



# Incredible Insects

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Read on to find out about some of the most colorful, helpful, and downright cool insects around!



From up in the sky to under the Earth, insects are all around us—even in Antarctica! And whether you love insects or find them a bit icky, there's no denying that these critters are amazing. Get ready to take a totally awesome insect tour, from helpful bees to colorful mantids and more.

## All About Insects

Insects live almost everywhere on Earth. Scientists think that there are more than ten quintillion insects living on the planet. How many is that? Well, that's 10,000,000,000,000,000 insects. Put another way, that means that there are more than 200 million insects for every single person on Earth!

So, insects are everywhere—but what exactly are they? Insects are a type of animal called an arthropod. Arthropods have no skeletons inside their bodies. Instead, they have a strong covering on the outside of their bodies that helps protect them. This covering is called an exoskeleton. Arthropods also have segmented bodies. This means that their bodies are made up of different main parts, or units.

### FUN FACT

**Insects appeared on Earth before the dinosaurs.**



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Arthropods can live on land or in water. For example, centipedes, millipedes, lobsters, and crabs are all arthropods! So, what makes insects different from other arthropods? Insects' bodies usually have three segments. They also usually have six legs and at least one pair of wings.



A green praying mantid stands on the lookout for its next meal.

### Magnificent Mantises

Sure, insects can be strange looking. Some can even be a little scary! But many are downright beautiful! For example, check out praying mantids, sometimes called praying mantises. These insects are famous for their unusual appearance. They have a triangle-shaped head that sits on top of a long neck. Their bodies are long and slim, and so are their front legs. When praying mantids use their front legs, they hold them tucked into a position that looks a bit like they are praying. But don't be fooled—their strange bodies aren't just for show. Mantids are very good at hunting!

#### DID YOU KNOW?

**Spiders are arthropods, but they are not insects. Unlike insects, spiders have eight legs and no wings.**

Praying mantids can spot their prey from any direction thanks to their heads, which can turn 180 degrees. That means that a praying mantid can turn its head around to face behind it without moving its body. Then, the man-

tid uses its long front legs to snatch its meal.



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And what is it eating? Praying mantids often dine on other insects, spiders, lizards, or frogs. Some even eat small birds!

Praying mantids aren't just some of the most unusual insects. They are also some of the most beautiful. The orchid mantis, a specific type, or species, of praying mantid, has evolved over time to look like a beautiful flower called an orchid. Its appearance helps the mantis hide in plain sight. Then, it can avoid hungry animals and surprise its own prey!



A large brown wētāpunga crawls over a rock.

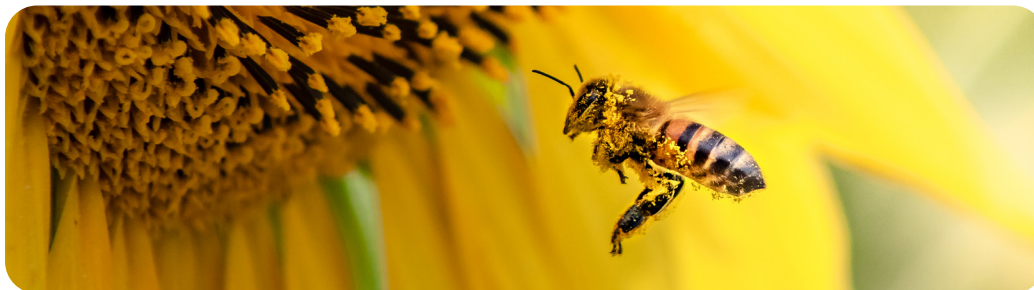
### Wonderful Wētāpunga

If you've never heard of a wētāpunga before, you're not alone. That's because the wētāpunga, or wētā for short, can only be found in New Zealand. There, more than 100 species of wētā roam the forest floors, where they eat plants, fungi, and other insects.

Wētā are related to the much more common cricket. However, they are different in a few ways. For one thing, wētā do not have wings, so they cannot fly. For another, many wētā are bigger than crickets—much bigger! In fact, wētā are some of the largest insects on Earth. Some can even grow to the size of small rodents. On top of that, some species of wētā have tusks. Male wētā use these curved tusks to battle each other. These insects are certainly unusual—but they are also super cool!



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*A honeybee covered in bright yellow pollen flies near a flower.*

### Busy Bees

Insects are awesome! They can look just like plants. They can reach amazing sizes. They can zip through the air, or tunnel through the Earth. But they are also awesome because they are very important to our planet. Many insects provide food for other animals. Others help us get rid of waste like rotting food or plants. And others help us grow the food and plants!

Bees are some of the most important animals around. They help keep many plants—including many of the ones we eat for food—growing and reproducing. This is because most bees are something known as pollinators. Pollinators are animals that take pollen from one plant and bring it to another. Pollen is a powder that plants make. Plants need this pollen to make fruits and seeds and to create new plants. Some plants rely on the wind to carry their pollen. However, most rely on pollinators!

Bees eat pollen. They also eat nectar, a sugary liquid created by plants. When bees land on a plant to eat, they often become covered in pollen. Then, when the bee flies away to another plant, it brings the pollen with it. This new plant uses the pollen to grow new plants. Bees—and many other insects—may be small, but the role they play on our planet is huge!