



SCIENCE EXPLORATIONS

Classify Insects
Zoom in on True Bugs

Introduction

Dr. Randall “Toby” Schuh never met a bug he didn’t like. Growing up in rural Oregon, he and his father loved to collect beetles. Today, Toby works for the American Museum of Natural History as an entomologist, a professional scientist who studies insects and travels the world searching for rare six-legged creatures to classify.

Insects are a dazzling example of the diversity of life on Earth. Scientists have described about one million species of insects, but there are literally millions more out there. The estimated number of individual insects is mind-boggling. If you divided up the world’s total insect population, there would be 1.5 billion bugs per person! (Feeling itchy?)

Toby’s specialty is “true bugs.” Most people use the word “bug” to describe any tiny thing that runs across the floor. Scientists use “bug” only to describe a special group of insects that have piercing-and-sucking mouthparts, which drain fluids from plants, animals, and people.

Toby is in charge of a project called the Planetary Biodiversity Inventory or PBI. Its goals are to investigate the biodiversity of true bugs, to collect and describe new species, to learn about their host plants, and to begin to understand evolutionary relationships among bug species.

Hi, I’m Toby Schuh. I’m an entomologist and the Principal Investigator for the PBI. Join me and explore the amazing world of true bugs!