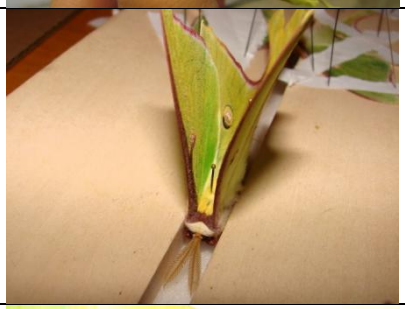
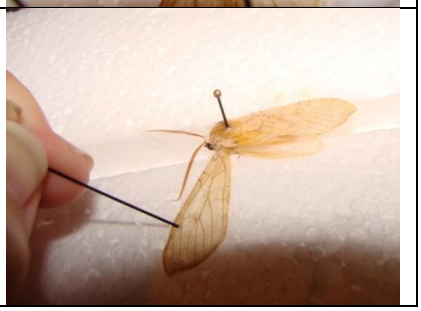
Spreading Insect Wings

by Alison Bockoven

Materials:

Spreading board *
Strips of paper
Pins
Insect

*you can make an improvised spreading board by carving a groove into a sheet of Styrofoam

Spread your insects as soon as possible. If you cannot spread them immediately, freeze until ready, and allow to thaw before pinning. Otherwise you will need to relax your specimen in a container with a damp cloth.		
Hold your butterfly or moth by the sides of the thorax and pin through the center of the thorax. Make sure your pin is straight and the specimen is about 10 mm from the top of the pin.		
Pin your specimen in the gap in the spreading board of the appropriate width. Make sure the insect is straight and level, with the wings even with the top of the spreading board.		
If the abdomen is large or droopy a bit of paper can be slid or pinned underneath as a support. If the body twists in the gap, use pins alongside the head and/or thorax to hold it in place. Position legs and antennae as desired.		
Using a pin held at an angle pull the fore wing forward. The strongest point of the wing is just behind the front vein. Pull the wing until the *hind* margin is at a 90 degree angle to the body, or just past.		

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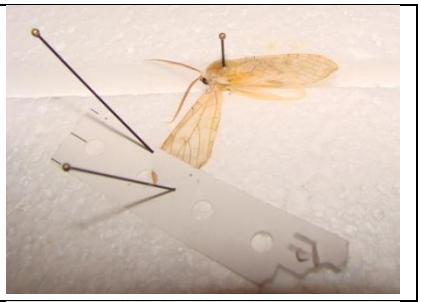
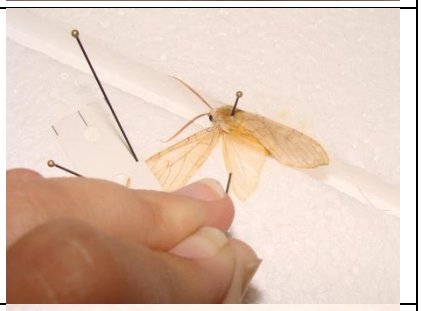
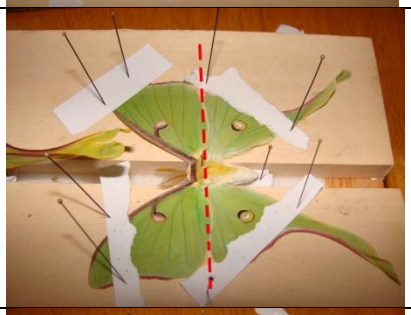
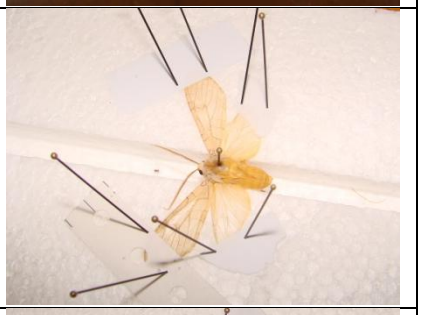
Pin a strip of paper to hold the wing in place. This will prevent tearing from the pins. Very small specimens may need to wait for this step until both hind and fore wings are in position.		
Repeat the procedure on the hind wing, pulling it into place to close the gap behind the fore wing. It should slide slightly under the fore wing at the base.		
Pin a strip of paper across the hind wing to hold it in position.		
Repeat these steps on the wings of the other side of the specimen. Note that the dividing margins of the fore and hind wings should make a straight line.		
Make sure the wings are symmetrical. As necessary, adjust the fore wings back to a 90 degree angle. For large specimens, add additional strips of paper to hold wings flat and in place.		
Allow specimen to dry for several days to a week or more depending on size. The wing muscles tighten as the body dries, so removing too soon will allow the wings to droop or retract past a 90 degree angle.		

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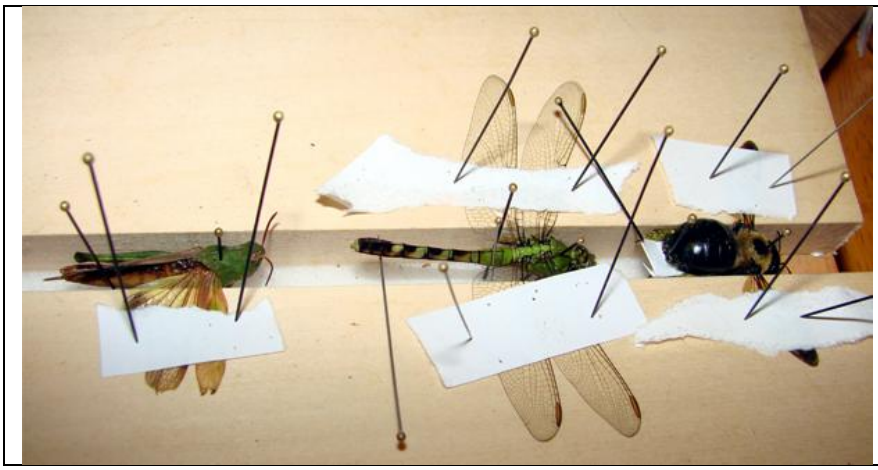	Other insects may be spread in a similar manner, depending on the guidelines appropriate for their order.