

Uncommon Invertebrates

Walking Stick by Marvin Barnes

Growing up in Virginia you may have seen a walking stick. They are rare and very unusual looking!

Scientific Name: The scientific order is Phasmatodea and there are approximately 3000 species.

Habitat: They resemble sticks or twigs and can be found in bushes or small trees. They are found primarily in the tropics and subtropics although several species exist in temperate climates. They feed on leaves and stems. *Diaperomera femorata* (found in Virginia) is particularly fond of oak and hazelnut trees.



They are usually nocturnal and are motionless during the day.

Size: Stick insect range in size from the half inch *Timena cristinae* of North America to the large 13-inch *Phobaeticus kirbyi* of Borneo.

Defense: They can play dead to avoid predators and can lose a limb to escape capture. The limb will regenerate. They can swipe at a predator with their spine-covered legs. One North American species, *Anismorpha buprestoides*, emits a putrid fluid.

Life cycle: They go through 3 stages of development: egg, nymph and adult. The female can lay up to 150 eggs, dropping them one by one to the ground. The eggs are camouflaged and resemble a brown seed. The eggs hatch in the spring and resemble a tiny adult. Their lifespan is one year but can be up to 3 years in the wild.

Interesting facts: In addition to the ability to regenerate a limb, the female can reproduce by herself, but will produce only females. Some species can squirt a fluid that temporarily blinds a potential predator.

Threats to Survival: Little is known about stick insects in the wild which makes it difficult to determine their status. The pet trade represents a threat to their survival along with the practice of framing them with butterflies in a display.

Photo credit: campinglovers.wordpress.com

References:

National Geographic

Sciencing.com

National Wildlife Federation

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