

# Lebanon 4-H'er compiles award-winning insect collection

BY SUZANNE KEENE

LEBANON — Walking along a trail in a Delaware wildlife preserve, Sylvia Royer spied a frog. With net carefully poised for attack, she sneaked through the tall grass and slammed the net down.

The frog disappeared into the grass, but Sylvia's initial disappointment turned to excitement when she discovered a red velvet ant entangled in her snare. Swishing the ant toward the open end of the net with her hand, Sylvia deposited it in one of the killing jars she had stashed in her daypack.

That red velvet ant is now part of Sylvia's extensive insect collection, which includes over 2,000 specimens. She began her insect collection at a young age, gathering bugs from her mother's vegetable garden on their Lebanon County dairy farm near Annville.

"I'd go outside in the garden and find a bug and look it up," she explains.

At first, she took her bugs to class for show and tell. When she was 11, she joined the local entomology club and learned how to preserve and display the insects. Three years ago that club disbanded, but Sylvia has continued adding to her collection on her own.

Sylvia has won a number of awards for her collection. Most recently, she received an Amateur Entomologist Award for 1984 from the Entomological Society of Pennsylvania. The award recognizes outstanding achievements and contributions to the study of insects by amateurs in Pennsylvania.

Two years ago her four-member entomological judging team took first place at state 4-H days. Her collection has won first place at the

farm show four times in the past five years. One year she had to settle for second place. This year she will enter her collection for the seventh time in the Lebanon Area Fair, where it has already won five first-place and one second-place award.

In the years since show and tell, Sylvia has learned much about collecting, identifying and preserving insects. She still does much of her collecting around home, capturing flying insects with a large net and snaring others with her killer jars. At night she sets up a black light and a white sheet on the balcony of their home. The light attracts the insects, which then perch on the white sheet and are easy to identify and collect.

Her 4-H club once had a black light party. "We all just stood around a black light and waited to see what would come up," she explained. The only difficulty came, she continued, when more than one club member wanted a particular insect.

Sylvia has collected many of her insects during family camping trips. While on a vacation to Florida, she gathered a number of insects, which she keeps in a separate case. The display she uses for the Farm Show may include only insects captured in Pennsylvania.

Through trial and error, Sylvia has learned that visitors are prohibited from removing insects from state parks without first obtaining a license or special permission from the park rangers. She said a park ranger once stopped her while she was out collecting bugs, but allowed her to keep her specimens since she was using them for scientific purposes.

Once she has captured the insects, Sylvia said she puts them in



Sylvia Royer, Lebanon, shows off her insect collection that has helped her win a number of awards, including an Amateur Entomologist Award this year.



To catch an insect resting on a leaf or flower, Sylvia captures them in her "killer jar."

## Homestead Notes

a "killing jar" which consists of a lidded jar containing plaster of paris soaked with ethyl acetate and a kleenex. The fumes kill the bug within seconds and the kleenex protects the insects from harming themselves.

"It keeps it from beating it's wings against the hard plaster," she said.

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Sylvia's insect collecting equipment includes a net and a daypack filled with several "killer jars."



Sylvia demonstrates how she would catch a butterfly overhead along the family's garden, where she first started collecting insects as a young child.