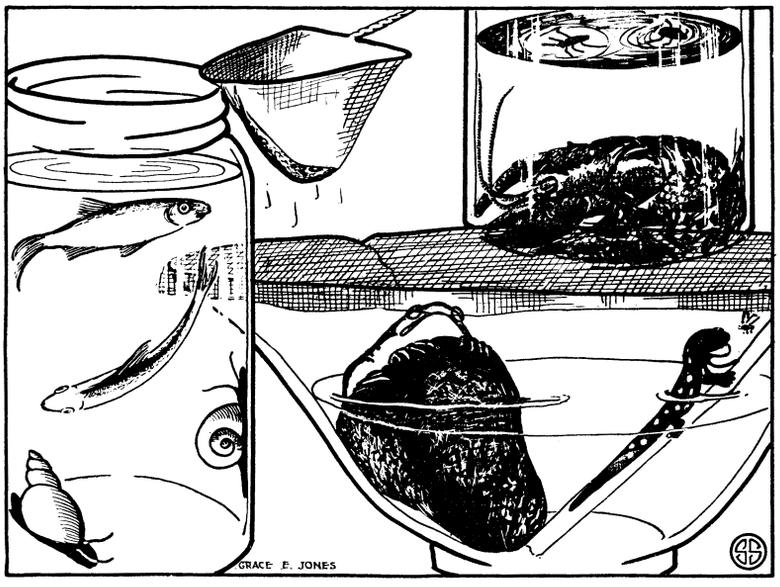
Inexpensive Summer Fun

To Bring 'Em Back Alive Is Fun For You, Too

(Eighth of a series of 12 articles. Next week—Collecting Birds' Nests)



LIVE COLLECTION

You don't have to be a tropical explorer to bring 'em back alive. An aquarium will do nicely. Nor are fish the only marine animals that make interesting pets. Whatever you do, try to make your aquarium reproduce as nearly as possible the environment of your specimen before you captured it. And when you are through with your pets, give them their liberty again.

BRINGING 'em back alive is not an exclusive privilege of explorers in the tropical jungles. Anybody who is doing a little collecting may quite reasonably wish to keep some of his specimens alive and wiggling. Many forms of animal life may be kept that way without any discomfort to themselves, and with considerable interest to the collector.

While it is possible to capture small wild animals like field mice, squirrels, and even skunks, and to bring them to some degree of tameness, nevertheless perhaps the easiest creatures to keep are those that live in water. Most of these creatures are more easily observed if kept in a jar of water on a table or windowsill than they can be in their native haunts, where all too often they hide in the mud or stones or dead leaves on the bottom.

The inhabitants of your aquarium collection may be quite various—small fish, frogs, turtles, snails, mussels, crayfish, water insects; on the seashore small crabs and other crustacea, sea anemones, live starfish and sea-urchins, etc. In general, anything that swims the lesser waters or clings to rocks or burrows in the bottom can be included. It is best to collect things that live in the warmer, quieter pools, because the livelier cold-water or deep-water forms are less likely to survive in the kind of living quarters you can give them.

What you keep your water-loving pets in is less important than how much water you give them.

A discarded glass bowl, or the ubiquitous glass fruit jar, will make a proper enough aquarium, and even an ordinary tin can will do for many of the smaller bottom-dwelling forms that are heedless of light or avoid it. But there must be plenty of water, and the water must be changed fairly frequently, to keep it reasonably clean and fresh.

When you are changing the water, don't dump it all out, and your specimen along with it. Just pour all of it off except for the bottom inch or so, then quickly refill with fresh water. And don't put a solid cover over the top, ever. Water animals need air just as you do, except that they get it dissolved in the water. Covering the jar with a lid prevents air from getting to the water surface in sufficient quantity.

When you want to examine your crayfish or baby snapping turtle more closely, the best way is to empty the contents of the jar gently into a large pan with a white bottom and take away the dirt and leaves he likes to hide in. After you have studied him as long as you like to, put him back in the jar again, with the rubbish he loves.

And by all means, after you have kept your pets for a while, take them back where you got them and turn them loose again. That's the fairest and most humane thing to do.

For more information about collecting for aquaria and a list of books and pamphlets on the subject, send us a postcard with your name and address. Ask for Bulletin 8. Address Science News Letter, 2101 Constitution Ave., Washington, D. C.

Science News Letter, August 6, 1938

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magnet or for other controls. The control board itself is in the outer room, and seems to have dozens of dials and switches on it.

Not being a physicist, I shall not try to explain how the cyclotron smashes atoms of matter, nor how it endows sodium, familiar to us all in our table salt, with radioactivity, nor how it changes an atom of one element into another element. Physicists are interested in these achievements because of what can be learned from them about the structure of the atom and similar abstract but important matters.

Medical research is also going on at this Radiation Laboratory, and perhaps the efforts to develop better weapons for fighting disease and relieving human suffering account in part for the human touch which I felt everywhere in the midst of the awesome machines and physical apparatus.

A number of mankind's worst disease enemies, among them cancer, heart disease, and leukemia, may find themselves smashed by the cyclotron along with the atoms that are disintegrated in this new, powerful tool of modern physics.