

HW379

1 of 8

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NAME HUNG FAN NGAI

DATE OF BIRTH [REDACTED]

SCHOOL ADDRESS AND COUNTRY

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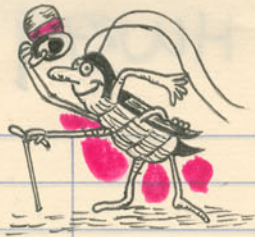
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Hong Kong's Greatest Insects

Too many people shudder at the sight of insects without realizing that these small creatures have been around for billions of years before man and know nature's untold secrets. As an amateur entomologist, I have always marvelled at the countless number of species of insects in this world and have never failed to increase my knowledge of Hong Kong's insect population. Here I would like to introduce Hong Kong's 'best' five creepy-crawlies.

No other insect symbolizes Chinese tradition more than the happy brown and green cricket. His cheerfulness represents youth, strength and spring time. A detailed study of him shows that he is also good at cricket fights. He knows how to build sub-

terranean nests with great care and, at night, the nocturnal 'songs' of the males are very penetrating and can be heard loud and clear at great distances. Such 'songs' are produced when the cricket rubs together his tegmina (forewings) bases. For picking up the 'song' of another cricket, he uses auditory organs in the tibiae of the forelegs! Who knows — maybe we can learn something from him!

Hong Kong's 'national insect' however must surely be our old friend the cockroach. Famous throughout the world, the cockroach has shown his amazing adaptability — indeed, the tall buildings in cities have provided 'a natural home' for him and in Hong Kong it is not unusual to find him on the sixtieth floor or so. When we realize that the cockroach has outlived the dinosaurs, we know

nature has created a wonderful creature — 5,300 species of them (that's one too many!) However, it is not always easy to recognize the different ones because some of the species have distinct sexual dimorphism which means two types in the same species with certain colouring and size. Often the female can be identified by having smaller wings and being black instead of brown like the male. In any case, regardless of species, the cockroach has now developed strong resistance to all attacks against him and scientists plan to use him in space tests since the cockroach can stand space rays that would kill man!

Another insect frequently represented in Chinese traditions is the cicada. Often unnoticed in the bustle of Hong Kong's city

life, he does well in the nearby parks and hill sides. There are 55,000 species of them and in time, and with practice, it is possible to identify the different species by the songs of the males! Indeed, a Chinese emperor once populated his garden with all kinds of cicadas in order to please his favourite concubine! Today, we have to be content with the knowledge that cicadas sing from June to early September and have a long stout proboscis with which they suck sap from trees and other host plants somewhat like a miniature antecater!

It requires more care to 'discover' the rarer insects or more unusual insects of Hong Kong. The red-tailed spider-hunting wasp suggests a very capable insect. Indeed, he strides rapidly over the ground with

long flickering antennae which seek spiders by their scent trails. It is quite exciting to observe such a wasp dragging along a large paralysed spider to his home in a weepage hole on the bank - retaining walls near a dam. He has fantastic jaws that could well develop more evolution and be used for holding more than just large spiders - who knows?

Entomology has its rewards when nature produces a 'funny fellow'. I am always delighted to find a water penny. The adults look a bit like small, brownish beetles and are found near the edges of fast-flowing streams in the New Territories. You have to look rather carefully for their larvae which cling to rocks that are often submerged. Nevertheless, it is the adult water penny that attracts for he

always reminds one of a kind of fossilized trilobite. Describing him like a penny is rather odd but he is a strange looking insect!

It can be seen that Hong Kong does offer a student a chance to study a variety of insects that can interest anyone who may not be an entomologist. It is more fun when one realizes how the cricket and cicada played an important part in Chinese art and literature. Our old friend, the cockroach should be respected more while insects like the red-tailed spider-hunting wasp show us that man may have to face much more developed creatures in the future! Hong Kong besides being an international city, does have some great insects!



P.T.O.

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Dr. Dennis S. Hill.



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