

A STUDY OF *HYDROMETRA LINEATA*.

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Among the reeds and rushes that border quiet streams and ponds lives *Hydrometra lineata*, one of the least known of our North American Hemiptera. This insect is comparatively rare in collections, but common enough in nature, though owing to its small size and inconspicuous appearance it escapes all but the sharpest-eyed collectors. Its elongate body is borne on hairlike legs and resembles a bit of twig or grass more than a living insect. After the eye becomes accustomed to the odd shape, they are most easily distinguished, especially when they move about over the surface of the water. During the past summer I took over five hundred specimens of this insect without any special effort, finding them common through New York State, Massachusetts, and Connecticut.

The appearance of this insect is unique and exceedingly grotesque, for the head, thorax and abdomen are so elongate and the legs so thin that it produces the effect of a minute Indian club stalking about on the water. Closer examination reveals a pair of solemn, protruding eyes situated at about the middle and on either side of the handle of this Indian club, while from the end a pair of threadlike antennæ are waved about in a mysteriously cautious manner. Underneath the head is the murderous beak, the common possession of all hemipterous insects. In very rare cases individuals may be found with a pair of wings closely folded upon the back and covered with leathery hemelytra, which are only to be detected by the use of a lens.

The economy of this elongate form becomes at once apparent on studying the habits of *Hydrometra*. In the first place, it reduces the insect's weight to the minimum and lessens the liability of breaking through the treacherous surface film upon which the life of this aquatic pedestrian is passed. In the second place, the long, cylindrical body is so like a bit of twig in appearance that *Hydrometra* is protected from his enemies and concealed from his prey, which do not in the least suspect in this apparent straw the presence of a deadly foe.

The genus *Hydrometra* was first established by Latreille in his "Precis des Caractères Generiques des Insects" (1797) p. 86. I have not had access to this book, but in his "Histoire Naturelle des Crustacés et Insects," T. xi., pp. 267-269 (1804), Latreille says: "I have taken the characters of the insect pointed out by Geoffroy, *Cimex stagnorum*