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Common Arizona Pond Insect Identification Guide

Dragonflies and Damselflies



Dragonfly Nymph

Large eyes, long legs, wingpads (= partially developed wings) on their backs, pointed projections on the back end. Often red-brown, green-brown, or black. Find dragonfly nymphs at the bottom of the pond. Similar to damselflies but have pointed projections rather than leaf-shaped gills on the back end. Immature dragonfly. (0.5cm—6cm)



Damselfly Nymph

Large eyes, wingpads (= partially developed wings) on their backs, three leaf-shaped gills projecting off the back. Often red-brown, green-brown, or black. Find damselfly nymphs clinging to vertical vegetation. Similar to dragonflies but with leaf-shaped gills rather than pointed projections on the back end. Immature damselfly. (0.5cm—4cm)

Beetles



Predaceous Diving Beetle

Quite active in the water, smooth and rounded for swimming, long swimming hairs on legs, straight antennae. Huge variation in shape, color, and size among species. Find these beetles swimming through the water, especially when they surface to breathe. Difficult to distinguish these beetles from the water scavenger beetles without handling, but typically more active. (0.2cm—3.5cm)



Water Scavenger Beetle

Smooth and rounded for swimming, long swimming hairs on legs, clubbed antennae, most with a long pointed spike on underside. Wide variation in shape, color, and size, though usually darkly colored. Find these beetles swimming or crawling on the bottom. Difficult to distinguish from the predaceous diving beetles without handling, but often less active. (0.4cm—4cm)



Whirligig Beetles

Rounded bodies, long front legs, other legs very short, eyes divided on each side (4 total eye regions). Deep black and either small or large depending on variety. Find these beetles swimming on the surface of the water in groups. Shape, eye division, and leg lengths are distinct. (0.5cm—1.5cm)

Mayflies



Mayfly

Large eyes, gills along abdomen, 3 tails, typically long, narrow bodies and fish-like movements. Often light colored. Find these crawling along the bottom or attached to vegetation. Distinguish a mayfly from a damselfly by the tails: 3 long, slender tails on the mayfly are unlike the 3 leaf-like gills on the damselfly. (0.4cm—1.8cm)

Flies



Horse Fly Larva

Large larvae, no legs, indistinct head region, body ringed with leg-like structures that give them a ribbed appearance. Usually light brown, yellow, or white. Find these flies at the bottom of the pond in muck. Similar in size to crane fly larvae, but the ribbing is distinct. (1cm—4cm)



Crane Fly Larva

Large larvae, no legs, indistinct head region, body ends with a ring of pointed fleshy projections. Usually brown. Find these flies at the bottom of the pond in muck. Similar in size to horse fly larvae, but lacks the ribbed appearance and has the fleshy projections. (1cm—4cm)

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Flies



Mosquito Larva

Elongate, narrow larvae, broad head, thorax wider than head, breathing tube and bristles on back end, no legs. Usually light brown or grey. Find these flies upside down at the surface, sticking the respiratory tube out of the water, or wriggling near the surface if disturbed. Enlarged thorax is distinct. (0.4cm—1.2cm)



Bloodworm

Small, elongate larvae, no legs, distinct head, very small, two leg-like structures on back end and one below head. Usually bright red. Find these flies at the bottom of the pond in muck. Bright red coloration is distinct, as is the shape of these flies. Larvae of non-biting midges. (0.2cm—1cm)

True Bugs



Backswimmer

Swim upside down several inches underwater or near surface. Long back legs used for rowing, large eyes, triangular cross section. Many are black with red or brown markings. Find these bugs floating effortlessly in the water. Easy to differentiate from water boatmen because they swim upside down and do not have narrow black bands on their backs. (0.5cm—1.3cm)



Water Boatman

Swim right side up, long back legs used for rowing, scoop-shaped front legs, large eyes, oval cross section. Most brown with many narrow black bands on their backs. Find these bugs at the bottom. Differentiate from backswimmers because they swim right side up and have black markings on their backs. (0.2cm—0.9cm)



Giant Water Bug

Very large bugs with broad and muscular front legs, large eyes, elongate or rounded bodies, and retractable breathing tube (can be short in some species). Brown bugs. Find these bugs standing completely still on vegetation or at the surface breathing. In some species, males carry eggs on their backs, which is distinct. Differentiate from other bugs by shape and lethargic behavior. (2mm—7mm)



Water Scorpion

Long, very narrow and stick-like bugs with long, non-retractable respiratory tube on back end. Generally dark brown with light brown legs and tube. Find these bugs holding onto the vegetation with the tube at the surface. Distinct from other true bugs with stick-like shape and breathing tube. (3cm—7cm)



Water Strider

Stand on top of water, large eyes, long middle and hind legs, short front legs, elongate bodies, often wingless. Most are darkly colored as adults, lighter as immatures. Find these large bugs on top of the water, which is distinct. (0.5cm—1.3cm)

Caddisflies



Caddisfly larva

Elongate larvae, head and thorax bunched toward front of body, long legs, often construct cases from leaves, rocks, or twigs. Most pond dwelling species construct cases of rock or leaves. Find these bugs at the bottom—look for moving rocks or leaves! These are the only insects that make cases. (0.5cm—2.5cm)