECT INSECTS

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One of the by-products of the recent war was an increased interest in the people and the natural history of many previously little-known Pacific islands. Hundreds of thousands of Americans in our armed forces visited many island groups that had been seen before by only a handful of travelers. Together with so many others, I was a recipient of one of the "traveling fellowships" then so liberally provided by our government to men in uniform. And the period spent in the islands of Micronesia was a rich experience, at least from the natural-history standpoint.

When in the fall of 1947 the opportunity arose to revisit Micronesia, I looked forward to visiting certain islands I had not previously seen, and I also had some curiosity as to what had happened to some of the busy military bases two years after the war. This time the trip was under the auspices of the Pacific Science Board of the National Research Council and was for the purpose of studying the interesting and rather unusual insect life of the Palau Islands in Micronesia. I remained until late spring, 1948.

The Palaus are a group of islands lying about 600 miles to the east of the Philippines. The two southern islands, Peleliu and Angaur, figured in the news during the war as scenes of hard-fought invasions. The occupation of Peleliu involved a massive military assault that virtually destroyed the original vegetation over most of the island and left a reminder of its intensity in such names as Bloody Nose Ridge. After the occupation, the construction of roads, air strips, supply depots, and troop installations further changed the appearance of the island. At the height of this activity, the island was a busy and crowded military base and had little of the typical atmosphere of a South Sea island.

### NATURE COVERS WAR SCARS

Today the roads are quiet and the quonset huts lie empty, with their screens rusting and broken through. Grasses, shrubs, vines, and small trees are beginning to cover the air strips, roadsides, and bare spots. In time, the air of desolation lying over the island can be expected to disappear as the native vegetation conceals the scars of war.

Babeldaob, the northernmost and largest island in the group, was by-passed and suffered little damage except to military installations. I selected the quiet and picturesque village of Ulimang on the northeast coast as a base for insect collecting. The village was situated on the seashore in an old coconut grove planted during the time of the German occupation before World War I. The houses were connected by neat sandy trails, which were swept daily. The

chief of the village had the very un-Palauan name of Charlie Gibbons, which he had inherited from his grandfather, a Jamaican Negro who had jumped ship in the last century and married a chieftain's daughter. By all accounts, the old Charlie Gibbons was a man of parts and his descendants are now prominent persons in the community.

Remnants of the old Palau life were conspicuous in the area. A few of the carved men's clubhouses were still standing but were in bad repair. Old stone trails and hut platforms, made of smooth, closely placed stones, were all through the area and gave evidence of a much greater population, with a stronger social organization, than now inhabits the region. The ridge of hills behind the village had been cleared and partly terraced in past times, and hut-sites and bits of pottery lying on the ground suggested the former presence of a village on the summit. Remnants of the old Palau handicraft, in the form of tortoise-shell spoons and carved platters with mother-of-pearl inlay, were still to be found in various homes in the village. The courteous yet friendly dignity of the villagers contributed much to the impression of charm and beauty of the village.

### COLLECTING IS VARIED

From this pleasant base, daily trips were made, in search of insects, into the various kinds of vegetation associations in the vicinity. A typical day's collecting trip would take me, in company with my Palau boy, up the grassy slope of the terraced ridge behind the village. After a short but hot climb we would reach the top and pause to get the fresh breeze from the sea and to enjoy the view of the village below and the sea and the reef beyond. Then we would dip down into the valley behind the ridge and spend the day collecting leisurely along some forested stream-side. At times we would follow an old stone trail, whose stones were worn smooth by generations of bare feet, to some unusually attractive glade. One such spot, near a deep pool in the stream, must have once impressed some aboriginal Palau natives as well, for a stone platform marked the site of a hut now long gone.

These trips, as well as those elsewhere in the island group, gradually disclosed the interesting insect fauna of the Palaus. In general, the insects were similar to those of other island groups in Micronesia, but there were many local developments that occurred nowhere else, as far as is known. Despite the uniformly warm climate, the large and showy insects one usually associates with the tropics were largely absent. Most of the insects in Palau were small and obscure types. Moreover, many of the groups of insects that are dominant in continental areas were absent or were represented by few forms. All of these distinctive features of the insects of oceanic islands are a result of special conditions that apply to islands

## NOVEMBER LECTURE TOURS, DAILY EXCEPT SUNDAYS

Tours of exhibits, under the guidance of staff lecturers, are conducted every afternoon at 2 o'clock, except Sundays and certain holidays. On Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, general tours are given, covering all departments. Special subjects are offered on Wednesdays and Fridays (the Friday tours open with an introductory lecture and slides or films in the Meeting Room on the second floor of the Museum); a schedule of these follows:

Wed., Nov. 3—Life Usually Unseen—Microscopic Plants and Animals (*Marie Svoboda*).

Fri., Nov. 5—Activities of a Museum. Illustrated introduction in Meeting Room (*Lorain Farmer*).

Wed., Nov. 10—Cats—Wild and Tame (National Cat Week) (*Harriet Smith*).

Fri., Nov. 12—Readin', 'Ritin', and 'Rithmetic—Schooling Throughout the World (American Education Week). Illustrated introduction in Meeting Room (*June Buchwald*).

Wed., Nov. 17—Natural History Facts and Fallacies (*Lorain Farmer*).

Fri., Nov. 19—Story of the Dunes. Illustrated introduction in Meeting Room (*Marie Svoboda*).

Wed., Nov. 24—Origins of Modern Dress (*June Buchwald*).

Fri., Nov. 26—Harvest Festivals. Illustrated introduction in Meeting Room (*Harriet Smith*).

and not to continental areas. Of prime importance, among these special conditions, is the sea barrier. All of the island inhabitants somehow had to cross this expanse of salt water in order to colonize the island. In examining the insects of an island, it is evident that many major groups of insects were unable to cross the sea, or were only partially successful. Those that did manage to cross by being accidentally carried on a raft of driftwood, or by being blown by high winds, or by some other form of accidental dispersal, often found favorable conditions, free from the struggle for existence, which permitted rapid development along special lines.

These are the special features of animal life on oceanic islands that interested the young Charles Darwin on the voyage of the *Beagle* more than a century ago. And the questions posed, particularly during his visit to the Galapagos Islands, contributed much to the thinking that led later to the formulation of his theory of evolution.





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