

Backyard Bugs

A busy world at your feet

ILLUSTRATIONS By WES BOOHER

THE OUTDOORS PAGE

By STEVE POLLICK and JEFF BASTING

A fascinating, important universe in miniature awaits in your backyard, the world of "bugs."

The term is used advisedly, for most of these small creatures — all members of phylum Arthropoda, hence, arthropods — are not really bugs, casual references aside.

True bugs include members of the order Hemiptera and include aphids, scale insects, assassin bugs, stink bugs, water boatmen and water striders, and cicadas, among many others.

But a lightning *bug* or firefly is not a true bug, but rather a beetle, as is a ladybug or ladybird beetle, and both belong to the order of insects.

The familiar daddy longlegs, or harvestman, is not a spider, is harmless, not poisonous, and is in an order all its own, but it has eight legs like spiders. The pillbug or roly-poly is a terrestrial crustacean related to shrimp, lobster, crayfish, and crabs.

In short, a bug is not a bug is not a bug, except ... So consider this an invitation to celebrate and explore the backyard micro-world and its hundreds of denizens.

Admittedly, some of these hard-shelled little creatures, such as mosquitoes, can be pesty and itchy, and others, such as yellowjackets and bald-faced hornets, can be downright nasty and carry the threat of venomous stings. But even the latter can be observed safely at a distance.

But to simply brush off all these small animals as "ewwwwww, bugs!" or mere "creepy-crawlies" is to overlook their critical roles — even for those species that we may deem pests or those we simply are not smart enough to

understand. For this frenzied, frantic, teeming world at our feet helps form the foundation of life as we know it.

Arthropods are members of any of five classes — spiders and scorpions, among others; crayfish, sowbugs, and others; millipedes (two pairs of legs per segment, slow), centipedes (one pair of legs per segment, fast), and insects. Among their many roles they may pollinate, aerate, build soil, clean up decay, and even control one another's populations, in many cases in complex predator-prey-parasite webs.

You're not going to learn everything there is to know about backyard bugs (there's that term again) in an afternoon. Perhaps not even in a lifetime. But buy, or borrow from the local library a good insect field guide and take it and a hand lens into your own backyard.

Check the grass, the garden, the shrubs, the trees. Turn over rocks or logs. A small garden pool or a pond will expand the micro-world even further. You will find small creatures everywhere — flitting, creeping, zipping, crawling, flapping, or even playing possum by remaining motionless in the face of that large bipedal predator that is staring at it. Theirs is a frenetic life, start to finish, in a season.

Soon enough you will find that a sunny late-summer afternoon has passed in a twinkling. Just in time for crickets, and cicadas, and katydids and the rest of the singing night shift in the backyard world.

Contact Steve Pollick at:
spollick@theblade.com
or 419-724-6068.

paper wasp



Makes open-celled nests in corners and eaves.

mosquito

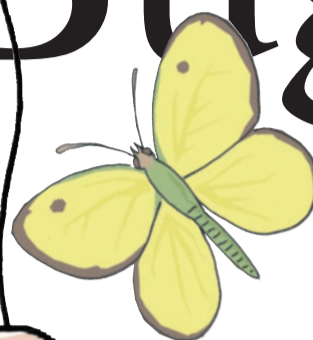
With 150 species in North America, these pesky biters need no introduction.



