

The NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALIST

CAIRNS

Journal of

NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS CLUB
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FIELD DAYS: Sunday before meeting. Notice of place and time given in 'Cairns Post'.

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NOTES ON A LOCAL FISHING OR BOLAS SPIDER

ORDGARIOUS MONSTROSUS

BY CLYDE COLEMAN, EDMONTON.

The prey of the adult female Ordgarius monstrosus are moths and are caught by a viscid drop of transparent material attached to a short silken line whirled around by one of the spider's second legs.

This spider was found on 11/6/'75, clinging to a few tangled strands of web on the underside of a sandpaper fig leaf. She was resting back downward and partly hidden by other leaves which formed anchorages for an irregular open web. This web was roughly horizontal and was used as an anchorage for making the fishing line or bolas. It was enlarged and strengthened each time an eggsac was formed, but was never used either to capture or bind her prey. The following night she was examined and found to be immature. Examination on 18/6/'75 showed her to be mature.

During these nights the nearby foliage was searched for a male, without success. One or two bolas were made most nights the spider was studied, made of a single strong silk line about 40-50mm. long, on the end of which were one to five drops of a very viscid water-clear substance that sparkled in the torchlight like beads of dew. One drop about 2mm. in diameter was most usual; those with a large number tended to be irregular in size and spacing.

Shortly after dark she would move to the underside of her web and cling there, back down, for about two hours, after which she would add a few more threads to the web from which she would suspend herself while forming the bolas. A vertical support line was formed by the spider lowering herself about 35mm. from the web and then climbing back up adding more silk as she went. Moving about 40mm. to one side of this point, she attached two lines to the underside of the web and then moved back to the vertical line while holding these last two lines, one by a third leg and the other held to the spinnerets by a fourth leg. Moving down the vertical line, she held herself upright by clinging to it by her four front legs, while her third legs gripped the line, now diagonal to her body. The other attached line, still held to the spinnerets by a fourth leg, now sagged below the level of the spider's body.

The viscid fluid for the bolas was now drawn from the spinnerets by alternate movements of the fourth legs and flowed down the attached line where it formed one big drop. This took about 20 seconds, after which the bolas was detached from the spinnerets and allowed to hang free. The method of drawing the fluid from the spinnerets varied, the legs being used either alternately, in unison or singly. When the one leg was used for this purpose the other held the line to the spinnerets.

Climbing to the attachment point of the bolas, the spider grasped the end of the line, fumbled for over a minute to free it from the web and gave it a vigorous whirling motion below the level of her body at about 30° to the horizontal. This whirling was intermittent, being maintained for about half a minute with irregular periods of inactivity. Whirling often seemed to be initiated by any rising of the breeze. This particular bolas was used for about three hours, after which it was drawn up and eaten. Within half an hour another had been formed and the whirling and resting intervals were repeated. At nearly midnight the spider was left to its own devices.

At different times the capture of two moths was observed, their strong fluttering as they were hauled in hand over hand, like struggling fish, was ample proof of the strength of the bolas. Prey was bitten on the head, which soon quietened them, and was sucked dry while held in this position.

One moth that had been caught by the gooey blob managed to break the line but fluttered to the ground where the bolas stuck it fast to a grass blade. It was caught and offered to the spider but was not seized, the spider moving towards her shelter. Later it was found that she would accept any small live moth that was placed on the bolas and would tie up these moths with her legs and hang them under the guy lines of her webbing, presumably to be eaten later. No moths of her own capture were attached in this way - probably believing one at a time was good fishing! One moth was struck more than once by the bolas

and escaped, but in between contacts it fluttered back towards the spider or the bolas. There seemed to be some attractant (probably odour) that lured these moths to the spider. Probably the escapee was struck on the upper wing surface; if so, the scales covering these would make the bolas much less effective by sticking to it.

On the night of 30/6/75 the first eggsac was formed; but was noted too late to observe initial details. About a fortnight later the whole process was observed.

