

Historical Contributions

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“Historical Contributions” is a new section of *Banisteria* devoted to reprinting short narratives of relevance to the natural history of Virginia. For this first installment, I have selected a few observations made by John Banister (1650-1692), the first university-trained naturalist to work in Virginia. More details about his life, writings, illustrations, and collections can be found in the publications by Ewan & Ewan (1970, 1992).

The following excerpts are from a paper that was originally published more than three centuries ago (1700-1701. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 22: 807-814). The insects described by Banister (in 1680) include mud dauber wasps, carpenter bees, cockroaches and wood roaches, bed bugs, fireflies (lightning bugs), and glow worms (firefly larvae). Comments in italics are those of James Petiver (1663-1718). Some of the following text was published in slightly different format in Ewan & Ewan (1970), occasionally containing additional words or sentences lacking from the journal version prepared by Petiver.

Literature Cited

Ewan, J., & N. Ewan. 1970. John Banister and his Natural History of Virginia 1678-1692. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL. 485 pp.

Ewan, J., & N. Ewan. 1992. John Banister, Virginia's first naturalist. *Banisteria* 1: 3-5.

Steve Roble, Editor, *Banisteria*

IV. Some Observations concerning Insects made by Mr John Banister in Virginia, A. D. 1680. with Remarks on them by Mr James Petiver, Apothecary and Fellow of the Royal Society.

V*espa Ichneumonica*. Here are divers kinds, long and slender waisted all, these make their Nests of Dirt, and are therefore called *Dirt Wasps*. Some of them make their Nests contiguous to one another, each adjoining Cavity having in it 2 or more partitions. Others build them in clamps one upon another; they fix them against a Wall or Ceiling of an house, or any where where dry. There is not above 2 *Wasps* belonging to one of these *Vesparis*'s, for when they have made one Cell, and put into it 6 or 8 live *Spiders*, they close it up to work upon another, leaving them to brood upon their young, something like that of *Aristotle* in his *Hist. Animal*. Lib. 1. cap. 20.

The young ones of these are cased over with a thin transparent horny skin of an Amber colour; those of the other are contained in a brown case, with a certain number of regular protuberances at one end thereof, some again lye in brown ones that are *smooth*, and some (if I mistake not) *naked*. I have not had leisure this year to inquire so far into their *generation, production, &c.* as I would, *vid. Mart. Lister Hist. Animal*, cap. 5. *libr. de Araneis* in genere.

Bombylus Tereclo. These *Bees* eat into *Timber*, and there make their *Nests*. This was in the *Joyce of a House* so firm and sound, that it was very hard entering with a *Peircer*, the hole was but just big enough for the *Bee*, to creep in at, and went right up, about 2 inches in the *Wood*, and then in a transverse line at least half a foot on each side, which seem'd to me (as I probed it with a knitting Needle) to be twice as wide as the entrance, how many *Bees* belonged to it I cannot tell, there was in, and I heard one or two about the door.

Blatta. These *Cockroaches* are one of the *Plagues* of this Country. They are *Oviparous* (strange and large, that had I not seen one half extruded, I should not have believed them theirs.

Blatta Volans. These are very rare, I have seen but this one here.

Cimices. *Wall-lice*. These are another of our *Plagues*, for where there is not great care taken to destroy them, they are as numerous in our *Beds*, as the former are in our *Kitchens*.

Cicindela mas. The *Fire-fly*.

Cicindela Mariana vaginis teneris fuscis marginibus fulvis Act. *Phil.* 246. p. 397. 16.

This is not that great *Virginian* kind, whose head shines, nor is it that smaller one, which *Piso* says the *Brasilians* call *Memoa*, nor the common kind, tho much of that shape and size. This emits its light at 2 *Crescents*, but the whole tail of ours shines, which it contracts and dilates at its pleasure. Its sheath wings are of a dark purple edged with yellow, and so is its head or helmet.

This is exactly described, and the same with those of *Carolina* and *Maryland*, from both which places I have received several of them. Yet amongst those from *Carolina*, which my ingenious Friend Mr Edmund Bohun sent me, I find a variety, whose sheaths were wholly blackish, but the *Helmet edged with yellow*: This I call *Cicindela Caroliniana vaginis omnino nigricantibus*.

Cicindela Famina. The *Glow-worm*. Is armed *Back and Head* in Joynt Armour of a deep *Murray* colour fastened to the *Thorax*; The *Tail* made of 9 shelly rings, in the last of which are visible the 2 shining points. Its *Head* is black, so small one cannot without the help of a *Glass*, perfectly discern the contexture of it. Its *Eyes* (if it have any) like those of a *Snail*, stand on the tops of 2 horns. It has 6 legs.