

Insects

Insects have become so abundant in form and function because they were some of the first organisms which ever ventured onto land. This, along with their small size, varied feeding habits, hard exoskeletons, wings and elaborate life cycles, allowed them to branch out and evolve into the near 1 million varieties found around the globe today. Every corner of the Arboretum is home to one species or another, often several. Their true number in a specific location is hard to estimate, but there are ongoing studies that allow us to get a better idea of the total diversity of these creatures all around us.

Insects occupy almost every available niche and are essential not only in the diverse food webs of the Arboretum, but also are important players in nutrient release into soils, the pollination and subsequent proliferation of wild flowers and other plant species, and are, of course, often fascinating as well as photogenic.

Biodiversity monitoring of Butterflies and Odonates (Dragonflies and Damselflies) was conducted in 2010 and 2011. The total species identified within each group are listed below as well as some of the "highlight" species.

Butterflies: 41 species: Hackberry Emperor, Eastern Pine Elfin, Milbert's Tortoiseshell, Bronze Copper, Banded Hairstreak, Acadian Hairstreak, and Striped Hairstreak. 2011 summer highlight: Baltimore Checkerspot.

Dragonflies and Damselflies: 39 species: Stream Cruiser, Horned Clubtail, Midland Clubtail, Swamp Darner, Arrowhead Spiketail, Powdered Dancer, and Aurora Damsel. 2011 summer highlights: Spot-Winged Glider, Black Saddlebags.



Sophisticated wing structure of the Green Darner Photo: Mark Dennis

Spiders

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Spiders are a common sight here in the Arboretum, and whether we are terrified of them or fascinated by them, they always seem to amaze us. We can possibly take comfort in knowing that there are no dangerous varieties of spiders found in this area, so there is no real danger in encountering them. As a matter of fact, without these little arachnids, the summer months would simply be unbearable with the number of biting insects which would be present.

In a way, whether we love them or hate them, spiders do us a huge favour in acting as natural mosquito control, as well as providing a food source for the Arboretum's many bird species. With several hundred species found throughout the Arboretum, spiders are second only to insects in terms of diversity of species. There are web builders and hunters, big ones and small ones, but all are equally fascinating in their own way. From the tiny big-eyed jumping spiders to the masterful architects, the Black and Yellow Argiope, the Arboretum is an excellent home for spiders and presents a great opportunity to witness them and learn more about their curious way of life.



The Black and Yellow Argiope builds intricate webs and is often found in gardens
Photo: thornm_(Flickr)