On this occasion the spider was active within half an hour of darkness, first forming several strong guy lines radiating from a point where she later attached a loose fluffy looking vertical strand about 35mm. long. To the end of this she clung with her four front legs, head up, while her fourth legs drew fine fluffy white silk from the spinnerets and passed it up to the third legs, which wove it into a loose sheet covering the ventral surface of the abdomen. This was observed with a hand magnifier which was used throughout the process of sac formation. This weaving continued for about half an hour when all outward sign of activity ceased. The eggs were evidently being placed in the sac but could not be seen for the density of the sac now held pressed to the mother's body by her third and fourth legs and probably because the inner flocculent silk of the nest was of the same whiteness as the eggs.

Egg-laying took less than ten minutes. Then the actions of the fourth and third legs were repeated, but now that portion of the sac nearest the abdomen was woven over until it was roughly spherical and the diameter was about 9mm. This took over half an hour to achieve and then the action of the spider changed. Grasping the sac with all eight legs, she commenced applying very fine white silk to the surface by a rapid rising and oscillating movement of the abdomen. The spinnerets were touched lightly to the sac then quickly raised and moved sideways alternately, being lifted about 2mm. clear and sideways 1½-2mm. The silk was not applied in one thread but in a number of very small gossamer lines, clearly visible by angling the torch close to this busy weaver. She moved up and over the sac in a head up or down position with a varying angle to the vertical, all the while the silk was being applied at about 90-100 strokes per minute. Close inspection showed that she was also imparting a slow oscillation to the sac by the movement of her feet, which were not used in this application of silk. Silk was woven over the top of the sac and at the base of the supporting strand, but no attempt was made at this time to strengthen this flimsy looking line which freely allowed the sac to twist and cant sideways as the spider changed her position on its surface.

This spinning and weaving ceased at about 10.45 p.m. She then climbed to the radiating support strands overhead and gave them a fresh application of white silk, and then moved slowly along each of these and the numerous fine threads radiating from the end of each, applying a pale brown viscid substance by a raising and lowering of the abdomen without any sideways oscillation. This material hardened quickly and changed to a brown colour like dead leaves.

By midnight she had finished this bracing and returned to the sac, again gripping the surface with all eight legs and applying the spinnerets with the previous rapid motion. This time the brown varnish-like material was applied. Though spreading like a slightly viscid liquid, it could be seen issuing from the spinnerets as minute separate streams blending only when applied to the surface of the sac and flowing into the tiny spaces of the closely woven white silk. This activity might seem monotonous if some thought were not given to the amazing muscular energy of the spider's abdomen. Attached to the rest of the body only by a pedicel about 1/6 of its diameter, it had already given 7,000 spider push-ups without pause or rest and in laying down the final coat of varnish it approximately repeated that performance.

The spider followed this by backing up the eggsac and now applying the spinnerets to the base of the vertical support strand, at the same time now giving the sac a distinct partial rotation while the varnishing of this vital part of the structure was continued upwards, the spider nearly standing on her head while applying this liquid glue. Reversing her position, she climbed the full length of this strand to the radiating strands, applying the varnish as she moved and giving the central point several applications, then backed down.

By 2 a.m. she moved back to the sac and, assuming the head-up stance, applied the spinnerets to about the equator but this time pressing them firmly to the surface and then slowly raising them about 1mm. This process was slowly repeated several times until a thorn-like projection 1mm. long was formed. Moving around the sac she formed four of these projections at irregular intervals and then moved back to the first projection. She again applied the spinnerets, moved away and climbed to the overhead supports, now trailing a strong silk line which she attached to outer twigs. Several of these lines were spun from the points of the sac to outside supports and some of the outer leaves to which they were attached were bound together and to nearby twigs.

Now at nearly three o'clock this amazing creature moved off to her shelter, leaving the observer weary but with an enhanced respect for her tenacity and with a few more problems to ponder.

This spider produced ten eggsacs from 30/6/75 to 9/9/75, the last being only about two thirds the volume of the others. The period between sacs was from seven to eight days. Spiderlings emerged in about three weeks, built small communal webs and ballooned away in a few days, depending on the weather. One emergence hole was cut in each sac and this was rough-edged. No parasitism was observed. One sac was cut open and eggs counted, 487, less than 1mm. diameter. Size of completed sac, pear-shaped (almost spherical), 13 by 11mm. As this spider is comparatively rare and the specimen studied produced over 4,000 eggs, the mortality must be terrific.

