

# Small Things Search



Across our time together, we've looked for birds flying in the fall and spring, searched for signs of animal life in winter, and watched the first leaves grow in the spring, but...have you ever wondered what's going on in the insect world? Let's find out more! To do a "small things search..."

1. Find a safe place outside where you can sit or lay down on the ground. It can be on a lawn near where you live, in a garden, along a trail – any natural space where you can look at the ground!
2. Imagine that you are opening a window "into" life on the ground. Use your hands to gently push back the grasses and look inside. You can use your nature journal as a size reference to estimate for how big your "window" could be!
3. What do you notice happening on the ground? Are there layers of plants? Do you see anything different on the top, middle, and bottom of the plants? Move slowly, watch carefully. Wait for small creatures to catch your eye as they move through your window! Use the magnifying lens on the top of your bug jar to take a close look! If you don't see anything after a few minutes, try moving to a new location, and/or look for a spot that might have some flowers in it – even clover, or dandelions!
4. Check out the Common Insect Guide to help you identify what you see! It's okay if you're not sure – you can even make up your own names for things!
5. Record your findings in your nature journal.

So why bother looking at the ground? Who cares about bugs? Though we might not spend a lot of time thinking about them, about half of all life on Earth is made up of insects and their relatives, some of which haven't yet been described by scientists. There are about 1 million different species of known insects, compared to about 6,000 different species of mammals, 9,000 species of birds, and about 32,000 species of fish known in the world. Insects make up one of the largest and most diverse groups of animal life on our planet.

Insects also impact our lives in ways we may not know! They pollinate the plants that grow to become the food we eat – flies, beetles, bees, wasps and even some butterflies and moths are pollinators! Both young and adult insects are very important food source for songbirds, almost all of whom feed their babies insects or spiders that eat insects. They help break down dead plants and animals return nutrients to the earth. Even though they're relatively small animals, they play a big role in the health of our plant and animal habitats!

