

Colorado Insect of Interest

Ambush Bug

Scientific Name: *Phymata americana* Melin

Order: Hemiptera (True bugs and relatives)

Family: Reduviidae (Assassin bugs)



Figure 1. A mating pair of ambush bugs.



Figure 2. Ambush bug adult.

and males on average are considerably smaller than females.

Distribution in Colorado: This insect is very widespread in North America and likely can be found in almost any area of the state.

Life History and Habits: Ambush bugs are predators of other insects and occasionally spiders. They lie in wait on plants and hunt by ambush, capturing prey that comes within range and injecting paralyzing saliva through their piercing-sucking mouthparts. Ambush bugs may be forage among leaves but most commonly wait among flowers for passing flies, bees and wasps that visit (Figure 3). Ambush bugs can be most easily found by examining yellow flowers (e.g., goldenrod, rabbitbrush) and white flowers that bloom in mid to late summer.

Description and Distinctive Features: The ambush bug (Figures 1 and 2) is a chunky bodied insect of angular form that is almost always found among flowers. General coloration is quite variable ranging from cream colored to yellow-orange. They are also patterned with a dark abdominal band on the back and irregular blotch markings of light-brown to black. The front pair of legs is greatly modified to grasp and hold prey and a short beak projects from the front of the head. Size of adults (8-11 mm) is a bit smaller than a honey bee, a common prey, but is variable

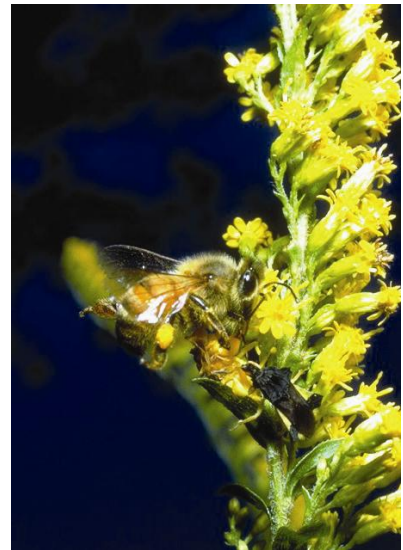


Figure 3. Ambush bug pair. The female is feeding on a honey bee. Photograph courtesy of Howard Ensign Evans.



Figure 4. Ambush bug egg mass glued to twig.



Figure 5. Ambush bug nymph.

The overwintering stage of ambush bugs are eggs, produced in masses that are glued to twigs (Figure 4). Eggs hatch in mid-late spring and the young nymphs initially feed on tiny midges and other small insects. They go through 5 immature stages before reaching the winged adult form and these early stages lack the markings of the winged adults (Figure 5).

Development time can be quite variable, requiring 5 weeks to over 3 months to complete. Cooler temperatures can affect development rate but the availability of suitable food is also very important. Temperatures also appear to affect the incidence of dark pigmentation with nymphs developing under cooler temperatures tending to become darker.