A SPECIFIC VISUAL RESPONSE IN DRAGONFLIES

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Children of Banda Neira Island, Indonesia, catch adult Anax guttatus (Burm.) by waving sticks to which a white coconut flower or ball of cotton wool is attached, thus utilizing the insect's response to a specific visual stimulus.

Dragonflies of the species Anax guttatus (Burm.) are caught by an unusual method by children on the Indonesian island of Banda Neira. The children use thin half-metre long sticks of the kind used in coconut matting. On the end of a stick a white coconut flower or ball of cotton wool is tied. The method for catching a dragonfly is to vibrate the stick, and point it toward a dragonfly, following its flight path. Often a dragonfly is attracted to the wobbling white object and lands on it, grasping it firmly. Usually children pick the dragonflies off their sticks and tether them to strings. Most commonly dragonflies are seen at dawn or dusk, and it is at these times that children catch them.

It is remarkable that only Anax guttatus is caught by this method although there are several other species of dragonfly on Banda. Dragonflies rely heavily on vision for feeding and mating behaviour, but I know of no other instance where a definite response is initiated by a specific visual stimulus.

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