

## How I kept my butterfly collection in tropical West-Africa

by

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It might be useful for butterfly collectors in tropical regions with a damp climate to know that, with a little trouble, it is indeed possible to set your butterflies on the day you catch them and still keep them in perfect condition for an unlimited time, set and all. This is why I should like you to know my experiences and method. Before I went out to the Gold-Coast (British West Africa, known for its extreme dampness of air) quite a few famous collectors told me, and moreover I read in several entomological periodicals, that it was impossible to keep a butterfly collection in a damp climate in the tropics, and not knowing better I believed them. According to them one could only keep butterflies in papers, dried properly in the sun and put in airtight tins.

However, after having done so for a year, I thought it rather dull, compared with the collecting at home and I decided I might just as well have a try to build up a collection of butterflies, set there and then and so I started. I had an African negro make me some glass-covered cases, which were not badly made, but which were very imperfect compared with the cases one could buy in Europe from dealers in entomological utensils. So I tried to perfect them myself. First I took the glass out, put some very soft mastic in and put the glass back in its place. By pressing the glass slowly and evenly, the mastic smoothed out every irregularity and closed perfectly airtight; the superfluous mastic could be cut away afterwards. Then I placed in the small slat again, thus locking the glass.

By lack of Moll plates or anything soft to hold the needles, I bought sheets of cork (those used for engine-gaskets), cut them into strips and glued them in pairs on each other on the bottom. The whole I covered with a sheet of white paper and the case was ready.

In the beginning I had still a lot of trouble with ants and especially with mould, which sometimes destroyed the whole contents of a case. Then I changed my tactics. I bought some paradichlorobenzene and a bottle of carbolic acid (phenol). I took all the butterflies out on a hot, dry day (in harmattan time or after it has not rained for a few days) and dried butterflies and cases thoroughly (don't put them directly in the sun, for the wood will split!). This done, I put them back in the cases, added some paradichlorobenzene and a small piece of cotton, fixed on a pin, drenched in phenol, and immediately afterwards I fixed the lid to the case with molten bee-wax, well caring that not the tiniest place was overlooked. Only one case I kept apart and closed it along the lid with adhesive tape and this case was destined to receive all the material caught afterwards and set after the cases were closed. In this case I could classify them and when filled, I waited for a dry day, opened the other cases, put in the fresh specimens, left the cases open for half an hour or so opened to completely dry them (not in, but near the sunshine) and closed them again with wax, as described. Since I tried this method not a single specimen was lost or spoiled and they kept as fresh as if they had just been taken from the setting board. In this way I kept them for over four years, till I went on leave to Europe and I am

definitely sure I could have kept them for ten years and more just the same.

As I said, before going to the Coast, they all advised me to keep my butterflies in papers and set them in Europe when on leave. But it is much nicer and much more of a hobby to set them in the tropics right away for several reasons.

First of all, when butterflies are set fresh, they are far nicer than if they have to be softened first. And here I do not mean the wings (for they can be set just as nice after having been softened well), but more especially the small details such as palpaes, antennae, legs and particularly the tiny but long tails of the African Lycaenidae. Once these have been dried in a crooked way, it is extremely difficult to get them in a nice position again. Furthermore you can, at all times, compare your species with new specimens caught and note small differences, sex differences, aberrations and even new species, which, on first sight, looked the same.

To take the cases home on leave, is not so difficult as it might seem to be. I took mine home in wooden cases, in which I put the butterfly cases on their high sides (as one puts books in a library) with a sheet of brown paper between them in case glass might break, but caring especially that they could not move or vibrate. After arrival in Holland not one specimen was damaged, not even so much as an antenna broken, they were perfect. At home I have another set of cases in which I fix the specimens and take the empty cases back to Africa to be filled again. This is how I enjoy and feel about my hobby of collecting butterflies, I wonder if others do feel in the same way.

P.S. The cases used by me in Africa were made of antproof „Odum” wood. It is possible that this method may be applied for other insects as well.

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*Xylocopa violacea* te Wageningen. In de warme dagen, die aan Pinksteren 1951 voorafgingen, werd in een der vertrekken van het gebouw „Hinkeloord”, aan de Rijkstraatweg te Wageningen, een wijfje van *Xylocopa violacea* L. gevangen. In dit vertrek is gevestigd de afdeling Houtteelt van de Landbouwhogeschool en men zou kunnen veronderstellen dat het insect uit de daar evt. aanwezige geïmporteerde houtvoorraden afkomstig is. Volgens ingewonnen inlichtingen moet dit echter als uitgesloten worden beschouwd, aangezien er geen geïmporteerd hout aanwezig is of was. Men moet dus wel aannemen, dat het insect door de ramen, die met het mooie weer open stonden, naar binnen is gevlogen.

Eén der op genoemde afdeling werkzame ambtenaren nam het insect mee naar huis en liet het in zijn huiskamer rondvliegen. Na ongeveer een week ging het dier dood, waarschijnlijk ten gevolge van voedselgebrek. Toen kwam het in mijn bezit, en het bevindt zich thans in de verzameling van het laboratorium voor Entomologie. Het exemplaar is groot en vrij gaaf, alleen beide voorvleugeltoppen zijn een weinig beschadigd. Het 11e en 12e lid van beide antennen is opvallend licht bruin gekleurd.

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