

# Field Notes

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

August 2007

## *What are those bugs flying around my light?*

At this time of year people often see large bugs flying around outdoor lights and wonder “what are those things”?

In August some temporary wetlands dry up, forcing some aquatic bugs to find new places to live. They are often seen flying around, and are attracted to lights. They may also be forced to find a new home if their habitat becomes too crowded or they run out of food.



There are five common groups of bugs that exhibit this behaviour:

- Backswimmers
- Giant water bugs
- Water strider
- Water boatmen
- Water scorpions

These are all “true bugs” (order Hemiptera) and go through incomplete metamorphosis. This means that the larva or nymph looks like the adult. If you find these bugs in the water they will most likely be young. If however, they are flying they will be adults. The easiest way to tell them apart is how big (developed) the wings are. If the wings are long and full grown they will be adults if not they will be young. Each time the young moult the wings grow a little.

These bugs spend the winter as adults which is another reason we start to see them at this time of year. In some species the adults stay active in the water during the winter while others hibernate. For those that do hibernate, they bury themselves in mud or under leaves either in the water or on the shore.

## **Did you know?**

That backswimmers and giant water bugs can inflict a painful bite.



That in some species of giant water bugs the males carry the eggs on their back.



That some species of water boatmen migrate to deeper bodies of water to spend the winter.



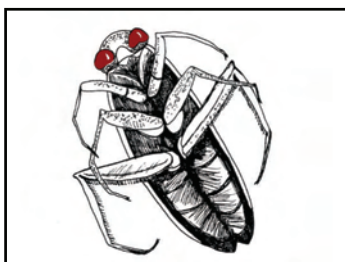
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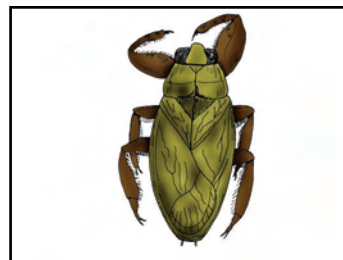


## *What you might see!*



### **Backswimmer**

Black and white bug with large red eyes. It is boat-shaped and swims along on its back using its legs like oars. Preys on insects and small fish.



### **Giant Water Bug**

Large, flat brown bug usually found among plants. It eats a variety of aquatic animals even tadpoles and small fish. Swims by kicking its hind legs.



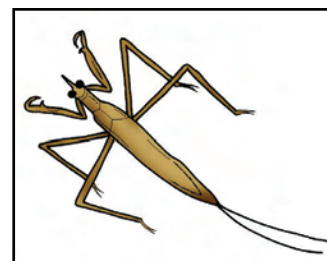
### **Water Strider**

Long, slender dark bug. Runs on the surface of the water with its long, skinny legs. Feeds on small insects.



### **Water Boatmen**

Slender, black bug with fine yellow bars. This bug swims by paddling its long, skinny, oar-like legs. Eats algae, dead plants and animals.



### **Water Scorpion**

Long, slender brown bug. Lives underwater but projects a breathing tube through the surface from time to time. Feeds on insects, seizing its prey with strong front legs.