

# Nat Theo Club

## FIELD NOTES

ISSUE #82



### Velvet Ant

PARASITIC WASP

#### HABITAT

Velvet ants can be found all over the southern U.S. They prefer sunny yards, meadows, and forests.

#### NOT AN ANT

The velvet ant is not an ant but rather a wasp. The female has no wings and so it crawls on the ground like an ant. The male has wings and uses them to find a female on the ground. The wasp uses its bright red and black colors to warn others of its powerful sting. It drinks nectar from flowers.



### HAVE YOU EVER BEEN STUNG BY AN ANT, BEE, OR WASP?

Every summer, I look for a special kind of wasp. It's furry and very pretty! This summer, my son saw one on our driveway and called me outside to see it. The wasp was red and black and moved quickly through the yard. When my son tried to keep it from walking away, it made a little squeaking sound. That sound is called stridulation. It happens when the insect rubs parts of its body together to make a warning noise. Grasshoppers, crickets, and katydids also make sounds this way.

The wasp was hard to watch in the yard, so we gently put it in a jar for a short time to observe it. This wingless female wasp was looking for nectar to drink. I think the flowers in my garden are what brought her here!

While hunting on the ground, it will also search for bee and wasp nests in the ground to lay her eggs. When her eggs hatch, they will eat the other insect's babies insects in the nest. This is called parasitism.

People sometimes call the velvet ant a cow killer, but don't worry—she can't really kill a cow. She has a very painful sting, but she won't sting unless she feels like she's in danger. She's not mean, just careful.

I remember feeling the pain of a bee sting when I was a child. For many years, I feared bees and wasps because I never wanted to be stung again. As a biologist, I have learned that bees and wasps do not want to sting me. When I give them space to live, they will pollinate flowers and eat pests. I do not need to be afraid. 1 Corinthians 15:55 says, "Where O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" This verse refers to what Jesus did for us. He took the fear, or sting, of death away from us. He has replaced that fear with victory. He conquered death so that we can live with him forever.