Insects not to scale

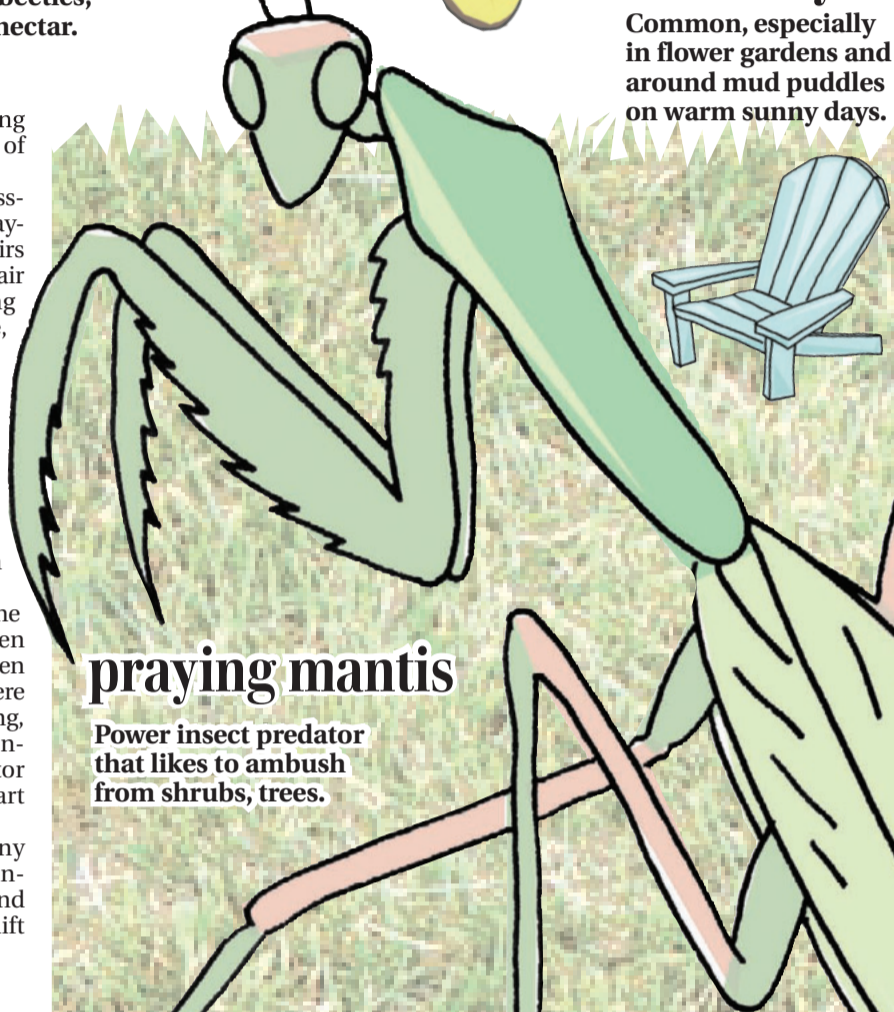
sulphur butterfly

Common, especially in flower gardens and around mud puddles on warm sunny days.



ladybug

200 species, a garden helper that feeds on aphids and beetles, pollen and nectar.

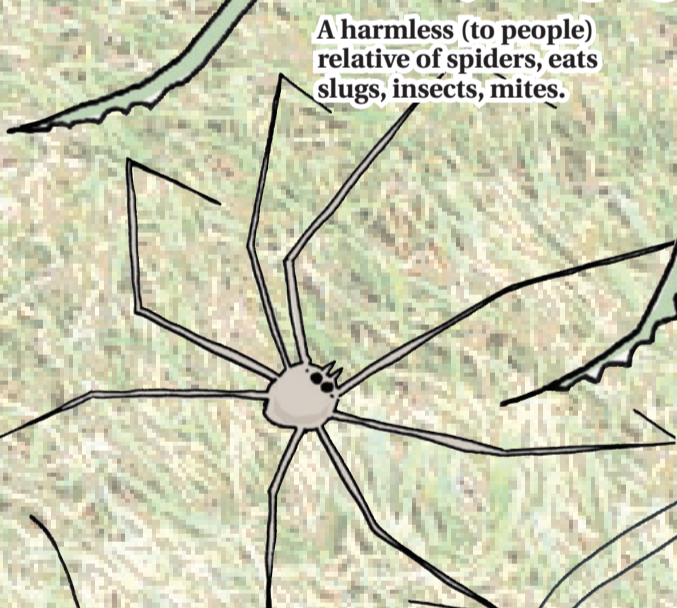


praying mantis

Power insect predator that likes to ambush from shrubs, trees.

daddy longlegs

A harmless (to people) relative of spiders, eats slugs, insects, mites.



