

# Insects up-close

**In the St.** Charles Ecopark you'll find a huge variety of insects. Carnivorous dragonflies defend territories around wetlands and ponds. Water striders row across water looking for small insects to eat. Butterflies drink flower nectar for energy or damp soil for minerals.

Though some insects annoy and harm humans—lice, mosquitos, and termites don't make many top-10 favorite lists—we'd suffer without them. They pollinate plants, recycle nutrients, and provide a key food source in many ecosystems. On a smaller scale, insects have lives as dramatic and beautiful as eagles or lions.

## HIGH AND LOW, NORTH TO SOUTH

Insects may not be the most famous members of the animal kingdom, but they dominate it. At least 75 percent of all animal species are insects. They can live from the Himalayas to deep caves. And we've found only a fraction—most insects live undiscovered in tropical forests.



**From left to right:** Leaf-eating walkingsticks look like twigs to avoid predators. Water striders move over the water's surface. Treehoppers feed on the sap of flowers, shrubs, and trees. A painted lady, a migratory butterfly like the monarch, sucks nectar from a flower. **Background:** A dragonfly at rest, the calico pennant. (All photos by Donna Brunet)

