

WATER STRIDERS

BY IAN

Water Striders are in the insect family, in the order of Hemiptera. They are the largest and most active insects that live on the surface of the water. Water Striders can be found on the surface of ponds, streams, and marshes.

Water Striders are usually brown or black, and have six legs. Their legs are as thin as hairs. The front two are short, made for grabbing prey. The middle pair is for pushing the Water Strider forward, and the rear legs are to steer. Striders can grow to just over a half of an inch. Water Striders have a sharp mouthpart, called a rostrum, to suck up body juices. The Water Striders are mostly found in large groups, and prefer the protection of overhanging trees and shade. Water Striders have very keen vision, and can move very fast on the water. Some Water Striders have wings. The wings are very short if they are present.

Water Striders come to the surface of the water in spring. In breeding season, (Spring) Striders communicate by sending ripples to each other on the surface of the water. The female Striders lay their eggs on plant stems or logs. Baby striders are called nymphs. The babies undergo five molts as nymphs, and then become adults in about a week. There may be as many as three broods per year.

The Water Strider eats:

Giant Willow Aphid, Fungus Gnat, Asian Tiger Mosquito, Ebony Jewelwing, Clouded Sulpher, Pennsylvania Firefly, Green Darner, and Eastern Dobsonfly.

The Water Strider's predators are:

Three lined Salamander, Southern Leopard Frog, Bullfrog, Black Crappie, Largemouth Bass, Golden Shiner, Creek Chub, Yellow Perch, and the Bluegill.

Water Striders can live for many months. The adult Water Striders can live overwinter, by crawling inside a plant stem when it gets very cold. From all the Water Striders that I have seen, it seems like the Water Striders are pretty good at surviving the winter.