

Arthropod Fact or Fiction



Scorpion



Bed bug



Love bugs



Tarantula

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I know it is the FCAT time of year and you are all busy with testing. After the FCAT marathon, I am sure you will be looking for some fun activity to help your students decompress. One fun activity is to explore arthropod facts and fiction. Arthropods are part of our everyday lives in Florida, and there are many urban myths surrounding them. The University of Florida recently had a booth at the Florida State Fair where children could earn a “UF Bugologist” sticker for answering the fact or fiction quiz. You can have your students do an internet search for answers to the following questions. This activity is great for teaching students how to find legitimate websites versus unreliable sites. You may suggest they look on sites that have the .edu or .gov suffix. One great resource is the featured creature site at UF, <http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu/>. See how well you do.

FACT or FICTION

1. Bedbugs are only a fairytale from a children’s rhyme.
2. Scorpions have the ability to glow.
3. Tarantulas are deadly to humans.
4. Lovebugs were engineered at the University of Florida.

ANSWERS

1. Bedbugs are only a fairytale from a children’s rhyme.
Nope. Bedbugs are real and are a true bug in the order Hemiptera. They are wingless and have piercing/sucking mouthparts that they use to feed on warm blooded animals including humans. Their feeding may leave the host with red itchy bumps but, lucky for us, bedbugs are not known to transmit disease. A tell-tale sign of a bedbug infestation is the black or dark red spotting seen on sheets and mattresses where the suckers have been feeding on their sleeping host. Yuck!
2. Scorpions have the ability to glow.
It’s true. Scorpions can glow. Scorpions have a protein coating on their cuticle that will fluoresce under ultraviolet light. Scientists are not sure why the scorpions have developed this talent. It is possible that it is a form of communication helping mates find each other under the moonlight. Sounds romantic, but scorpion mating is a pretty dangerous affair . . . well, at least to the male. Some scorpions glow bright green-blue or bright green-yellow. They can even fluoresce after death. How cool is that?

3. Tarantulas are deadly to humans.

Although venomous, tarantulas are not “deadly” to humans. Tarantulas feed by injecting an enzyme into their prey, usually birds, insects, or rodents, which dissolves the tissue so they can feed on the cellular fluid (a mouse slushy . . . *gross*). When injected into humans, this enzyme causes pain and swelling, but not death. In fact, there have been no substantiated reports of fatalities from tarantula bites.

4. Lovebugs were engineered at the University of Florida.

Not a lot of love is given to the lovebug. The lovebugs that are such a nuisance to motorists in Florida were documented as swarming in southern Louisiana in the 1920s, and were described in Texas in 1940. Yep, that was before genetic engineering was really possible. Since 1940, our dear lovebug has moved eastward throughout the Gulf States and into Georgia and South Carolina. These lovestruck bugs seem enamored with Florida. Actually, lovebugs have been collected in Escambia County, FL, since 1949! As far as their potential for feeding on mosquitoes, that is fiction as well. The lovebug larvae feed on decaying plant material and the adults feed on nectar. Sorry, FSU fans, but lovebugs were not developed by UF.

Florida Integrated Pest Management News.



2006

The Florida School Integrated Pest Management (IPM) statewide working group directed by Dr. Faith Oi met on February 1st in the University of Florida McGuire Center conference room. This group has been active at UF since 1996 and is working hard to improve children’s health throughout the state.

In attendance were representatives from UF/IFAS, USEPA, Florida Department of Agriculture, Florida Department of Health, Florida Department of Education, and the Florida Pest Management Association.

For the past two years, the Florida School IPM program has implemented a pilot program in Brevard County. This program was adapted from the Monroe Model for School IPM championed by Dr. Marc Lame. The success of the pilot program in such a large school district (89 schools) has allowed us to take the next step in the program which is statewide expansion. The Brevard County School IPM program has allowed us to form a model to make this progress. The pilot program participants in Brevard County will champion the training and education for other counties in the state.

The work in 2006 will build on the Brevard County foundation and will focus on pilot schools in Alachua, Brevard, Duval, Volusia, Manatee, and Sarasota Counties. This expansion will be partially funded by an EPA PESP grant.

Besides announcing the expansion phase of the program, it was also announced that Dr. Rebecca Baldwin will now co-direct the Florida School IPM program with Dr. Faith Oi. Rebecca graduated from UF in December 2005, and has been involved with school IPM since 2001.

The long-term goal of the Florida School IPM program is to reduce the risk of pests and unnecessary pesticide use for 1 million children in 5 years.

For more information about IPM in schools, or to view past issues of the Pest Press, please visit <http://schoolipm.ifas.ufl.edu>



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