

# Insects



Striped Blister Beetle (*Epicauta vittata*)



Praying Mantis (*Mantis religiosa*)



Cecropia Moth (*Hyalophora cecropia*)



Widow Skimmer (*Libellula lydia*)

## DID YOU KNOW:

There are more than a million species of insects and more are discovered each year. All insects have three body parts (head, thorax and abdomen), antennae and six legs.

## EATING HABITS:

Insects eat almost everything; plants, wood, nectar and pollen, other insects, decaying animal matter, even blood. Some insects (ants and cockroaches for example) will eat human garbage. The adults of some insect species, like the Cecropia moth above, don't eat at all.

## **THE YOUNG:**

Most species of insects lay eggs or larvae that metamorphosize (change) into adults. Usually there are four stages to insect life; egg, larva, pupa and adult. (See the handout on metamorphosis for more information.)

## **HABITAT (HOME):**

Insects are found just about everywhere in Missouri. Some live in trees, some in grassy areas, some underground and some even live in water.

## **DEFENSIVE HABITS:**

Although insects like bees and wasps can inflict painful stings, insects have very few ways to defend themselves. A monarch's only form of defense is a mild toxin (poison) that causes it to taste bad to predators. The toxin is from the milkweed plant. The monarch's bright colors help warn predators of the bad tasting snack.

## **UNUSUAL FACTS:**

- The most poisonous insects are bees, wasps and ants. The species with the most toxic venom are harvester ants.
- A horse fly was recently clocked at more than seventy miles an hour.
- Most insects have short life spans, but a queen termite may live fifty years or longer.
- Insects have their skeletons on the outside, which makes it hard for them to grow. The only way they can become larger is to break out of their skin and swell up to a new size before the skin hardens; this is called molting.
- Insects have no circulatory system, no central heart, veins or arteries to circulate blood cells or transport oxygen. They have a simple tube running down the back which is open at both ends and slowly pulses fluids and nutrients from the rear of the insect to the head.
- The respiratory system of an insect is composed of air sacs and tubes called trachea. Air enters the tubes through openings called spiracles along the sides of the body.