

## **An Introduction to Central Texas Arthropods**

We are surrounded by insects and spiders. They are everywhere, and so ubiquitous that we tend to ignore them. Deciding to learn about them involves a commitment to be more observant, which in turn makes us more aware of our surroundings. The more we can learn about our fellow creatures on this planet, the more "at home" we tend to feel. There is nothing more frightening than the unknown, but if we choose to make at least a small portion the unknowns in our world more familiar, it becomes a friendlier place, one in which we can relax and enjoy ourselves just a bit more.

Insects are fascinating. They come in an enormous variety of forms, and their lifestyles can be just as intriguing as those of birds and mammals. While learning to identify and understand these creatures can seem like a daunting task, it can also be a challenging and engaging pastime. Let your curiosity run loose, go ahead and be amazed by some of the remarkable creatures you see, and, by all means, have fun!

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Here are some suggestions for getting the most out of studying bugs:

Think Small - details, tiny creatures, alien lifestyle.

Never Give Up - at least get to order, or at least determine if it is an insect! Don't just ignore the minutia because they are frustrating.

Browse Books/Websites - you can never see enough different insects - the more you see them, the more familiar they become.

Make a Personal Collection - whether it be actual specimens, photos, a life list, or a garden list, start keeping track of what you see. At least have a small collection of reference works.

Practice, Practice, Practice - you want the most common bugs to be very familiar, and those that are seen only occasionally will fade from memory quickly if you don't review them. Make a habit of looking all the time and don't ignore even the most commonplace creature. Simply make a mental note of what it is. Perhaps say it out loud.

Go on Field Trips - getting out in the field either alone or with others is the only way to see more than your common household insects. A field trip for insects need not be to some distant, spectacular destination (but it could be, if you want). A small garden, local hike-n-bike trail, or nearby water retention pond are all potential insect habitats.

Watch and Learn - about habitats, lifestyles, behaviors, seasonal occurrences. Hone your observational skills so that you notice more about your surroundings. It never hurts to be more aware.

Share What you Learn - helping somebody else learn what you know is a great way to increase your own understanding and reinforce those myriad details.