

Nature Week at Heritage Village - June 21

The CSI beetle

Have you watched enough CSI (Crime Scene Investigation) TV to know that beetles are a vital part of the cast?

I stumbled upon a rotting dead raccoon on our property, swarming with flies. As I looked closer (not too close because the coon was in a trap and it was disconcerting to me) I noticed mating pairs of beetles. Was this what Gil Grissom was always talking about? It turns out that, in fact, investigators do use the sequence of insect scavengers to determine the elapsed time since death of a carcass. The flies arrive first. Unfortunately they were too fast for me to catch, so I can't tell you which ones were present. Then the flesh-eating beetles arrive. The beetles, known as margined carrion beetles, arrive from 4 to 12 days after death. The adult beetles eat the carcass and the larvae (not yet fully grown) eat the fly maggots. They do the main job of cleaning up the decaying bounty.

“Mother nature is a very efficient machine. It is very good about recycling nutrients and that is where these insects come in. They have evolved to take care of these unpredictable resources of nature.” – Jeff Tomberlin, Co-director Forensic and Investigative Sciences, Texas A&M University.

To watch a fascinating, but gross, 3-minute movie about a real researcher who studies the timing of decomposition by insects go to this National Geographic site. (Viewer discretion advised)

<http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/news/141029-bugs-bodies-csi-vin>

Again I thank Lorie Axtell for the beetle photo. I did not tell her where the beetle came from so don't let her know.

:-)

Oiceoptoma noveboracense is recognized by the bright orange edge of its pronotum that is possibly a warning to predators. Carrion beetles can emit a strong irritating odor. The beetle is about 1/2 -inch long.



The larvae resemble a trilobite. Both the adult and larvae are flat and flexible for maneuvering around a corpse.

The larvae photo came from www.bugguide.net

The adults overwinter in their pupal case, emerge early and mate between April and June. They can be found actively recycling protein during the daylight hours in deciduous forests. All you need is a dead body.



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