

2nd Column (2019. 1. 15)

Hello, everyone! For today's column I will talk a little bit about insects, more specifically my experience in working with them. What? Insects?!?

Although I have always been somewhat interested in insects, I really started learning about them when I was studying in Hawaii. Even though my major was linguistics, I ended up working at the University of Hawaii Insect Museum. When I was looking for some part-time work I thought it would be convenient to work on campus, so that is where I started looking. One of the jobs I found was for a Digitalization Project Assistant at the Insect Museum, and I applied for the job.

The Insect Museum is actually less of a museum and more of a working lab (although they do have tours when requested). The main goal of the digitalization project is to make the university's insect collection available to researchers in other labs as well as to amateur entomologists. In the digitization process, I organized the specimens and took pictures of each one with the accompanying label information. The largest part of the collection is drosophila (small fruit flies), and there are an especially large number of specimens from the Hawaiian Islands. Accordingly, there is also a lot of research related to drosophila carried out in the museum. Handling these kinds of small insects was a very meticulous job, and sometimes a bit tedious, but I was able to learn so much while working on the project that I really enjoyed the work.

I worked at the Insect Museum for two years. The first year I mostly worked on the digitization project while the second year I was focused on spreading Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies). A large part of an entomologist's research is doing a lot of fieldwork, which sometimes includes collecting hundreds of specimens. Because of this, it is usually quite difficult for the researcher to pin and spread all of the specimens by themselves. At the beginning of my second year in the museum I learned how to spread Lepidoptera and started working on some researchers recently collected specimens. In the entomology department there was also a Japanese researcher, and funnily enough she taught me in Japanese how to spread Lepidoptera!

The weather in Hawaii is perfect for keeping insects for research and as pets because it is warm all year round, the humidity is high and there are always plants growing. Insects I have kept up until now include stick insects, beetles, praying mantises, crickets (as food for the mantis), and caterpillars. The only insects I am keeping at the moment right two small beetles. My favorite insects to collect are moths and beetles.

Insect collecting might have a bit of a childish image in Japan, however entomology is vital in environmental conservation. Let's all play with insects!

University of Hawaii Insect Museum website:
<http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/insectmuseum/>