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Editorial - The Trumpet shall Sound

Strictly speaking, insects have no need of a trumpeter, for though they lack both the blow and the lips to perform on this imposing instrument nevertheless some of them seem to produce a similarly regal sound in a related manner. Neither are insects in need of anybody to beat the drum for them, for many are accomplished performers on percussion instruments. But since neither human ears nor hearing aids of any kind are yet attuned to all of the messages thus broadcast, a word of comment may be appropriate.

It is believed that when a queen bee produces the piping sound one so often hears of but so rarely hears, she does so by forcing air out through the thoracic spiracles. These, supposedly, are appropriately tuned or tensioned. By contrast the death's head hawk moth produces a sound sufficiently similar to gain her some, at least, of the privileges of the queen bee by forcing air out through the mouthparts. This is a skill which any trumpeter might covet. It is perhaps no accident that in many places human percussion instruments started from hollow logs, since many insect percussors, from termites to beetles, perform on these instruments. Human ideas in many fields have originated from insect activities, and Pope's advice still applies:

*Go, from the creatures thy instructions take;
Thy arts of building from the bee receive;
Learn of the mole to plough, the worm to weave;*

Many years ago my duties as an entomologist in Calcutta converged strangely with those of an exorciser of ghosts. I was called in rather early one morning to advise on the possible source of a fine specimen of the cerambycid *Stromatium barbatum* Fabr. When I arrived the beetle was nonchalantly waving its antennae from the mantelshelf at a somewhat less than enthusiastic member of the household of a petty rajah. Across the corner of the room was a recently acquired grand piano. I commented on this and occasioned embarrassment; tactless persistence revealed that the house was haunted and the ghost a pianist - of sorts. Grovelling under the piano I came upon a tidy pile of rather coarse wood strands

and, dropping a negative plumb line upwards, a rounded rectangular hole in the frame of the piano. Solicitous enquiries of the household in the days that followed confirmed my suspicions that this hole marked the exit of both the beetle and the ghost. The lusty chewing of the larvae, supplemented perhaps by the stridulation of the adult evidently invoked a minor resonance in the strings of the instrument. I put a plug in the hole.

Insects contribute so much that is of interest in life that we should all of us be prepared to put in a plug for them when opportunity offers, for though they need neither trumpeter nor drummer among their own kind, we who are of coarser fibre are too often insensitive to them. They, for their part, too often leave their holes open.

Brian Hocking