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## BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ASILIDAE (INSECTA: DIPTERA) 1996-2006

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This current update of published papers (616) concerning the Asilidae is published to aid emerging workers in the field to keep up-to-date, especially in the changing field of robber fly systematics.

KEY WORDS: Diptera, Asilidae, robber flies, bibliography

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Дан список 616 работ по мухам-ктырям (Asilidae), опубликованных в 1996-2006 гг., преимущественно, в области систематики этой группы.

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## PREFACE

Asilidae are a family of true flies belonging to the superfamily Asiloidea within the suborder Brachycera. The Asilidae comprise one of the largest and most abundant families of present day insects. Over 7,000 valid species are known, representing 530 genera and subgenera, and these are distributed throughout the world, except in the Arctic and the Antarctic. In addition, 18 genera and 39 species have been described from the Eocene, Oligocene, and Miocene; 15 of these genera are also recent [cf. Fossil]. Because of their predatory habit of feeding on other insects and their voracious appetites, they contribute to the maintenance of the natural balance among insect populations. To some extent, parasitic wasps and flies are taken by them, but much of their prey consists of plant-feeding insects. Certain species are known to seriously deplete the populations of apiaries. The adults are, with some exceptions, active flies, and many because of their considerable size readily attract attention.

An important part of the fauna of sunny, dry hillsides, sandbanks, forest edges or arid fields and meadows are the Asilidae. Some lovers of nature know them very well due to their excellent power of flight and the quite large size of their body. With unusual energy and relentlessness they search for food which – with some quite rare exceptions – consists of flying insects. Due to their predatory way of life, they have obtained quite pejorative names in many languages, eg. "robber fly" in English or "Raubfliege" in German. They can often be seen carrying prey of surprising size. Robber flies are, compared to rest of the world of insects, monstrous and insatiable predators. They are well adjusted to this way of life. Their legs are strong and covered with spines so that they can grasp the prey while flying. Their body is covered by thick bristles and hairs, which often protect them from the victims efforts to defend itself. The proboscis, with a sword-like hypotarsus (lower part of pharynx) of many kinds is able to pierce the thick body covering of even the hardest Coleopterans.

Also, large eyes and excellent vision are characteristics of these essentially diurnal animals, which are most active around midday in full sunshine. Robber flies usually sit on a high perch, while observing their surroundings in search of victims, which they catch during a quick flight. Often we can see that these perches are very solid, ie., stones, branches or tree trunks, onto which they usually return and where several individuals may gather.

Robber flies are opportunistic predators, their diets often reflecting prey availability in a particular habitat. O'Neill (1992) has shown, in a study of *Efferia staminea* (Williston), "that the diet of a generalist predator is a function of the temporal and spatial scales over which sampling occurs", ie, asilids tend to feed on whatever is currently available in the immediate environment. Shelly (1986b) has shown that foraging success varies with the attacking angle and distance, while Furthermore, larger species tended to consume a greater diversity of prey taxa. Some species, especially the smaller ones, do not catch their victims in flight, but await small insects which, by chance, fly within their reach. At any rate we are unaware of any robber fly which is not a predator.

Robber flies generally establish a perching zone in which to locate potential prey. Perching height varies by species, but generally occurs in open, sunny locations. Asilidae seize their prey in flight and inject their victims with saliva containing neurotoxic and proteolytic enzymes. These ~~-~~injections, produced in the labial and thoracic glands and transported through ~~-~~their modified mouthparts (hypotharynx), rapidly immobilize prey and digest bodily contents (Musso 1968). The robber fly soon has access to a liquid meal, which is generally consumed upon returning to a perched position. It is quite surprising how quickly the victim succumbs after it has been captured by an asilid. This is usually explained by the enormously intense activity of the proboscis; all of the soft portions of the body are sucked out very quickly. Although it has not yet been proven, it is quite possible that the main factor is some kind of very active histologic enzyme (tissue dissolving substance). But what is absolutely proved is the extra-corporeal digestion of robber flies.