Nothing seems to be known of the methods by which the young spiders catch their prey. Do they snare prey as their mothers do and, if so, have they different means of attraction for the increasing size and different species of victims they will need as they increase to a size where they can capture the adult's prey?

It was noted that the support strand at the top of the sac was not strengthened until the hard varnish-like material had been applied to the surface of the sac. This may have been to allow flexibility of the sac's movement. This is only conjecture, but the finished sac is like nothing but a hard brown dry berry, inflexible and tough and evidently strong protection against parasite, predator and weather, and a suitable crèche for the children of a remarkable mother.

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FURTHER NOTES ON THE AUSTRALIAN PRATINCOLE

BY NANCY HOPKINS.

Airstrips and a golf course have intruded on that part of the Townsville Common which at least as late as 1954 was the breeding ground of the Australian Pratincole, *Stiltia isabella*, the subject of past contributions to this journal. They may still breed nearby, but I no longer live in Townsville and refer now to past observations.

My first experience in 1938 was unusual. There was only one egg, and though the area was grassy, the chick was seen more than once. In later cases the land was bare, providing little cover, but the two chicks were seen only once, usually when newly hatched. I made only brief weekly visits but always found the parents in the nesting area, alert and often using decoy tactics. In at least one of these cases two immature but full-grown birds appeared close by after three weeks. Dr. G. L. Maclean, writing in the *Emu* (1975), throws some light on the subject. He states that the chicks stay in the "nest", a slight depression in the ground, for a day after hatching, then are led to a disguised burrow (usually a rabbit's) and keep to the same burrow during the period of dependence on their parents, who appear to entice them from their burrows to be fed.

Ready-made burrows would be rare in my main stalking ground. The 1938 birds possibly relied on grass cover. I quote from my notes: "9/10/38 ... found nest ... one egg 15th: Chick hatched ... tawny down 22nd: Chick in grass, could not locate at first, mother trailing wing. Later drove up to mother(?) and

chick in open. Chick ... ran to cover 29th: Chick well hidden, both birds trailed wings. 5th Nov.: Chick full-fledged, colouring immature but similar to adult, flies well. 12th: Three birds in usual place, seemed to be parents shepherding young, now mature."

If, as I then thought, and later knowledge confirms, my chick at the nest on the 15th October was newly hatched, it was flying well at three weeks.

As to the disappearing babies, I saw one pair through binoculars against lumpy earth that had been bulldozed into a rough ridge and glued my eyes to the spot, but they vanished as I approached. I searched in vain without thinking of an underground retreat, which in any case must have been well concealed, as I would have hunted among the clods.

Twice odd shelters were found. Once, meeting Dr. Beatrice Schuchard "birding" on the Common, I took her to where I had recently seen two nests with eggs. Guided first by the antics of two parents, and later by their tracks, we found two young under a flattened oildrum with incredibly little space below it. Despite the heat, the welter of tracks indicated that it was a regular retreat.

A week or so later I took Mr. Roy Wheeler to this place, but failed to find the young of either of the two nests, though the parents were displaying. We turned to what I suspected to be the territory of another. A pratincole perched on a rough lump of cow-dung moved away as we approached and we found two chicks under the edge of the dung. I doubt that this tiny cave could have accommodated them for long. They could have been first-day chicks, nests among dung being common.

All in all, my observations do not suggest that Australian Pratincoles spend the whole of their infant lives concealed in a burrow or its equivalent, but I should like to be able to stalk again with this (to me) new knowledge.

In the 1938 case, as already stated, a week-old chick was seen in the open with a parent. At another time I came upon a bird with two chicks about a week old, which certainly did not retreat into a burrow. I followed one chick for some distance and caught. Only one parent appeared, so perhaps it was a disorganized one-parent family.

References: Hopkins N., 1969, Rare Birds in the Townsville District.

N.Q. Nat. 16:26

1954, Breeding of the Australian Pratincole.

N.Q. Nat. 22:21-2.

Maclean G.L., 1973, Review of Biology of *Stiltia* and *Peltohyas*.
Emu 73:61-70.

