

Bug of the Month

by Jim Revell / May 2015

American Salmonfly

AMERICAN SALMONFLY	
Class:	Insecta
Order:	Plecoptera (Stoneflies)
Family:	Pteronarcyidae (Giant Stoneflies)
Genus:	Pteronarcys (Giant Stoneflies)
Species:	dorsata (American Salmonfly)



Our featured bug this month is from Master Gardener Teresa Bailess. She sent me this picture at the right of an American Stonefly she found on her deck where she freed it from an old spider web. Fortunately, Teresa got the picture when she did as she reported it played possum for a while and then disappeared. As it turns out, playing possum or feigning death is one of their defense mechanisms! They also emit noxious fluids from their leg joints to defend themselves against fish and other predators.

American Salmonflies are the largest Stoneflies found in North America and range throughout most of NA except southwest. They are in a classification that includes 9 Families and 578 Species in North America north of Mexico.

American Salmonflies are generally found on vegetation or rocks (hence the name “Stoneflies”) in the late Spring and Summer along large streams and rivers. Females release fertilized eggs into the water where the larvae hatch and live during early life stages. Interestingly, if the water contains chemicals, the larvae will die - - thus, if you see a good many adults around, it is a good indicator of a healthy ecosystem.



Adult Salmonflies do not feed, while the larvae feed on algae found on the rocky bottoms of streams and rivers. The adults range 1.22-1.89 inches in length, are nocturnal (at times attracted to light) and are gray or dark brown with obscure orange or yellow midlines (becoming wider and more distinct at the ends) on their thorax.

You can see these markings a little better in the close-up of Teresa’s picture to the left. They have two pair of wings that are smoky brown with blackish veins. They also have orange or yellow markings on their underside where the head, thorax and abdomen connect.

Research References / Resources:

<http://www.insectid.ento.vt.edu/insect-id/orders/plecoptera/plecoptera.html>

<http://www.insectidentification.org/insect-description.asp?identificataion=American-Salmonfly>

<http://bugguide.net/node/view/196105/data>

National Wildlife Federation’s *Field Guide to Insects and Spiders of North America*, Arthur V. Evans, 2008

Jim Revell is a Bedford Extension Master Gardener Volunteer.
Read more of his articles on the “Jims Bugs” page @ www.BedfordMasterGardeners.org