

12. Beware: Giant Water Bugs!

Todd found this unique bug on a flooded road this summer, and some of the things we learned about it were fascinating! This is a Giant Water Bug, which is sometimes referred to as a toe-biter because their bite is extremely painful. They live in freshwater streams and ponds worldwide. In fact they are the largest insect which occurs worldwide!

Something that fascinates me about Giant Water Bugs is that these creatures show paternal care, meaning the males care for young. The 'spikes' on this bug's back are really eggs. The eggs of this species are laid on the male's wings where they are carried until they hatch. The males invest considerable time and energy in reproduction and females take the role of actively finding males to mate.

Adult Giant Water Bugs prey on any small animal they can handle, including insects and other aquatic invertebrate and invertebrates such as tadpoles, salamanders and small fish. Giant water bugs are ambush hunters, which lie motionless waiting for their prey, which they capture by using their clawed front feet. Using their strong jaws and sharp teeth, they then inject chemicals into the body of the prey. Those chemicals turn the prey's insides into liquid, which the giant water bug can suck up.

Giant Water Bugs are active all year, but are most commonly seen in the late summer and early fall, when they leave the shallow ponds at night to look for deeper bodies of water where they can remain active throughout the winter under the ice.

Predators of giant water bugs include birds, fish, other aquatic predators, and people! Giant water bugs are eaten in some areas, such as Thailand, where they are considered a delicacy.

I think I will pass on eating them, but they are fun to watch and learn about...from a distance of course!