Shelly (1986a) reported that of the nine Neotropical Asilidae species he studied, diet constituents were more than 85% composed of insects from the orders Diptera, Coleoptera, Hymenoptera, Homoptera, and Lepidoptera. ~~-~~Some kinds, eg. *Mallophora* on honey bees (Rabinovich & Corley, 1997), specialize on butterflies (Lepidoptera) or beetles, (Coleoptera) or Ichneumonidae and stinging hymenopterans, but no monophagous or oligophagous species are known. It is interesting, that among the asilids themselves, we can observe the similar kind of cannibalism for which mantids or spiders are noted, wherein the female attacks males and females indiscriminately. But it only occurs under exceptional circumstances. On the whole, robber flies can be regarded as a beneficial group of insects. However, it has also been noted that they are enemies of honey bees and are commonly found around bee hives destroying large numbers (Marcangeli, 1998).

Mating of these dipterons is not usually accompanied by a complex courtship, as is seen in some related families: however, males of a number of species perform courtship dances either on a surface or during a hover in front of the female (Lavigne, 2003a).

Egg-laying habits depend on the species and their specific habitat. Females deposit whitish-colored eggs in many different ways, each typical for the species or certain groups of species. Most frequently, females drop eggs while in flight and these fall into cracks in the soil surface or in plant whorls on low-lying plants. Some species deposit their eggs between the culm and stem of grasses or in burrows of wood-boring insects. Other species deposit their eggs in the ground and cover them with a thin layer of soil. The most unusual oviposition behaviour is exhibited by females of many species of the subfamily Asilinae, which deposit eggs in empty flower bracts, in fissures or crannies of living plants or trees and with the help of a specialized ovipositor, even directly into the living tissue of plants. Females in certain genera, ie, *Promachus*, attach their eggs to stems, twigs or grass stalks and cover them with a chalky protective coating (Harusawa, 2001b).

Robber fly larvae live in the soil or in various other decaying organic materials that occur in their environment. Larvae are predacious, feeding on eggs, insect larvae, or soft-bodied insects. Robber flies overwinter as larvae and pupate in the soil.

Pupae migrate to the soil surface and adults emerge, often leaving behind their pupal case sticking out of the substrate. Complete development ranges from one to three years, depending on species and environmental conditions. Theodor (1980) proposed that larval growth is accelerated in warmer regions and that many asilid species live no longer than one year.

Usually there is no connection between methods of oviposition and life of the larvae. The only function of the oviposition method is the protection of the eggs. Hatched larvae almost always penetrate the soil where they continue to develop. They can most usually be found in dry sandy sites. The only exception is the phylogenetically youngest subfamily Laphriinae – its females deposit eggs in openings in dead tree trunks or stumps and the larvae live within the rotten wood feeding on the larvae of the species that produced the burrow (Lavigne & Bullington, 1984).

The white or yellow larvae of robber flies have a cylindrical or slightly flattened shape with a rather reduced head capsule. Typical, also, is the location of the posterior spiracles, which are located on the penultimate segment, which differentiates them from larvae of all other related families. They require one or more years to complete their development. Although the larvae of many species are known, it is not so clear upon what they feed. Older sources describe their life style as predominantly herbivorous or saprophagous (feeding on decaying animal or plant matter). Nevertheless, if we consider the studies of contemporary authors, we find that larval asilids are completely carnivorous.

All robber flies have a characteristic divot (ocellar tubercle) on top of the head, which is located between their especially prominent compound eyes. In general, adult Asilidae have an elongate body with a tapered abdomen. However, some species are stout and hairy, mimicking bumble-bees, and still others may be slender and have a damsel fly appearance, the Leptogastrinae. Adults range in size from the minute (3 mm), eg, genus *Holopogon* in North America, to the gigantic (over 50 mm) eg. genus *Phellus*, in Australia, but average 9 to 15 mm in length.

