

Insect collection

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Transferring the bugs from the net to the jar can be a risky business. The red velvet ant that Sylvia caught while stalking the frog carries a painful sting. The ant, which is like a female wasp without wings, is also called a "cow killer" because of its sting. She said that while she immediately knew what she had caught, she did not realize that it could have stung her when she pushed it towards the jar with her hand.

Identifying the insects can be a tedious and time-consuming process. We've spent whole days sometimes, identifying things," she said.

Over the years Sylvia has collected a number of books which help her identify the insect. By looking through the books she gradually narrows down the possibilities until she can finally make a positive identification.

Sylvia has taken several insects that she was unable to identify to the entomologists at Penn State University. Even they were unable to identify one of them, Sylvia said.

To display the insects, Sylvia

places them on a pinning block of Styrofoam or soft wood. The block has ridges cut into it, where she places the insect's body. She then pins the wings to the board and lets the insect sit for about a week to dry. When it is completely dry, it becomes stiff and can be transferred to a display case.

Sylvia said it is important to place moth crystals in the display cases to keep moth larvae from destroying the insects, a lesson she learned the hard way. Her first display, she said, was ruined when larvae squeezed through the cracks in her case and laid their eggs on the insects.

"I opened up my box and found a pile of dust," she said.

Sylvia's father, a carpenter, made her display cases and the rest of the family takes an interest in her project as well. They help her collect and identify the insects and her father and little brother have both started their own collections.

In the display case, each insect is accompanied by three labels, placed one on top of the other. The first one gives the county where the insect was caught and the date it was captured. The second label

tells where it was found and the third gives its common name.

The labels are required for competition, but are a good idea just for personal use, Sylvia said. In competition, judges look for proper identification, neatness of pinning, and quality of specimens. One year, she recalled, a judge pointed out dirt on the feet of a grasshopper that was part of another contestant's display.

While she has excelled in her 4-H entomology project, Sylvia is also involved in number of other projects. Her current projects include sewing, cooking, photography, vegetables, wildlife and forestry.


Since her entomology judging team took first place at state 4-H days two years ago, Sylvia has turned her judging efforts to vegetables. Last year she was the fourth-place individual in vegetable judging, which involves identifying diseases, weeds and seeds. She said she plans to participate in the event again this year.

Sylvia said she hopes that a younger 4-H'er will take an interest in entomology, giving her an opportunity to become a teen leader.

At Annville Cleona High School, where she will be a senior this fall, Sylvia participates in marching and concert bands, wind ensemble, chorus, and mat maids. She plans to join the tennis team this fall.

After high school, Sylvia said she would like to earn a degree in art therapy and help the mentally disabled "express themselves through art."

She said she will probably continue adding to her insect collection at a slower rate. "It will probably just stay a hobby for me," she said.



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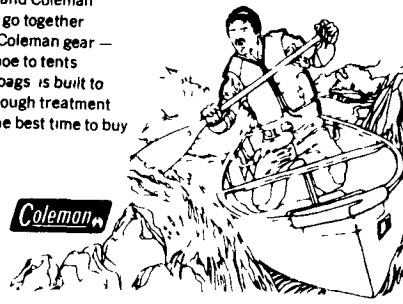
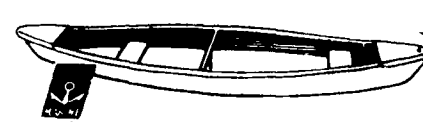
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