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THE ORIGIN OF GENERIC NAMES OF QUEENSLAND RAINFOREST TREES Part III

BY JAMES A. BAINES.

Note: STCN = Standard Trade Common Name

PCN = Preferred Common Name (likely to become the standard name).

Banksia. Named by L.f. after Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820), who was with Cook in the 'Endeavour' and, with Solander, was the first botanist to study N.Q. plants. He was President of the Royal Society for 43 years and was a great patron of science with a special interest in Australia. The only species found in N.Q. rain forests appears to be *B. integrifolia*, known in the north as White Banksia and in the south as Coast Banksia.

Barringtonia. Named by the Forsters after the Hon. Daines Barrington (1727-1800), F.R.S., who wrote on British trees and left unpublished MSS. with the Royal Society. Allan Cunningham, botanist-explorer, discovered the Mount Royal Range in 1823. As the Barrington Tops, a plateau through which flows the Barrington River, is at the edge of this range, it is likely that the name Barrington is honoured, although George Barrington, an ex-convict chief constable of Parramatta and reputed author of several historical works on the colony of N.S.W., died in 1804. There is a rich sub-tropical flora in the

- Barringtonia.** N.Q. has four species of *Barringtonia*, including *B. calyptata*, which is known as Mango Pine, Cassowary Pine, China Pine or Cornbeef-wood but, to the timber trade, *Barringtonia*. The genus has 100 species and gives its name to family *Barringtoniaceae*.
- Bauerella.** Named by Borsí after Austrian-born brothers, Ferdinand Lucas Bauer (1760-1826), natural history artist with Flinders in the 'Investigator', and Franz Andreas Bauer (1758-1840), F.L.S., F.R.S., who was employed as a botanical artist by Sir Joseph Banks. This monotypic rutaceous genus is superseded, the plant now being called *Acronychia baueri*. The brothers are still remembered in the name of the genus *Baueria* (family *Baueraceae*).
- Beilschmiedia.** Named by C.G. Nees von Esenbeck after O.S. Beilschmied, German botanist, whose occupational surname means axe-smith (Bell, axe; Schmied, smith, cf. surname Schmidt). C.T. Beilschmied, apothecary in Silesia, translated botanical works into German. Francis lists three species known as Blush, Grey and Yellow Walnut respectively; they are lauraceous trees, not related to the true walnuts, *Juglans* (Fam. *Juglandaceae*); named from the look of the timber.
- Betchea.** Named by German botanist Schlechter after German-born Ernst Betche (1851-1913), who was a botanist at Sydney Herbarium, and collaborated with C. Moore in 'Handbook Flora of N.S.W.', 1893. The species is now *Ackama australiensis*.
- Bischofia.** Named in 1825 by Blume after M. Bischof. There is only one species, *B. javanica*, named from Java but extending to Samoa and including N.Q. It has been placed in a family of its own, *Bischofiaceae*, (see J.C. Willis' 'Dictionary of the Flowering Plants and Ferns'), but Burbidge retains it in *Euphorbiaceae*. It is known as Needlebark, Beefwood and STCN Java Cedar.
- Blepharocarya.** Gk blepharon, an eyelid; karyon, a nut; the fruits being contained in a globular involucre consisting of woody bracts. There are only two species including *B. involucrifera*, Northern Bolly Gum or STCN Rose Butternut. Francis and Chippendale retain it in family *Anacardiaceae*, but Airy Shaw has placed it in a separate family, *Blepharocarpaceae*.
- Bombax.** Late Latin bombax (from Gk bombyx), cotton. *B. ceiba*, Northern Cottonwood, Silk Cotton Tree, or STCN Kapok Tree, is included in Hyland's 'Card Key to the Rain Forest Trees of N.Q.', but it is an introduction (native to India, Ceylon and tropical America). The Q. species is referred by Burbidge to *Gossampinas*, in family *Bombacaceae*.
- Bosistoia.** Named by F. Mueller after Joseph Bosisto (1827-1898), pharmacist, who discovered antiseptic properties of eucalyptus oil and was involved in pioneering its extraction commercially. Baron von Mueller also named *Eucalyptus bosistoana*, Coast Grey Box, of Vic. and N.S.W., after him.
- Bouchardatia.** Named by French botanist Baillon after A. Bouchardat (1806-1886), professor of medicine, Paris, who researched vanilla, arrow-root, arums and cinchona, and wrote a fine work on quinology. *Melicope neurococca* was once placed in this rutaceous genus.

