

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WIND-BORNE INSECTS

There is much uncertainty as to how far living insects can be carried by the winds. Long journeys through the air probably always imply that the travelers attained great altitudes; not entirely or mainly through their own efforts but because they were borne aloft by upward air currents. Collections made by means of screens or traps installed on airplanes have revealed a surprisingly large insect population more than two miles above the earth, but comparatively few of these entomological flights have yet been made and information concerning the wind transport of insects is still meager. Describing the flights made in Louisiana by the U.S. Bureau of Entomology, B.V. Atwood, in a recent article, states that no insect pest is known to have been introduced into the United States from abroad on the wings of the wind, but that such a thing is not impossible.

"The majority of the specimens," he says, "were dead when examined, owing either to the effects of the buffeting and rough travel or because of the severe shock experienced when they struck the screen designed for their capture. When the plane returns to the ground after each flight, the specimens are transferred carefully from the screens to tiny glass containers filled with preservative. These bottles are identified by means of labels glued on the outside and are sent to the National Museum, where experts study the shattered insects under magnification and piece them together so that they may be correctly classified."

Some are of unknown species, which may mean that they have come from little explored parts of distant countries. One more fact bearing upon the possibility of serious invasions from afar is that a large proportion of the insects carried to high levels in the atmosphere are frozen to death before they get back to earth.

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