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Biology Curators Group Newsletter

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BARBER'S FLUID: the answer to a Dipterist's prayer

If you are having trouble with rigor mortis in your flies, especially if you are experiencing difficulties in attaining relaxed genitalia, then Barber's fluid is for you(!) A mixture of easily obtainable chemicals - recipe below - Barber's fluid can be made up in the home and stored without problem, so long as it's left out of the reach of children. One dab with a small brush on the offending parts induces their relaxation in about 5 minutes, such that they may be manipulated with ease and without damage to the rest of the abdomen. Total immersion (for c.10 minutes) of dried out and even quite aged specimens renders them sufficiently pliable to be remounted or set in new positions. The Barber's Fluid subsequently evaporates, leaving specimens seemingly unaffected by the wetting.

The male genitalia of many Diptera are not normally adequately visible to enable their use in determination, yet their morphology is frequently used in keys etc. to help distinguish species one from another. Laborious preparation methods or lengthy relaxation procedures inhibit many Dipterists from undertaking genitalic examinations. The ease with which fly genitalia can be manipulated and examined so soon after application of Barber's Fluid could well dispel these inhibitions, making determination of many "critical" species a much more certain and less onerous undertaking.

Ingredients of Barber's Fluid (to make up 900cc.): 95% alcohol, 330cc.; distilled water, 300cc.; ethyl acetate, 150cc.; ether, 120cc.; acetic acid, 10-20 drops.

The beneficial properties of Barber's Fluid were brought to my attention by Loic Matile earlier this year. I have now used this "magic potion" extensively myself and find it extremely reliable.

Martin C D Speight

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And finally..

One small item, lifted without shame from the latest edition of M.P.G.'s "Museum 3000" column....

Computer Nature Reserve

The Minister for Conservation has announced the creation of a Local Nature Reserve in the central processor of the Cambridge IBXL36K computer. Recent work by electro-ecological experts has shown the existence of a population of Demestes nineohmtwowattii hitherto thought to be extinct in this country. Biologists will recall that Demestes is one of many resistor mimics that were discovered to be living in electronic devices in the mid 24th century. It has been suggested that many of the failures of earlier machines were due to the replacement of real components by these mimics which perform in every way like the real thing - except that they are capable of movement. So far over 9,000 species of insects and arachnids mimicking resistors, diodes, transistors and silicon chips have been described.