

AN INTERESTING METHOD OF CATCHING DRAGONFLIES

In 1961 I made a business trip to China as an employee of a metallurgic company. Once, a bus in which I was traveling stopped near a small rice field. I was fascinated by the following scene.

A boy, aged about 13, was standing at the edge of a shallow water reservoir, holding a live libellulid dragonfly tied to a black thread (cf. Fig.

1). It was flying, vainly trying to free itself. A large number of aeshnids and libellulids were flying over the rice field. From time to time one of them came to the captured dragonfly as close as 15-50 cm, stopped in its flight watching the tied insect, and then departed. There was something inhuman in this tormenting a helpless animal, but it occurred to me that this could be an easy method of catching dragonflies.



Fig. 1. A Japanese postcard (1976), showing this "dragonfly game", which is widespread in Japan as well. — (S.I.O. Archives).

I returned to Poland in the late autumn, and the next year I tested the method used by the Chinese boy. However, I took a slightly different approach.

I went to a large forest complex, N of the town of Tarnowskie Góry, where a 50 m wide clearing meanders through the woods for several kilometers. There is a stream, called Graniczna,

flowing through the middle of that clearing. The brook is over 1 m wide, and its banks are strengthened with fascines. On both sides of the stream there are meadows and old river-beds of various depths, and places with *Sphagnum* vegetation.

I broke off a long willow branch and defoliated it. The first dragonfly captured — an *Aeshna cyanea*, — I tied to the end of the stick, fastening threads at 2 points of its body, the prothorax and the second abdominal segment. Thus, the dragonfly could freely move the wings and could partially move the abdomen. I drove the stick into the bank, projected 0.6-0.7 m off the bank's line. The fluttering dragonfly was well visible against the water background.

The method appeared very efficient. From time to time, a dragonfly would come close, and practically each net stroke was successful. I caught the following species: *Aeshna cyanea* (Müll.), *A. juncea* (L.), *A. grandis* (L.), *Soma-tochlora metallica* (Vander L.), *Cordulia aenea* (L.) and *Libellula quadrimaculata* L. No *Leucorrhinia* and *Sympetrum* individuals, nor any Zygoptera present in the area came close to the imprisoned dragonfly. It is unknown how *Gomphus vulgatissimus* (L.) and *Cordulegaster boltonii* (Don.), both frequent in that area, would behave, since not a single individual of these species was around at the time of testing.

After a while I was disgusted with the whole affair and had qualms of conscience. It was a "slaughter" rather than a hunt. It looked like shooting at a deer tied to a tree. There is no pleasure in hunting when the game has no chance to escape! I have not repeated such catching any more. Anyway, it has the disadvantage that all individuals caught are males. Not a single female ever came close.

It seems, however, that in quantitative surveys the application of this method could be opportune.

L. Sawkiewicz, Ul. Lenartowicza 8 m 2, PO-41-902 Bytom, Poland.