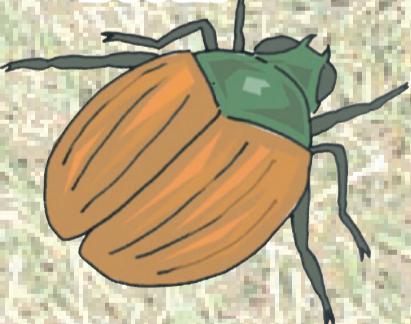
pillbug

Also called the roly-poly when it curls in your fingers, scavenges decaying debris.



Japanese beetle

A too-familiar invasive diner in gardens, trees, and landscaping.



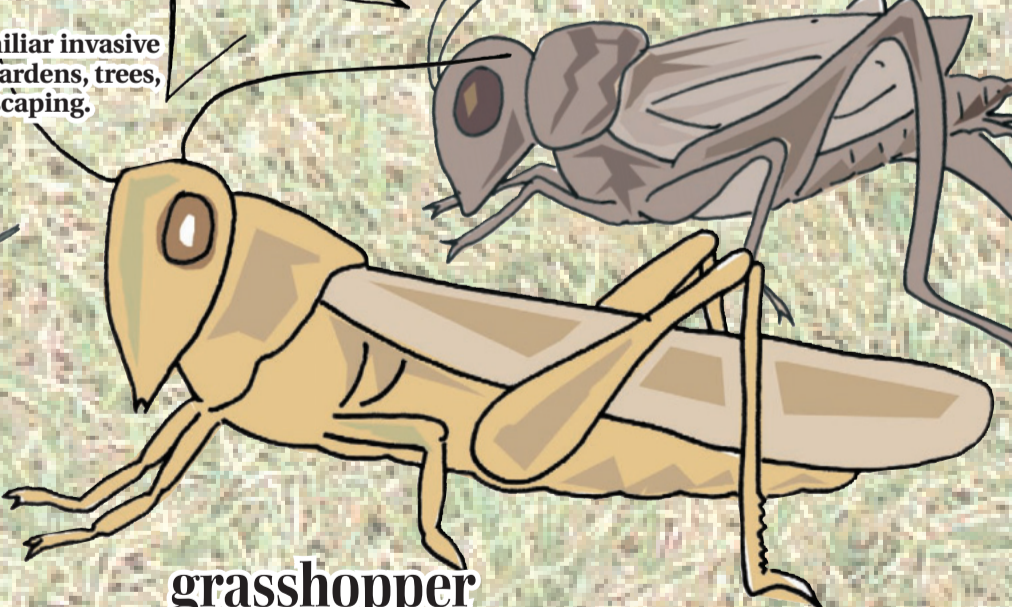
cicada

75 species, falsely called locusts, tree insects with familiar buzzing evening song.



grasshopper

More than 550 species, some buzz or sing, widespread in gardens and grasses.



field cricket

Familiar for its chirping song, likes to hide in nooks and crannies in gardens and grasses.

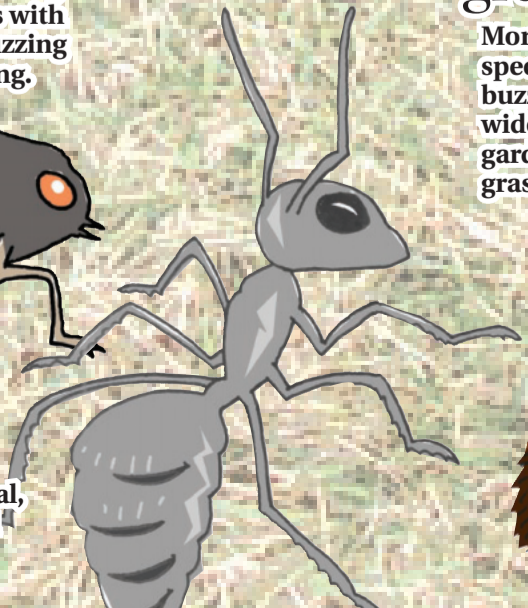


centipede

Quick-moving, many-legs, nocturnal, a predator in the ground or on the surface under rocks, logs, debris.

ant

700 species, highly social, found everywhere, feed on other insects, a key family of arthropods.



banded woolly bear

Caterpillar of the Isabella moth, a folklore forecaster of winter, feeds on weeds.

