

# ASSASSIN BUGS

Nearly 3000 species of assassin bugs exist; however, scientists suspect that many more will be discovered. They vary in length from less than ¼ of an inch to 1½ inches. They come in many colors and shapes and most species have two pairs of wings. All assassin bugs have a powerful, curved beak that they use to pierce and suck out the tissues of their prey. A common species found in Florida is the wheel bug, which has a crest that looks like a cogwheel or chicken's comb. This is the only insect species in the United States with such a crest.

Assassin bugs feed by external digestion, meaning they push their beak into their victim's body and inject a toxic liquid that affects the nerves and liquefies the muscles and tissues of their insect prey. Once the inside of the prey is turned to liquid, the assassin bug uses its rostrum to suck out the liquefied tissues. This insect preys on numerous harmful insects such as caterpillars, stinkbugs, aphids, and beetles. However, they are general predators and may feed on each other and other beneficial insects. Since assassin bugs are themselves preyed upon by many enemies, they have developed a unique defense system, using their beak to squirt venom at their attacker as far as a foot away! Their saliva can cause severe irritation to human skin and induce a very painful "bite." For this reason, both nymphs and adults should be handled with care.



EGGS



NYMPH



ADULT

SIZE |—————|  
Up to 1½ inches



Wheel bug - notice the crest on its head

Information from UF featured creatures website at  
[http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu/trees/wheel\\_bug.htm](http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu/trees/wheel_bug.htm)  
<http://www.ivyhall.district96.k12.il.us/4th/kkhp/1insects/assassin.html>