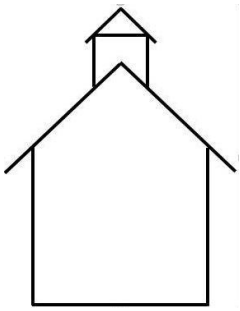

ICEHOUSE Project Space

Mark Dion: Field Station for the Melancholy Entomologist

As the sun sets over the hills of northwestern Connecticut, the entomologist returns to his field station. This summer he's been given the use of a small building for his research that was built as an icehouse in the nineteenth century, a circumstance he finds ideal for his investigation into the insect population of the high country to the west of the Housatonic River. Over the course of his career that now spans a quarter of a century, the entomologist has witnessed what many of his colleagues have been calling "the insect apocalypse," a dramatic worldwide decline in most insect species. There are over one million known insect species, and current estimates put the total number at well over thirty million – three out of every four known animal species are insects. A recent study found an average drop of nine percent per decade in the last forty years in the insect populations worldwide. This translates into a rate of extinction that is eight times faster than that of birds and mammals.

The threats to insects are multifarious and include chemical and light pollution, habitat loss, and climate change. As indigenous insect populations spiral downwards, the rise of invasive species are creating havoc in many ecosystems. This spring, the tops of the hills surrounding the field station were brown instead of green as the caterpillars of the invasive spongy moth denuded the leaves of oaks, their favorite food source. Forest defoliation by the moths creates an unfavorable environment for many forest-dwelling birds, hastening their decline. Global warming has allowed the moths to thrive as they more easily survive mild winters, while dwindling numbers of native parasitic wasps and flies, their natural predators, impact one of their only population controls.

The entomologist slumbers – and dreams. In his dream a white ash tree has grown like a column through the floor of his field station and up through the station's rafters. As only could happen in a dream, the tree matures rapidly, with its trunk quickly swelling from several inches in diameter to that of full maturity. But as quickly as the tree grew, it stops, and its leaves fall and bark begins to peel, revealing the serpentine galleries carved by emerald ash borers – an invasive beetle transplanted from Asia that is threatening to kill all the 8.7 billion white ash trees in North America. Downy, Flicker, and Pileated woodpeckers arrive and begin pulling off the tree's bark in search of the borer's larvae, feasting on what they find beneath. The woodpeckers, momentarily at the top of the food chain, are satiated.

Waking from his dream, the entomologist watches a carpenter ant traverse the floor of the field station. As he slumbered, an ant colony has been hard at work undermining the

foundation of the icehouse. As we, the human species, slumber, our actions – and inactions – are similarly undermining the very underpinnings of the natural world.

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