



Insect Ninja Warriors

The Ninja warriors of ancient Japan used their skills of deception to fight their enemies. Often this involved camouflage, sneaking silently through the shadows and other methods to hide their identity and presence. Insects use some of the same types of deception to obtain their food and confuse the enemy.

Ant lions, whose adults look very much like damselflies, are experts at concealing themselves. The larvae dig funnel shaped holes in fine sand and then rest at the bottom of the funnel with only their large jaws protruding. A hapless ant may stumble upon the funnel and slide down to the bottom. The sides are steep and the sand is loose, so while the ant is struggling to climb out, the larva has ample time to grab the victim with its mandibles and have lunch.

Ambush bugs have a camouflage exoskeleton that looks somewhat like a piece of bark. They move about stealthily on twigs until they get within reach of their prey. The front legs are like spring traps that can grasp the intended food insect and hold it while the bug dines.

Crab spiders are true deceivers when it comes to color matching. The spiders seek out plants and flowers that match their body color. For instance, yellow crab spiders set up shop on yellow flowers, pink ones on pink flowers, etc. You get the picture. There they lie in wait until an insect visits the flower. Their crab-like legs are perfect for grabbing the prey. If the spider cannot find a plant that matches its color, it can slowly change its own color to resemble the hosting plant.

Robber flies are like Ninja airplanes. They have long, sleek bodies and powerful wings that can carry them swiftly through the air searching for suitable prey. Their legs are long, hairy and are held netlike when they capture their prey. Sometimes the prey is much larger than they are and it takes a tremendous struggle and strength to come out the winner.

Jumping spiders have the ability to leap forward many times their own length, which gives them a great advantage to creep up on a fly or other insect, and then pounce on it suddenly. They don't often miss, as they have several of their eyes facing toward the front to give them a kind of "range finder" sight.

Probably the most Ninja-like insect is the praying mantis. In fact, the movements of the mantis in stalking its prey have given rise to a form of kung fu karate known as the "mantis style". The mantis moves slowly up to the intended victim and then strikes with lightning speed with its strong trap-like front legs.

Many other insects exhibit Ninja-like characteristics as they carry on looking for their food. I wonder if the Ninjas studied a great many of these activities to develop their own trade and their skills.

