

Water Creatures



Now that we are in mid-summer, we tend to go to places that are cool and inviting. One such place is our favorite lake or pond, where we can sit quietly, meditate a bit and take in the coolness of the water.

But, there is a lot of activity going on in our pond. Across the surface are some scurrying insects on the move, stopping for a few seconds, and then they are off again. They seem to be standing on the water and do not sink in. These are water striders, true bugs that have tiny hairs on their long feet which keep them from breaking the surface tension of the water. They literally “walk on water!” You can duplicate this feat by carefully placing a fine sewing needle on top of water on its side. The needle will actually “float” on the water. Note that only four of the insect’s feet are actually touching the water. The other two, the front pair, are poised to catch small insects which the strider will devour.

Another surface insect is the whirligig beetle. These beetles float on the water’s surface using air bubbles as floatation devices. Because they are half submerged in the water, they have developed two sets of eyes, one to see above the surface and another to see below the water. This way, they can keep an eye on both predators and prey. Whirligigs get their name by the habit of swimming round and round on the water surface.

We can watch dragonflies and damselflies floating in the air above the pond. Dragonflies hold their wings horizontal to their body when at rest, but the damselflies fold their wings together over their backs. The immature, or nymphs of both of these are aquatic. They have long hinged lower jaws that can shoot out and capture prey. These nymphs are very voracious and some of the larger ones actually feed on small minnows in the pond.

Diving Beetles live and hunt under the water. They occasionally come to the surface to get a bubble of air to breath. Their feet have been modified to act as oars and have long bristly hairs to increase surface area. The adults are attracted to lights at night and can sometimes be found struggling to move about on their “oars” on your porch in the morning.

Another water creature that is attracted to lights is the giant water bug. During the summer, these three to almost four inch true bugs sometimes are seen flying around street lights. They are so large that they look like bats. Their front legs are designed to grasp and hold prey (often tadpoles) while they sink their beaks into its body. The saliva of the bug is a poison and quickly kills the unfortunate victim. Don’t pick up one of these bugs unless you stay away from the beak. The bite can sting and the area will swell up. Fortunately, the reaction does not last more than a few minutes in most people.

Many other insect water creatures can also be found on or in the water. Next time you sit next to a quiet pond or lake, remember that there are some fascinating activities and life and death struggles going on at the surface as well as beneath the water. Nature is always busy!

