



INSECTS

TERRESTRIAL INSECTS

BATIQUITOS LAGOON FOUNDATION

There are many kinds of insects around Batiquitos Lagoon. Insects play an important role in the structure and function of ecosystems: they are an important food source for a wide variety of animals, including other insects; and they pollinate plants. Some insect predators have been useful for controlling other insects (biological control—as opposed to use of chemical pesticides).

Ladybird Beetle



Ladybird Beetles are oval-shaped and often brightly colored (red with black markings). The name "ladybird" (or the incorrect "ladybug") can be traced to the Middle Ages when these beetles were dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Since adults and larvae consume large numbers of pest insects, such as aphids, scale insects, and mites, they are useful predators (used commercially).



Harlequin Bug

Harlequin Bugs are about the size of fingernails and are dark with colorful orange and white spots. They are often found on wild mustard plants and bladderpod. These are technically true bugs (Order Hemiptera) while most common insects are not.



Darkling Ground Beetles

Most common Darkling Ground Beetles are called "stink bugs" because they give off an unpleasant odor when handled (probably a defense mechanism against predators). Most are generally found on the ground underneath rocks or logs. Watch for them on the trail.



Spittlebugs

These are small jumping insects less than ½" long. The young (nymphs) produce a spittle-like mass. These insects are very common, and spittle masses are often abundant during the summer, especially on the Coastal Sagebrush and Goldenbush found along the trail. The adults, called Froghoppers, emerge and then fly away.



Longhorned Borers

These beetles have antennae that are at least half as long as (and usually longer than) their bodies. Larvae of most species feed on the solid tissues of dead or dying plants, usually trees and shrubs. Therefore, many are very destructive to whole forest and woodland communities. For example, the Eucalyptus Longhorned Borer, the larvae of which feed on eucalyptus trees, was recently introduced from Australia and has caused much damage to the eucalyptus trees around Batiquitos Lagoon.



Bumblebees

Bumblebees are large, hairy bees with black and yellow bodies. Bumblebees form colonies which are formed every spring by overwintering queens. Bees have more blossom intelligence than any other insect group, that is, they remember blossom characteristics, distinguishing between different species and remaining faithful pollinators (consistently pollinating the same species of plants). Because they are such good pollinators, they serve an important role in the overall functioning of the lagoon ecosystem.



Ants

There are many different kinds of ants. Like bees, ants are social insects, living in organized colonies. The ant colonies vary in size from a dozen or so to many thousands of individuals. Most nest on the ground, but some nest in natural cavities. Each colony consists of one to several queens (the largest individuals in a colony who do all the egg laying), workers and males. Some species of ants are carnivorous, others are scavengers, and some feed on plants. Most ants will bite when they are disturbed, and some may even sting. Argentine ants are the common species found in this area—these are the small black ones, also called "sugar ants". They are not native to this area but are extremely successful here.



Red Gum Lerp Psyllid

These are the small insects that suck sap from Eucalyptus leaves (especially red gums which are the most common species at Batiquitos), resulting in leaf damage and drop. They produce sticky honeydew from which the nymphs build protective cup-like structure, and the honeydew attracts sooty mold.

Butterflies

This showy group is discussed separately.