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NOTES ON THE OCCURRENCE OF *HEPIALUS THULE*, STRECKER, AT MONTREAL.*

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In the part of Mr. Strecker's *Lepidoptera*, Indigenous and Exotic, dated Feb. 22nd, 1875, is the description, and on the accompanying plate an excellent figure, of this species from a female sent to that author by the late Mr. Caulfield, and which was probably taken in the previous summer. The specimen was found in Phillips Square, which is about two miles from its nearest known locality, by the caretaker, from whom it passed to the taxidermist of the Natural History Society, who gave it to Mr. Caulfield.

From that time I can find no further record of its capture till that given in the Feb., 1884, number of the *CANADIAN ENTOMOLOGIST* (Vol. XVI., 39), by the late Mr. Bowles, who recorded having received a specimen of it during the previous year, 1883. He also stated in the same note that Mr. J. G. Jack, of Chateauguay Basin, P. Q., had also a very beautiful specimen of this moth, presumably taken in that locality.

In 1889, when looking into this matter, I wrote to Mr. Jack, at Jamaica Plain, informing him that I had found it recorded in the old minute book of the Montreal Branch that he had found the larva of what was probably a large species of *Hepialus* at Chateauguay, and asking him for particulars about this matter, and especially whether he had ever succeeding in rearing the larva to imago, or had taken this species there, and mentioning what Mr. Bowles had published in 1884. To this letter Mr. Jack replied that for two or three years in succession he had found a larva which he believed to be a *Hepialus* in the stems of *Acer Spicatum*, and one in a stem of *A. Rubrum*, and another in that of *A. Pennsylvanicum*; that the stems in which they were found were from one to two inches in diameter; that the borings extended from about a foot above the surface of the ground down into the rootstock, and that the point of exit

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was usually but a few inches above the surface of the ground ; that the larvæ were searched for and found in late fall or early winter, and that though about a dozen were found he did not succeed in breeding the imago ; and finally that he never took *H. Thule* anywhere, but exchanged with the late Mr. Shaw, of Montreal, for a nice specimen which he afterwards gave to the Museum at Cambridge, Mass.

No further specimens, so far as I have been able to ascertain, were taken till 1885, in which year Mr. Shaw was so fortunate as to secure nine specimens. Mr. Shaw, to the great regret of our members in the Montreal Branch, died in 1886, and I was therefore unable to learn any further particulars from him.

In 1887 I searched in vain for the species, but in 1888 I was successful in discovering it, and took twelve specimens.

The locality where I discovered it, and which was probably the same as where Mr. Shaw had found it, is the brow of the old sea terrace of the post-pliocene period which extends for some miles east and west of Montreal, at a point in the municipality of Côte St. Antoine on the western outskirts of Montreal, and just above the St. Henry Swamp. I only found it in a very limited portion of this locality, not more than 400 or 500 feet in length, and supposed it was restricted to this very small area.

In 1889 I only secured six specimens, though I visited the locality much oftener, and in 1890 one just before starting on a trip across the continent, while in 1891 I only obtained two, and one other was taken by Mr. Winn.

From these facts I feared it was doomed to extinction in this locality, as the Canadian Pacific Railway runs along the brow of the terrace, and the swamp at its base is being drained and cultivated, and will be built over in a few years.

But last year we learned from one of our members that he had taken the species about three miles further west, but on the level swampy tract below the terrace, and some of our members went out on 15th July and two specimens were secured. This year Mr. Winn has traced it out all along this terrace, so that its range is much more extensive than we supposed.

The earliest date upon which I have taken it is 6th July, and the latest upon which I have heard of its being taken is 20th July of this year, but the specimens were worn and ragged.

The species seems to fly only for about fifteen to twenty minutes in

the twilight, as I have never taken it before ten minutes past eight, nor ever after half-past eight. Bright, clear evenings I have found much more favourable than cloudy ones, though I have visited the locality on many evenings without seeing one.

I have never succeeded in seeing where they came from, though I have stood watching intently for them for fifteen minutes or more before they appeared, but suddenly two or three would be in the air together, often out of reach of the net, swinging back and forth in their peculiar oscillating manner, though single individuals have been taken by others while flying along near the ground.

