

# Bugs, Beetles, and Bees

by Jamie Kelly, Naturalist at Pioneers Park Nature Center

The word, bug, is typically used interchangeably with insect. However, not all insects are bugs, but all bugs are insects. Stink bugs, milkweed bugs, and boxelder bugs are some examples of true bugs. These bugs as well as beetles, bees, grasshoppers, and butterflies are all insects. Insects are comprised of small invertebrate animals that have six legs, three segments to their body (a head, thorax, and abdomen), and typically two pairs of wings. To help remember try singing this song to the tune of Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes to help remember how to identify an insect.

*Head, thorax, abdomen, abdomen.*

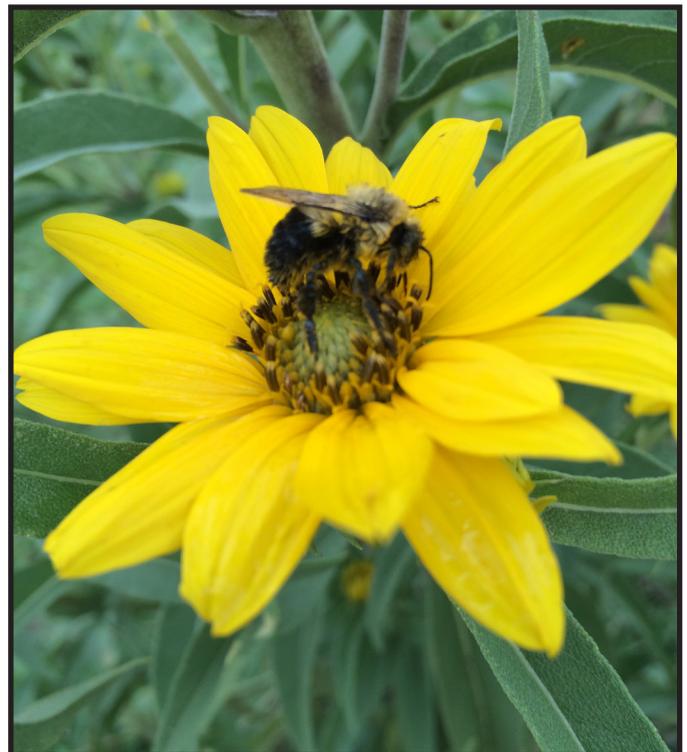
*Head, thorax, abdomen, abdomen.*

*Two eyes, two antennae, four wings, and six legs.*

*Head, thorax, abdomen, abdomen.*

Wondering around the Nature Center I encounter many insects. Two of my favorite are the bumble bee and the milkweed beetle. Here is a little bit more about these two insects.

The bumble bee: There are over 4,000 different types of bees in North America. The bumble bee is fat and fuzzy compared to a honey bee. Its signature colors are yellow and black. Bumble bees have hair all over them. Looking closely at a busy bumble bee you might see yellow or orange balls on their legs. What you are seeing are full pollen baskets. As the bee travels from flower to flower they pick up pollen on the tiny hair covering their bodies. The bumble bee helps to pollenate other flowers as they move about, spreading the pollen they carry from one flower to another. Many plants need bees to help with pollination. Through pollination plants are able to reproduce and grow seeds.



Large milkweed beetles: These red beetles with black dots can be found on common milkweed plants in prairies and grasslands. They have four eyes, six black legs, two black antennae, and are about 12-15 mm long. The female lays eggs on or near that milkweed plant. When the eggs hatch the larvae bore into the stems and roots of the milkweed for the winter. Adults emerge in early summer and spend time eating the leaves and buds of the milkweed. By feasting on milkweed, these beetles become poisonous. Their red color serves as a warning for birds and other predators to stay clear of eating them.

Come out to the Nature Center in late summer and early fall to investigate insects. The Nature Center is open Monday – Saturday, 8:30 am – 5:00 pm and Sundays from noon – 5pm. Suggested donations for visits are \$3/person, \$5/family, \$10/group.