Robber flies have long, strong legs that are bristled to aid in prey capture. Sexual dimorphisms are not extreme, although females tend to have slightly broader abdomens than males. Most robber flies have a brown, gray, or black coloration.

The Asilidae enjoy a worldwide distribution, with certain groups occurring characteristically in certain regions. For instance, the genera of Megapodinae are unique to the Neotropical region. Large island chains tend to encompass abundant asilid faunas, particularly those south of Asia. By contrast, smaller islands such as the Hawaiian chain have no endemic or introduced species. The majority of robber fly species are found in dry, sandy conditions, as confirmed by the diversity of species found in such locales. Some species are well adapted to desert climates, where they are known to thermoregulate in response to temperature variations throughout the day. Few species occur in woodland areas, and those that do tend to aggregate in forest glades, or along the edges, near grasslands.

Loew was perhaps the most influential dipterist to contribute information to the study of robber flies, describing several species and more than 80 genera. Other mid-nineteenth century contributors include Macquart, Walker, Wiedemann, Rondani, and Bigot. Later, dipterists in the 1900's became specialists of robber flies in particular locales, most notably Curran and Bromley in North America.

The first major attempt at compiling asilid citations was that of Hull (1962), whose bibliography at the end of volume 2 of “Robber flies of the World” included 1344 references. This current update of the literature on Asilidae supplements the previous updates by Lavigne, Dennis & Gowen (1978), and Lavigne (1999). While only 10 years have passed since the last update, the authors felt that the significant increase in numbers of published papers dealing with Asilidae (616), especially in systematics, has warranted the effort.

In the area of systematics, Artigas et al. (1996-2006), Londt (1996-2006), Geller-Grimm (1997-2005), Hradský (1995-2005), Hayat & Alaoglu (1996), Lavigne (2005-2006), Parui et al. (1997-1999), Scarbrough et al. (1996-2006), Tomasovic et al. (1996-2006), Weinberg & Bächli (1996-2005), and Cannings (1999) have continued their efforts to clarify the taxonomy of asilids in various parts of the world. Of special importance is the work by Dikow (2003) who has dealt succinctly with family names among the Asilidae. Additionally Bybee et al. (2004) have attacked the taxonomy of asilids at the molecular level. Lehr (1996-2002) was making further important inroads into Far eastern asilid taxonomy until his untimely death in 2005 (Harusawa, 2005e; Cannings, 2006; Zaitsev et al., 2006). We also mourn the loss of another student of Asilidae in Japan, Dr. A. Nagatomi, in the same year (Ohishi, 2005).

Advances are being made in the descriptions of robber fly eggs by Candan et al. (2004) and Suludere et al. (2000). Internal morphology of females has been elucidated by papers by Artigas & Papavero 1997 (a, b, c) and Candan et al. (2006). Papers by Kunkel & Hastings (1996), Lavigne & Bullington (1999-2005), O'Neill et al. (1996-2001), Shelly (1986), Weber & Lavigne (2004), among others, have elucidated many obscure aspects of robber fly behavior. In the field of ecology, papers by Bonte et al. (2002-2003), Cannings (1998), Castelo & Capurro (2000), and Clements, Skidmore, & Denton (1999) provided different approaches. Additionally we have included the web page citations for homepages that contain either professional papers and/or some of the better digital photographs of Asilidae.

A fairly complete listing of papers dealing with Asilidae appear in an Excel spreadsheet on the webpage maintained by Drs. F. Geller-Grimm, Th. Dikov and R. Lavigne [<http://www.geller-grimm.de/catalog/literatu.htm>]. Additionally Dr. Geller-Grimm has compiled a listing of valid generic names for asilids [<http://www.geller-grimm.de/catalog/genera.htm>] (also published in *Studia dipterologica* in 2004) and valid species names [<http://www.geller-grimm.de/catalog/species.htm>]. Also included on the webpage are numerous translations of papers from Russian to German, Russian to English, Japanese to English as well as others [<http://www.geller-grimm.de/catalog/transla.htm>].

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