

# The Canadian Entomologist.

VOL. XLIX.

LONDON, JULY, 1917

No. 7

## POPULAR AND PRACTICAL ENTOMOLOGY.

### THE DEATH-FEIGNING INSTINCT.

BY E. MELVILLE DUPORTE, MACDONALD COLLEGE, QUE.

Many widely different animals possess the instinct of feigning death. The sand-hopper, a terrestrial amphipod, and the pill-bug (*Armadillidium*) are well-known examples among the Crustacea. That many Myriapods will coil up and remain perfectly still on being touched is well known to all acquainted with the habits of the common millipedes. Among the spiders, the Epeiridæ or orb-weavers are perhaps the ones which most commonly feign death on being disturbed.

Though rare the instinct occurs among the vertebrate animals. Certain fishes and amphibians are known to feign death. Two noteworthy examples of death-feigning birds are the partridge of the pampas of the Rio de la Plata and the tern of Pekinese Island.

Among mammals one of the best known examples is that which has enriched the "American language" with the expressive term "playing 'possum." Other well known examples are the fox and the armadillo.

It is among insects, however, that the death-feigning instinct is most widely distributed, especially among the Coleoptera and Hemiptera. The active flyers such as the Diptera, Hymenoptera and Lepidoptera seldom feign death.

The term "feigning death"—an unfortunate one as it connotes a consciousness which does not exist—is used to designate the assumption by an animal, when disturbed, of a rigid state which may be of momentary duration or may last upwards of an hour. The attitude of the feigning animal varies, but is very seldom the same as the attitude of the dead insect. The motionless condition and the rigidity due to the contraction of the muscles are the chief characteristics of the death feint, and for this reason I have included under the term all rigid motionless attitudes which are the result of a reaction to a shock stimulus. Given so broad