

Susquehanna Times

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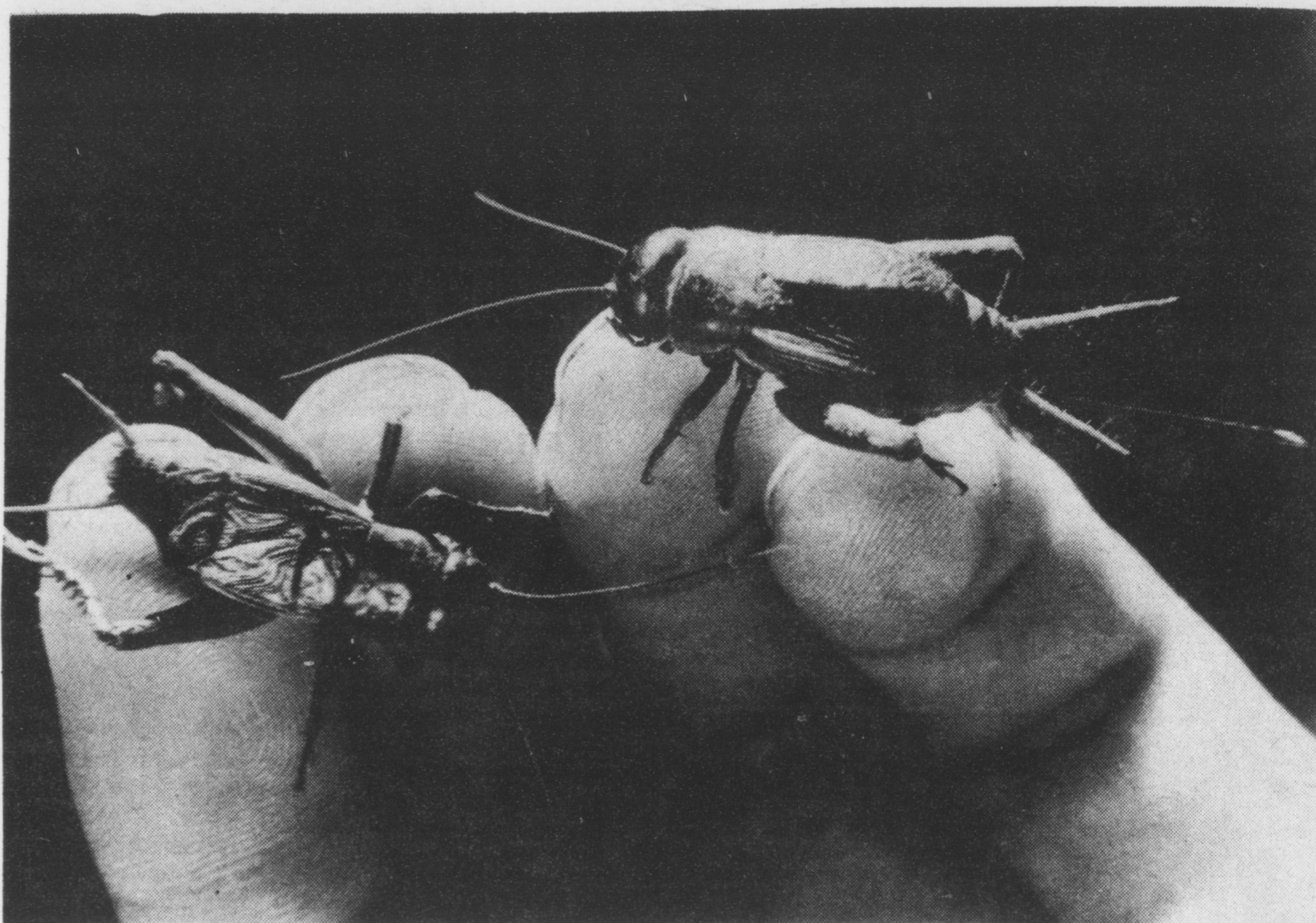
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Crickets cling to the fingers of Matther Keller of Mount Joy, who keeps 70 or 80 of the insects as pets.

Insect opera; they sing before they fight

Eleven year-old Matthew Keller of Mount Joy has become something of an expert on crickets. He has a collection of 70 or 80 of

the little beasts, and he spends hours watching them.

A *Susquehanna Times* reporter who visited Matthew recently, found himself spending more than an hour, staring, like Matthew, at the crickets. They really are amazing animals.

Matthew pointed out a mating pair of crickets. The female, who can be indentified by the long egg-laying spike on her tail, immediately began searching for a place to bury her egg. Apparently, fertilization takes place just before the egg is buried.

Another female, for some reason, ate her own egg.

The reporter saw quite a few battles. When two crickets meet head-to-head, they sing angrily and lunge at one another, until one cricket backs down.

Other cricket activities include: excavating a burrow in the ground, and battling to defend it from other crickets; and grooming (crickets spend a lot of time keeping their legs clean).

Matthew, who is a Vietnamese refugee, and the adopted son of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Keller of Marietta, learned how to raise grasshoppers in his native Vietnam, where grasshoppers are considered a gourmet treat.

Crickets also consider grasshoppers good eating. Besides consuming a variety of insects, Matthew's crickets gobble sugar cookies, apples and raisins. He also gives them water).

Matthew began collecting crickets in his backyard, after the Mount Joy swim team season ended, leaving him with time to kill. At first, he kept his pets in his bedroom, but, when their musical chirps awoke the family, a brother rigged up an aquarium for the crickets, and they were banished to the porch.

Matthew has learned to

make the crickets sing and fight on command, a trick which delights his sisters. His sisters, incidentally, can't seem to make up their minds about whether they like the crickets. They often ask permission to hold the insects, then shriek and look disgusted when the privilege is finally granted.

The whole family, however, enjoys watching the cricket colony.



Matthew Keller, with aquarium full of crickets.

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