If touched by the net without being caught, they would drop into the grass apparently quite helpless. Six-sevenths of those which I have taken were males, but others have secured a more even division of the sexes.

One of the specimens taken in 1891 was a female, which I kept alive in order to secure eggs. It laid freely an enormous number, and I do not know whether it might not have laid more had it been kept alive longer. It was kept alive for two days in a wooden box, with gauze over the top, and seemed to hang perfectly quiet and to allow the eggs to run from her, as they were not attached, but loose in the bottom of the box. At the end of this time she was found to have been knocking about and spoiling her wings, and so was killed. The eggs were counted very carefully, and were found to amount to the enormous number of 2,151.

The following description was taken :—

Length, .027 of an inch.

Breadth, .022 of an inch.

Even oval, slightly flattened on lower side, perfectly smooth, but dull, like unglazed porcelain.

Colour, a pale honey-yellow when laid, soon turning black.

This female, however, must have been virgin, as the eggs speedily shrivelled, so that I was unable to obtain the young larvæ, or to make any of the experiments which I had contemplated in the direction of placing the eggs upon any likely food-plant. In connection with this subject several questions of great interest arise. It is well known that the moths of this family are very abundant in the Old World, one especially, *Hepialus Velleda*, swarming in Scotland in myriads, yet though we have a great many species on this continent, I do not think that any one can be considered other than very rare, except *H. Mustelinus*, which Packard reported (Proc. Ent. Soc., Phil., III., 394), as not uncommon at

Brunswick, Me., at light, and *H. Argenteomaculatus*, which is stated to be pretty generally distributed, though it is certainly not common in the imago state.*

Now, if the females in this genus produce over two thousand eggs each, it can be easily understood why they are so abundant in Europe, but why are they so rare on this continent?

Mr. D. S. Kellicott, who discovered the larva and pupa of *H. Argenteomaculatus*, found that that species bored in the roots of *Alnus incana*, but came up into the stem when mature, and Prof. J. B. Smith stated that it bred also in oak, willow and poplar. Mr. Kellicott stated in his paper upon this subject, which he read before this club at the Cleveland meeting, that after these nearly mature larvæ had come up into the stem, large numbers of them were destroyed by woodpeckers.

Upon reading this, it occurred to me that possibly this furnished the key to the mystery of the scarcity of these moths on this continent, and I therefore wrote to an ornithological acquaintance to ask if woodpeckers were more abundant on this continent than in the Old World. This gentleman replied that while he had no definite knowledge upon that question, he should judge that we had in Canada ten to twenty times as many woodpeckers to the square mile as they had in England.

I must, however, confess that even if this estimate be correct it is not an entirely satisfactory explanation, as there are on this continent a number of small species in this genus which no doubt feed in the roots of shrubs or herbaceous plants where woodpeckers would not be likely to find them, which are quite as rare as the larger species. I also wrote to Dr. Strecker to learn whether, so far as he knew, *Thule* had ever been found in any other locality than Montreal, to which he replied as follows:—"Some years since, an example of *Hepialus Thule* was taken somewhere in Wisconsin, I don't recollect where or by whom, but a sketch was sent me at the time for identification, which I immediately recognized as that species."

In regard to the life-history of the species in this genus, the English entomologists to whose works I have access are extremely vague. Stainton, in his Manual I., 109, says of the genus, "Larva feeding on the roots of plants," which leaves it very indefinite as to whether he means in the roots or tunneling in the earth and feeding on the roots. He even says that the larva of *H. Hectus* feeds on the leaves of dandelion, and F. O. Morris says "on the dandelion." Newman, "British Moths," does not commit himself as to *Hectus*, but of most of the others he says "on roots," but of *H. Velleda* he says "in the subterranean rhizome of the common brake, (*Pteris aquilina*)."

In spite of the very loose statements of English entomologists, I think there can be no doubt that the larvæ of this genus are internal feeders, as stated by both Harris and Packard.

*Since writing this paper Prof. J. B. Smith has called my attention to the fact that *H. McGlashani* is very abundant. See Ent. Amer., II., 15.