

Thomas Eisner Papers
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Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
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Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2019
Revised 2024 February

Collection Summary

Title: Thomas Eisner Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1945-2011

Bulk Dates: 1957-2008

ID No.: MSS85545

Creator: Eisner, Thomas, 1929-2011

Extent: 35,000 items

Extent: 100 containers

Extent: 40 linear feet

Extent: 43 digital files (7.82 GB)

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm2010085545>

Summary: Biologist, entomologist, and conservationist. Awards, correspondence, desk calendars, grants and projects, lecture abstracts, newspaper clippings, printed matter, reports, slides, teaching material, testimonies, subject files, writings, and other papers documenting Eisner's career as a biologist and entomologist and his activities and interests pertaining to chemical ecology, conservation, and human rights. Material in digital format include Eisner's speaking engagements and television appearances and interviews.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Carpenter, F. M. (Frank Morton)--Correspondence.

Carrel, James Elliott, 1944- --Correspondence.

Deyrup, Mark--Correspondence.

Ehrlich, Paul R.--Correspondence.

Eisner, Thomas, 1929-2011.

Eisner, Thomas, 1929-2011. For the love of insects. 2003.

Eisner, Thomas, 1929-2011. Secret weapons. 1983.

Hölldobler, Bert, 1936- --Correspondence.

Janzen, Daniel H.--Correspondence.

Kovalev, S. A. (Sergeï Adamovich), 1930-

Lindauer, Martin--Correspondence.

Meinwald, Jerrold, 1927-2018--Correspondence.

Roth, Louis M. (Louis Marcus), 1918- --Correspondence.

Rothschild, Miriam--Correspondence.

Silberglied, Robert E. (Robert Elliot), 1964-1982--Correspondence.

Wilson, Edward O.--Correspondence.

Organizations

British Broadcasting Corporation.

Cornell University.

Cornell University. Institute for Research in Chemical Ecology.

Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad (Costa Rica)

Merck & Co.

United States. Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Subjects

Arthropods.

Biochemistry.

Biodiversity conservation.

Biodiversity--Costa Rica.
Biology.
Bombardier beetles.
Chemical ecology.
Endangered species--Conservation.
Endangered species--Law and legislation.
Entomology.
Environmental chemistry.
Environmental protection.
Human rights advocacy.
Human rights.
Insects--Behavior.
Insects--Chemical ecology.
Insects--Defenses.
Insects--Ecology.
Insects--Evolution.
Insects.
Nature conservation--Florida--Florida Keys.
Nature conservation--Texas--Big Thicket.
Nature conservation.
Wildlife conservation.

Titles

Natural world.

Occupations

Biologists.
Conservationists.
Entomologists.

Acquisition Information

The papers of Thomas Eisner were given to the Library of Congress between 2010 and 2012 by Thomas Eisner and Maria Eisner.

Processing History

The papers of Thomas Eisner were arranged and described by Pang H. Xiong with the assistance of Rosa Hernandez in 2019.

Digital files were received as part of the Thomas Eisner Papers on optical disks, each of which was assigned a unique digital ID number. Use the digital ID number to request access copies of the files associated with each media. A description of the standard processes taken on all born digital records can be found in the Processing History Note: Born Digital Collection Material at <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.digital>.

Additional processing conducted by staff included ripping .cda files to .wav format and disk imaging DVDs containing multi-part, multimedia content.

Transfers

One cassette tape and some film reels have been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division where they are identified as part of the Thomas Eisner Papers. Patrons are encouraged to contact the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division in advance of a research visit.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Thomas Eisner in these papers and in other collections in the custody of the Library of Congress is reserved. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division for further information.

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Thomas Eisner are open to research. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use. Access to digital content is available onsite only in the Manuscript Reading Room and requires advanced notice. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting.

