

BSCI 328C: Special Topics in Entomology
“Doepkens Insect Collection: Experience the Process of Curation and Public Display”
Spring, 2026

Prepared January 9, 2026 (subject to change)

"In the intricate dance of nature, insects are the choreographers of biodiversity."
- E.O. Wilson

"As we peer into the world of insects, we glimpse the brilliance of adaptation and the resilience of life in its myriad forms." - Thomas Say

"Insects are the architects of ecosystems, constructing the intricate structures upon which the web of life is woven." - Doug Tallamy

Course Description

Insect collections are at the heart of biodiversity investigations. Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth at all its levels, from genes to ecosystems, and the ecological and evolutionary processes that sustain it. Insects dominate biodiversity in nearly all terrestrial and freshwater habitats. This seminar, designed as a small group seminar, celebrates the incredible variation of insect life and what they do to support life on our planet. Beneficial insects, like pollinators, natural enemies, and decomposers play important roles in maintaining sustainable conditions in their contribution to ecosystem services. In contrast, injurious insects must be managed appropriately for the health and well-being of mankind without harming the environment. In recent years, the Lamp Lab has been investigating the biodiversity of insects on farms. Here is an opportunity to be involved in using a long-term collection of insects on a Maryland farm to tell the story of William Doepkens and the value of insects on his farm.

In 2025, the Department of Entomology received an insect collection on loan from the Doepkens family. Their father, William, born in 1916, had a lifelong hobby of collecting insects on his farm. Together with his children, he amassed a collection contained in 12 boxes as shown in the photo above, consisting of 735 specimens in 8 orders (Odonata, Orthoptera, Hemiptera, Megaloptera, Coleoptera, Lepidoptera, Hymenoptera, and Diptera). The story of William Doepkens and his farm, as well as the details of his collection, is to be put on display in the glass cases on the first floor of the Plant Sciences Building, just outside the Insect Zoo.



Here are three of the 12 insect boxes of the William P. Doepkens Insect Collection are displayed at the family farm, along with four of William Doepkens's children. The collection of insects from their farm near Bowie, MD, was started in the 1930s and serves as the source of specimens for this seminar-style course.

Course Goals

The goal of the BSCI 389 seminar is to design and implement an educational display of the Doepkens Insect Collection with a focus on William Doepkens as a farmer and entomophile, as well as the insects he and his family collected and their value on farms. Working in the Entomology Teaching Lab on Monday afternoons, students will have lectures, discussions, and hands-on activities related to the curation process and the development of a display. Readings will include original research articles that demonstrate the value of insect collections for scientific investigations. Guest speakers will augment the seminar, and field trips are possible to the farm and other collecting sites. Students will have the opportunity to develop their own collections based on their specific interests, perhaps to be used as part of the display.



William Doepkens's farm office and insect collection.

William P. Doepkens and Insect Collection

From Jean Wright and Fred Doepkens: “Our father, William P. Doepkens (1916-2000) was raised on a farm near the intersection of Rt. 50 and Rt. 424 in the Davidsonville/Gambrills area of Anne Arundel County. The farm is now a designated Maryland Century Farm. His formal education was obtained at a nearby one-room school through the 8th grade, but he was definitely a life-long learner and devoted steward of the land, using sustainable agricultural practices on the family 200+ acre farm that he eventually inherited. He was a farmer, nature lover, and amateur photographer who enjoyed travelling and even served on the forestry board at one time.”



William Doepkens with his insect collection.



One of the 12 boxes of the insect collection.

“My dad built the cases from black walnut harvested from the family farm, and they measure approximately 27”w x 21”h x 3.5” deep. They are not hermetically sealed, but are fairly airtight. For years I remember him taking them down occasionally to place a few moth ball crystals in each case.”

Instructor

Dr. Bill Lamp (he, him, his), Professor,
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Teaching Assistant

Yasmine Helbling, Lab Manager, Lamp Lab,
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Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

1. Curate an insect collection and identify insects through exposure to resources and techniques.
2. Read research articles based on insect collections with understanding of salient points.
3. Develop an educational plan for an insect collection display.
4. Apply collaboration skills towards development of a collection display.

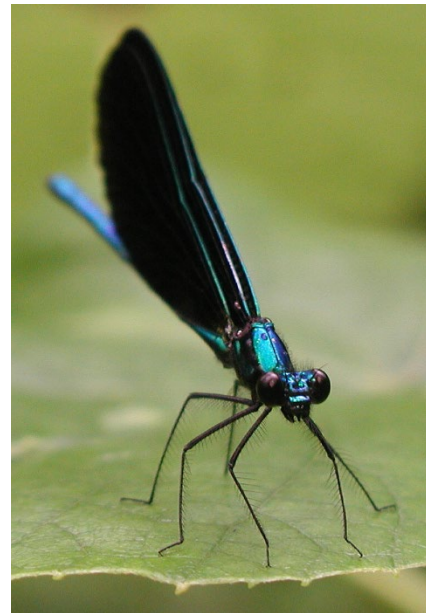


Dr. Lamp collecting insects on a farm with a sweep net.

Examples of Species in the Collection



Anax junius,
green darner



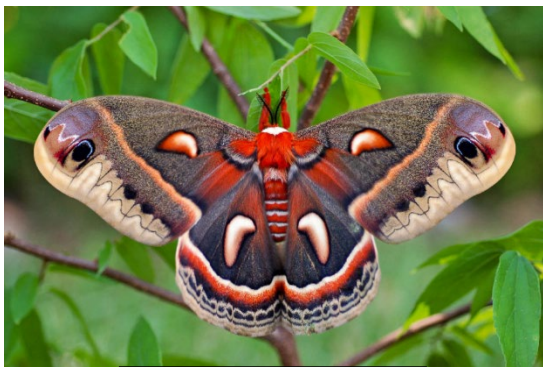
Calopteryx maculata,
emerald jewelwing



Corydalus cornutus,
eastern dobsonfly



Magicicada septendecim,
17 year cicada



Hyalophora cecropia,
cecropia moth



Vanessa atalanta,
red admiral

Registration, Credits, and Location

- BSCI 328C, Special Topics in Entomology, can be taken for 1 credit.
- The class is in PLS 1161, the Entomology Teaching Lab, on Mondays, 2:00-2:50.
- Contact Dr. Lamp (lamp@umd.edu) if you would like to be more involved and produce your own collection in the lab.

Recommended Resources

An insect identification field handbook. I strongly suggest:
Eaton, E.R., and K. Kaufman. 2007. Kaufman Field Guide to Insects of North America. Houghton Mifflin Co., New York. 391 pp. ISBN: 0-618-15310-1. Available new (or used) through Amazon for \$14.99 (as of Dec. 15, 2025).

Grading

Grades are determined by attendance, engagement, and participation in the course as determined by the TA and Dr. Lamp. Mid-semester grades will be provided unofficially.