

Catch, observe and identify your bugs

There are thousands upon thousands of insect species in the world. Some can be problematic, by eating our garden plants or trying to eat us! But many of the insects in our environment are 'beneficial bugs' and help to maintain the balance within our ecosystems. It is very helpful, and a lot of fun, observing insects and understanding their place in the world. During this activity you can hone your insect-catching skills, but be careful because some insects bite or sting. So, to avoid hurting them or yourself, don't pick them up with your bare hands.



Equipment

1. An insect net. You can make your own insect net prior to the day (www.amnh.org/learn/biodiversity_counts/read_select/ht/makenet.htm) or buy one from an entomology supply store or retail outlet.
2. Large-mouthed jar, for catching and observing slower moving insects and spiders.
3. Hand held magnifying glass, or just a good set of eyes.
4. Camera, for recording the event and your catch. You can look up information later, once you've released the animal.

Observe and catch

When trying to find flying insects, stand at least 1.5 – 2 metres away from the flowers you are observing. This will give you a larger viewing area. It is easier to detect the motion of flying insects than to spot the actual insect's size and shape. Avoid casting a shadow over the area, as this will scare the insect. When using a net, sweep from the side or below if possible, to reduce the chances of scaring the insect away. When you swing the net, follow through with your swing. Just like in tennis. This gives you more speed and, also, pushes the insect to the end of the net. With practice you can then 'flip' the end of the net closed (Fig 1) as you complete the sweep.



Once you have an insect in your net, it is easier to visualise your catch if you move into shade or use your body to cast a shadow over the net (Fig 2). When the insect is at the end of the net, close it off with your hand, just below the insect (Fig 2). This will then enable you to transfer the insect to your collection jar (Fig 2). If you are trying to catch an insect close to the ground, it may be easier to 'swat' the net over the top of the insect. Then, with the hoop of the net held to the ground, lift the end of the net so as to encourage the insect to move to the tip of the net. Insects will walk or fly up, not down.

Make sure you don't shake the insect in the jar or leave it in the sun. Once you have finished observing the insect, release it in a safe place.

