

South Yuba River State Park Insects

*Ralph Cutter, California School of Fly Fishing,
Nevada City, CA ©2013*

Spring

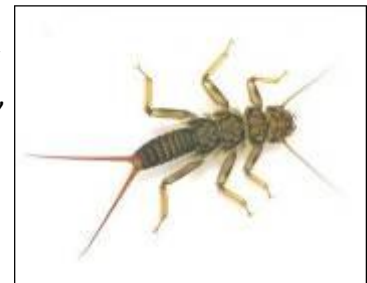
The first insects to emerge from the depths of winter in the South Yuba River canyon are the native bees. Native mason and bumblebees begin to forage just as the very first native plants like the manzanitas are beginning to blossom. Pipevine swallowtail butterflies are usually the first and most common insect to be noticed by hikers. They seek nectar from a variety of flowers including lupine and spring vetch, and then they lay their eggs on the succulent leaves of the Dutchman's pipe or pipevine. The swallowtail's beautiful black and orange spotted caterpillars hide on the underside of the pipevine, but their presence is announced by the small black poop they leave on top of the leaves.



Pipevine Swallowtail Butterfly

Early Summer

Checker spot, mourning cloak, and California sister butterflies are commonly seen early in the summer. The checker spot is frequently associated with monkey flowers, the California sister with oak trees, and the mourning cloak with willows. Golden stoneflies and mayflies such as the Pale Morning Dun emerge from the river in late spring through early summer and provide important food for trout and birds.



Golden Stonefly Nymph

Midsummer

The hills are alive with the electric buzz of male cicadas as they call to prospective mates in midsummer. The females respond to the 100-decibel buzz by a quick flick of their wings which produces an audible click. The other daytime noisemakers are the grasshoppers. Most grasshoppers call by rubbing their legs against their wings, but the band wing grasshoppers make a crisp crackle by snapping their hind wings together. Many Yuba River explorers have been startled by band wing grasshoppers as they leap from the ground at the hiker's feet, and create a buzz somewhat like that of a rattlesnake.

By midsummer, golden stoneflies have stopped emerging from the river, but have been replaced by the dainty little yellow stoneflies, which frequently sport a bright orange tip on their abdomen. Stoneflies are weak fliers and when threatened they drop deep into Yuba side foliage. If the foliage overhangs the river, the little yellow stoneflies may fall into the river and provide a quick meal for a hungry trout or smallmouth bass hiding in the shadows below. In

the evening, several varieties of moth-like caddisflies will hatch from the river to provide important food for bats and nighthawks.

Summer

During the hot summer months most native flowers have stopped blooming and the solitary pollinating bees have laid their eggs and died. Non-native plants such as star thistle and Himalayan blackberry continue to require intense pollination and the equally non-native honey bees are more than willing to oblige them. Invasive insects and invasive plants often share a symbiotic relationship.

Late Summer

The South Yuba River is a natural migration corridor for dragonflies. During late summer and well into the fall, spectacular flights of these acrobatic insects will commonly be seen. Dragonflies dine on just about any insect they can catch with the jagged, basket like teeth on the front of their legs. As any South Yuba picnicker can attest, yellow jacket populations peak in the fall. These pesky insects fill a valuable niche in the ecosystem by feeding on caterpillars and carcasses of dead animals.



Whitetail Dragonfly

Winter

The first rains of winter are heralded by the emergence of rain beetles. The black, olive-sized male beetles zip over the ground searching for a mate. The flightless females release a lemon-scented pheromone that lures their mate. Unfortunately, these potential suitors are also attracted to lights and their arrival is often announced by their thumping against home windows as they seek the lamps within.



Rain Beetle