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APPRECIATION

At the Annual Meeting on 14th September our President for nine years, Mr. Jack Cassels, and our Secretary for thirteen years, Mrs. Marion Cassels, both retired from office. As a gesture of appreciation of all the work that they have done for the Club through all the "ups and downs" of these years, they were both unanimously awarded Life Membership. We are grateful that they will continue to serve on the council and lend their moral support to the brave new office-bearers.

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N.B. With the best will in the world, these office-bearers still need members to pay their subscriptions (now due) and to contribute material for the Journal, if the Club is to remain viable. Please lend them your support.

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SOME GULF RECOLLECTIONS

BY L. E. SKINNER, I.S.O.

Over thirty years ago the region bordering upon the southern shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria, even in the immediate vicinity of Normanton itself, offered a wealth of bird life for observation.

It was then almost an isolated country where the nomadic life of the Aborigines had substantially ceased. Old timers attributed the large numbers of crocodiles, Crocodilus johnstoni as well as the saltwater crocodile, C. porosus, in lagoons and streams to the recession of the hunting habits of the Aborigines, especially in the taking of eggs. The white occupation of the country was described as "virtually stagnant and devoid of substantial new development with no reasonable prospect of future population growth."

Consequently there was little harassment of the bird life in that large area by its human occupiers. Pelicans were regarded as water polluters and of course were chased from any lagoon from which a station's domestic water supply was drawn.

However, some of the disturbing activities of the white occupation over the years on the balance of nature had resulted in the payment of bonuses by the local shire councils: one pound (or now two dollars) for a dingo scalp, irrespective of any ancestral cross breeding with domestic dogs, and six pence (or now five cents) for a pig's ear. These amounts had greater purchasing power in those days and, accordingly, the destruction of dingoes and wild pigs was a part time station activity.

The large birds of the region existed in considerable numbers. Apart from seabirds they were the Brolga (Grus rubicunda), Bustard (Eupodotis australis) locally called plain turkey, Jabiru (Xenorhynchus asiaticus), Pelican (Pelecanus conspicillatus), and the Pied or Black and White Goose (Anseranas semipalmata). Of these, the permanent residents appeared to be the Brolga and Pelican, in flocks. At the time a Pelican rookery existed near the mouth of the Staaten River.

Following the summer rains and floods the open country became well populated by Bustards, usually seen singly or in pairs; and each lagoon, however small, was seen to be the food supplier to a usually single Jabiru, apart from other species of birds. The Pied Geese, in large flocks, were nomadic.

Included in the bird life of the region was no small number of migrants who mainly inhabited the lagoons and streams during their stay. Their arrival and departure were usually noticed only by their sudden appearance in or absence from the locality, as the case might be.

The Bustards displayed little fear of an approaching motor vehicle but, when any person alighted from the vehicle, would keep their distance by walking steadily away.

However, the great migration from the region of Bustards that occurred in 1944 following the summer rainfall of 1943/4 which measured at Normanton only half the average, was a noticeable event apparently unequalled before in living memory. For eight days thousands of these birds flew from west to east low over Normanton. Their daily flying hours over that place were from between 3.30p.m. and 4p.m. until near dusk. For the first three days the first hour of the afternoon's flight saw the birds thickly extended northwards and southwards as far as the eye could see but their numbers dwindled as the afternoon progressed and also in the days that followed. A few stragglers always ended the daily trek.

Several years later a resident of Atherton at the time of this migration informed me that Bustards were numerous on that Tableland in 1944.

