

Invertebrate Field Biology

POTENTIAL HAZARDS

THESE INSTRUCTIONS ARE NOT MEANT TO ALARM YOU. STATISTICALLY THE STREETS OF GAINESVILLE ARE MORE DANGEROUS TO YOUR LIFE AND HEALTH THAN THE AREAS WE WILL BE VISITING DURING THIS COURSE. THE MAJOR DIFFERENCE IS THAT MANY OF YOU ARE MORE ACCUSTOMED TO LIVING WITH THE TRADITIONAL RISKS OF THE STREETS THAN YOU ARE THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH NATURE. A LITTLE CAUTION WILL MAKE THIS A SAFE AND ENJOYABLE COURSE.

SNAKES:

It is unlikely that we will encounter any dangerous snakes. However, since they do occur in this area, look where you are stepping when in thick vegetation. Also, use caution when turning over logs. Avoid wearing “open” footwear such as sandals.

SPIDERS:

The only dangerous spider we are even remotely likely to encounter in the Gainesville area is the black widow. You will be shown a picture of a black widow. They are usually found in dark places. Just watch where you reach. Black widow bites are rarely fatal, but they can make you very sick.

SCORPIONS:

Scorpions are not uncommon in the Gainesville area. Fortunately, the species we have in Florida are not dangerous. Their sting is similar to that of a bee or a wasp. They are most common in dark places during the day and come out at night to hunt. Use care when collecting insects under loose bark on dead trees and logs.

BEEES, WASPS, AND STINGING ANTS:

Bees and wasps are potentially life-threatening to people who are hypersensitive to them. The symptoms in these people may begin within a few minutes after being stung. **It is important that anyone who knows that he/she is hypersensitive notify the instructor at the beginning of the course and remind him anytime stinging insects are likely to be encountered.** Unfortunately, there may be no previous warning of hypersensitivity. Therefore, **if you are stung and begin to feel dizzy, become nauseous, or develop a rapid heartbeat, notify the instructor immediately; it is better to err on the side of caution!!**

It is almost certain that sometime during the course someone will be stung by a fire ant. Most people are not allergic to fire ants, but some are. If you are stung by a fire ant, notify the instructor just as a matter of caution. The instructor will point out a fire ant mound at the earliest opportunity. Look for them and use caution. Many people are stung who inadvertently stand on the mounds without knowing they are there. If you get fire ants on you, brush them off as soon as possible. They must pinch the skin up prior to inserting the stinger in it, and often may be removed before they sting.

Poison ivy and poison oak:

The instructor will point out poison ivy and poison oak at the earliest possible time and will attempt to warn students of its presence. However, it is inevitable that at various times we will be in areas where it grows. Be constantly alert for it and avoid it when possible. If you suspect that you have come in contact with poison ivy, immediately upon returning from the field trip, wash exposed parts of the body

thoroughly with warm soapy water. As soon as you get home, change clothes and wash those which are possibly contaminated. Since the reaction to poison ivy is an allergic reaction to the toxins, some people react much more severely than others, and some do not react at all. Again caution is wise.

Do not attempt to catch wild animals! Rabies may make some wild animals less afraid of humans!

Do not open ethyl acetate insect killing jars in vehicles or under any conditions where there is poor ventilation! Ethyl acetate is the safest insect killing agent we know, but should still be used with caution!

WHAT ABOUT LYME DISEASE (LYME ARTHRITIS)?

Lyme (from Lyme, Connecticut) disease is a very serious disease that in about 50% of cases causes a characteristic rash which resembles a bull's eye and often a flu-like illness. These initial symptoms may be followed by a variety of other more severe symptoms if untreated. This disease is now epidemic in the northeastern U. S. and in Wisconsin and Minnesota. A few cases have been reported from Florida, but it is not as common here as it is farther north. Lyme disease is transmitted primarily by a small tick called the deer tick (Ixodes dammini) in the northern U. S. We do not have that species in Florida, but we do have a closely related species (Ixodes scapularis). We do not know whether the cases in Florida were from our species of tick or from northern ticks which were carried to Florida on migrating birds. Lyme disease appears to be extending its range southward along the coastal states, and is a possible threat. In addition to Ixodes ticks, we also have other species of ticks which will bite. Also, there have been a few cases of ehrlichiosis, another tick-transmitted disease, reported from Paynes Prairie. Tick bites are uncomfortable and should be avoided. **Upon getting home from field trips, examine yourself carefully for ticks paying special attention to areas where tick movement might be constricted (waists, armpits, etc.) and especially the hairline.** The instructor will give you instructions on the proper method of removing ticks which are already attached. Repellents are recommended particularly for the Lake Wauberg trips.

MOSQUITOES:

Depending on the weather, we might run into some hungry female mosquitoes. A small container of insect repellent might come in handy on such occasions. Long pants are also advisable for most field trips.

SUNBURN AND SKIN CANCER:

On most days we will try to get the field work done early before the sun gets up too high. However, it is possible to get significant UV exposure starting about 10:00 A.M. A hat and sunscreen are recommended for those days when we must be out during the late morning.

SEAT BELTS: It is state law that seat belts must be worn by all passengers riding in state vehicles. If seat belts are not worn, insurance coverage might be invalidated to some extent. **Please buckle up while in the state vans on field trips.**