

# A Story a Week ...

... from woodblock printmaker David Bull

## In the Wet

I'm back in the river again this afternoon ... quite literally ... sitting up to my waist in the shaded shallows near one of the small weirs down which this stream drops through our valley, step by step. Do I talk about my little river too much in these stories? Well, this time it can't be helped; the episode was just too much fun not to share!

First, a couple of (apparently) random things. Have you ever watched a dragonfly, and observed its habit of sitting on some particular perch, flitting away for a couple of seconds, and then returning to the same perch, time and time again? I have, and have always been a bit curious about just why it does that. Another curious insect behaviour I have observed is the bizarre flying style of one particular type of tiny midge-like insect - instead of just flying about here and there, looking for whatever it is that such insects look for, this one flies in an extreme zig-zag pattern, switching direction up to three or four times a *second*. I get a headache watching it! Why on earth do they waste so much energy like this?

I think you might now see the outline of this story ...

As I sat there in the water, my hands clasped over my knees, very much enjoying the coolness after an extremely hot afternoon, a dragonfly dropped out of nowhere and perched on my upper arm. I had the presence of mind not to be startled, and kept as still as I could.

At first, he perched high up on his extended six legs, but he then began to lower himself down, very slowly, until his legs were folded, and his body almost touched my arm. It looked like he was 'crouching' ready to spring. He was perched so that he was facing outwards over the river, and as my view was straight down along his body, I could also see what he was seeing.

He was indeed ready to spring, and spring he did, just as a small insect floated across our field of view. It was over in a second - my new friend 'Tom' launched himself into the air, zoomed out to the insect, and then returned to home base. Of the insect, there was no further sign. Tom then slowly lowered himself into position again, ready for the next mouthful to come by.

There was no shortage of food for him. Evening was approaching and the air was full of small flying insects. The fish all around me were also ready for this, and the surface of the water was frequently dimpled as a hunter from below snapped up a flyer who had ventured too close to the water. It must be a tough life being an insect!

It was great fun watching the action from the same point of view as the dragonfly. I learned a lot: which sort of midge is just too small to bother with, which flies are too large (although it was interesting watching him tense up sometimes, clearly weighing his options - try for it, or let it go?)

And then one of those small insects that I mentioned above - the ones with the crazy energy-wasting flight pattern - wandered into our field of view. Tom didn't hesitate, and launched himself right at it. But a couple of seconds later, he was back on his perch, with an empty mouth. He had lunged at it, missed, flittered around and lunged again, missed again, and then given up and returned home. The little insect zig-zagged merrily along, and I have not the slightest idea if it even knew what had just happened, and how close it had come to sudden death.

Energy-wasting indeed. You do what you have to do to stay alive out there, and whether or not your behaviour makes sense to others, or fits the accepted norms, is irrelevant.

Right?

**David Bull**  
**Seseragi Studio**  
**Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City**  
**Tokyo Japan 198-0052**  
**<http://astoryaweek.com>**