Technical Requirements

Digital content is primarily audio files in .wav format and video files in .vob format. Specialized software is not required to access these files.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or digital ID number, Thomas Eisner Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1929, June 25	Born, Berlin, Germany
1933-1947	Eisner family fled to Spain, then moved to France, Uruguay, and New York
1951	B.A., biology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
1952	Married Maria Lobell
1955	Ph.D, insect physiology, Harvard University
1955-1957	Research associate, Harvard University
1957-2011	Assistant professor, associate professor (1962), professor of biology (1966), and Jacob Gould Schurman Professor of Chemical Ecology (1976), Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.
1988	Received Karl Ritter von Frisch Medal, highest award of the German Zoological Society
1990	Received Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement, shared with Jerrold Meinwald
1991	Brokered deal between Merck & Co. and Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad, Costa Rica
1992	Founded Cornell Institute for Research in Chemical Ecology (CIRCE) with Jon C. Clardy, Jerrold Meinwald, and Wendall L. Roelofs, Cornell University
1993-2006	Director, CIRCE
1994	Received National Medal of Science, highest scientific honor
1994-1996	Chairman, Endangered Species Coalition
2003	Published <i>For Love of Insects</i> . Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
2005	Published with Maria Eisner and Melody Siegler <i>Secret Weapons: Defenses of Insects, Spiders, Scorpions, and Other Many-Legged Creatures</i> . Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
	Pygmy mole cricket, <i>Ellipes eisneri</i> , named after Eisner
2011, Mar. 25	Died, Ithaca, N.Y.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Thomas Eisner (1929-2011) span the years 1945-2011, with the bulk of the material dating from 1957 to 2008. Eisner was an authority on insect behavior, ecology, and evolution and is credited with co-founding chemical ecology, the discipline that melds biology and chemistry to reveal the chemical interactions of organisms with each other and the world at large. He is also known for his study of the defensive mechanism of bombardier beetles. Awards, correspondence, desk calendars, digital files, grants and projects, lecture abstracts, newspaper clippings, photographs, printed matter, publicity material, reports, slides, subject files, teaching material, testimonies, writings, and other miscellaneous material pertain to Eisner's career as a biologist and entomologist, including his tenure at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. Also featured are his interests and activities relating to his advocacy of human rights and the conservation of endangered species and nature. The papers are in English and organized into the following five series: [Correspondence](#), [Subject File](#), [Writings](#), [Miscellany](#), and [Slides](#).

The [Correspondence](#) series includes Eisner's many exchanges with children, colleagues, government officials, professional organizations, students, and others. This series documents aspects of his career as a biologist and entomologist and provides insight into his advocacy of human rights, chemical prospecting, and conservation. An extensive file between Eisner and Jerrold Meinwald, a chemist and co-founder of chemical ecology, describes their numerous collaborations to understand the chemical languages of insects. The series is primarily professional in nature and includes exchanges of data with other biologists and updates on Eisner's projects and research. Material relating to Eisner's tenure at Cornell University is found throughout the collection. Correspondents include F. M. Carpenter, James Elliott Carrel, Mark Deyrup, Paul R. Ehrlich, Bert Hölldobler, Daniel H. Janzen, Martin Lindauer, and Jerrold Meinwald. Because of its breadth, this series will overlap with other series in the collection. Correspondence from individuals such as Louis M. Roth, Miriam Rothschild, Robert E. Silberglied, and Edward O. Wilson are located in the [Subject File](#) series with other topical files Eisner amassed.

The [Subject File](#) series comprises a wide range of topical files highlighting Eisner's accomplishments, activities, interests, and work. Topics generally relate to biology, chemical ecology, chemical prospecting, conservation of endangered species and nature, entomology, and human rights. In 1991, Eisner helped to broker a deal between Merck & Co., a large pharmaceutical firm, and Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad, Costa Rica, to facilitate chemical prospecting of Costa Rica's biodiversity resources. Articles, correspondence, proposals, reports, and other papers in this series chronicle this event. Documentation of Eisner's work relating to conservation and endangered species is extensive and ranges from his efforts to conserve Lignumvitae Key in Florida in the 1960s and 1970s and the Big Thicket region of Texas in the 1970s to files pertaining to his activities with scientists and members of the United States Congress to save the Endangered Species Act in 1995 and 1996. The range of activities relating to his advocacy of human rights include a large file on S. A. Kovalev, a Russian biologist arrested in 1974 in the Soviet Union for human rights activities. Also featured in this series are Eisner's grant-funded projects to study the evolution and defensive systems of arthropods and material chronicling Eisner's involvement in the founding of the Cornell Institute for Research in Chemical Ecology in 1992.