I have retained a list of birds observed late in the afternoon of 26th January 1944 during a short walk along the Normanton bore drain where it meandered across the clay pan to the Norman River filling two shallow depressions on its way; Brolgas (numbering about thirty); Pelicans (numbering over one hundred); Egrets (Egretta alba) in pairs and singly; White Ibis (Threskiornis molucca), a small flock; Black Duck (Anas superciliosa), a small flock; Grey

Teal (Anas gibberifrons), a small flock; Little Pied Cormorant (Phalacrocorax melanoleucus); Terns, unidentifiable owing to distance; Whistling Eagles (two) (Haliastur sphenurus); Nankeen Kestrel (Falco cenchroides); Crow (Corvus orru); Wood Sandpiper (Tringa glareola); Crested Pigeons (Ocyphaps lophotes); Masked Plovers (Vanellus miles); Banded Stilt (Cladorhynchus leucocephalus); White Headed Stilt (Himantopus himantopus); Magpie Lark (Grallina cyanoleuca); Black Backed Magpie (Gymnorhina tibicen); Budgerigar (Melopsittacus undulatus) flying overhead; Red Tailed Black Cockatoo (Calyptorhynchus magnificus) flying overhead; Little Grass Bird (Megalurus gramineus); Masked Wood-Swallow (Artamus personatus).

On other occasions, visitors to the bore drain included flocks of Yellow-Billed Spoonbill (Platalea flavipes); Royal Spoonbill (Platalea regia); Eastern Swamp-Hen (Porphyrio melanotus); and Black-Tailed Water Hen (Tribonyx ventralis).

Numerous lagoons across the Norman River received birds that did not venture to the bore drain. Visitors to those waters, apart from ducks including the Burdekin Duck (Tadorna radjah), were the flocks of colourful Green Pygmy Geese (Nettapus pulchellus).

The main permanent permanent scavengers of Normanton town were the kites, Square-Tailed (Lophoictinia isura) and Fork-Tailed (Milvus migrans), in apparently equal numbers. Overhead every day kites soared and swooped, performing aerobatics that airmen have been unable to imitate with their machines.

A magnet of attraction for these birds was the air close to whirlwinds and grass fires. Evidently disturbed grasshoppers and other insects became clustered there for easy taking. At breakfast time one morning a great commotion in the backyard of the National Hotel brought all hurriedly to the scene. A number of kites were flying out through the open door of a wire-netted (roof and sides) enclosure. Inside were several muscovy ducks quacking excitedly, and eight dead kites that had been killed by the ducks. The yardman, after throwing kitchen scraps to the muscovies, had left the enclosure door open and kites had swarmed in for a share of the food. Two ducks that had been sitting on eggs appeared to have been the main destroyers of the intruders.

Even a brief reference to the birds of Normanton itself in those days would be incomplete without mentioning the Blue-Winged Kookaburra (Dacelo leachi) heralding the approach of light with its particular laughing notes; the early morning ground feeders, Diamond Dove (Geopelia cuneata) and Bar-Shouldered Dove (Geopelia humeralis); the plovers (the masked plover outnumbering the spur-winged plover (Vanellus miles novae-hollandiae)); the large flocks of Galah (Eolophus roseicapillus); the screeching Red-Collared Lorikeet (Trichoglossus rubritorquis); the mischevous Little Corella (Cacatua sanguinea); and the numerous nocturnal birds, locally referred to as "night hawks". One of the latter was killed by flying into the windscreen of a motor truck conveying me from Magoura Station to Normanton one night. I identified it to my satisfaction as a Northern Boobook Owl (Ninox ocellata).

During my residence in Normanton two grasshopper plagues were experienced. A host of birds gorged themselves but, adapting the words of A.B. Paterson, could make no "difference on a run when a grasshopper plague has once begun..

Over thirty years ago, towards the end of each year, the tree lined banks of the Magnificent River, an anabranch of the Mitchell River, resounded with the cooing of Torres Strait Pigeons (Myristicivora spilorrhoa). This was about the southern limit of their annual migration down the eastern shores of the Gulf for their breeding season.

I visited Kowanyama on the Magnificent River in 1973 and was informed that in recent years these pigeons have ceased to arrive in their flocks to breed on the Mitchell. The food is still there but it seems that elsewhere is now able to meet the needs of the fast diminishing migration of these birds from the north.

Although the demanding nature of my duties in those years of residence at Normanton did not favour a study of nature to any great extent, even cursory observations of the birds and animals of the region, as practised by many of the Gulf residents, assisted in making life there both interesting and enjoyable. After all, the country life "has pleasures that the townsfolk never know".