The [Subject File](#) also contains video files. There is a video file for "Secret Weapons," an episode produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation for the television series *Natural World*. This episode originally aired in 1983 and was written by and featured Eisner. The episode won many awards, including the grand award in the science category at the New York Film and Television Festival. Video files are also available for Eisner's other appearances on the Discovery Canada channel and *Nature Watch* series.

The [Writings](#) series consists of Eisner's articles, books, essays, and papers along with writings by others about Eisner. There are seven bound volumes of Eisner's published articles, essays, and papers from 1952 to 2008, in chronological order, as well as articles bound together according to subject. Topics on which Eisner wrote generally relate to biology, chemical ecology, and conservation and reflect his interest in deciphering how ants, bombardier beetles, caterpillars, cockroaches, fireflies, millipedes, spiders, and other arthropods and insects use chemical signals to attract mates, defend against predators, locate food, and protect their young. Correspondence, reviews, slides, and other material help to highlight Eisner's books *For Love of Insects* and *Secret Weapons: Defenses of Insects, Spiders, Scorpions, and Other Many-Legged Creatures*. *For Love of Insects* is considered Eisner's memoir of fifty years in the field, and the series includes an audio file of a radio discussion of this book in 2004.

The [Miscellany](#) and [Slides](#) series provide further documentation of Eisner's personal and professional activities. The [Miscellany](#) series includes material relating to Eisner's academic career, accomplishments, engagements, and talks. Also included in the [Miscellany](#) series are digital files, including audio files of a bombardier beetle discharging a defensive

and toxic secretion. Eisner was known for his nature photography and used pictures to illustrate concepts whenever possible. Photographs by Eisner of a variety of subjects are available in slide format. The [Slides](#) series includes images of a bombardier beetle ejecting a defensive spray, insects, maple leaves, plants, ultraviolet coloration and patterns, and the *utetheisa ornatix*, a moth that uses an alkaloid chemical to make itself unpalatable.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in five series:

- [Correspondence, 1946-2010](#)
- [Subject File, 1954-2011](#)
- [Writings, 1952-2008](#)
- [Miscellany, 1956-2009](#)
- [Slides, 1945-2005](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-36	<p><u>Correspondence, 1946-2010</u></p> <p>Correspondence received and sent to children, colleagues, government officials, organizations, students, and others along with supporting material.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by name of person, organization, or topic.</p>
BOX 37-69	<p><u>Subject File, 1954-2011</u></p> <p>Correspondence, drafts of bills, grants and projects, newspaper clippings, petitions, photographs, printed matter, proposals, reports, surveys, testimonies, and other papers pertaining to Eisner's accomplishments, activities, interests, and work. Video files are also included in this series.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by topic. The file structure of the digital content has been maintained as received.</p>
BOX 70-76	<p><u>Writings, 1952-2008</u></p> <p>Articles, books, essays, papers, and related material such as an audio file, correspondence, reviews, and slides.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by type of material and therein alphabetically by topic or type of material. The file structure of the digital content has been maintained as received.</p>
BOX 77-90	<p><u>Miscellany, 1956-2009</u></p> <p>Annual reports, awards, biographical information, desk calendars, lecture abstracts, publicity file, teaching file, and other material. Digital files include audio and video files.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by topic or type of material. The file structure of the digital content has been maintained as received.</p>
BOX 91-100	<p><u>Slides, 1945-2005</u></p> <p>Slides of photographs primarily taken by Eisner.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by topic.</p>

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Slides, 1945-2005

Container

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BOX 100

Wax, 1971-1997
(2 folders)