

Small Worlds Around Us
Lynn W. Watkins
By
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This Fearsome Creature Is A Tiger In The Water
With none of the grace and beauty of the real tiger, but always present in fresh water lakes and streams, crawls a ferocious little monster, barely an inch long, aptly named the "water tiger." It is the child of the diving beetle, a fierce, bloodthirsty little monster, just as fearsome to the other inhabitants of that underwater community as is the real tiger in its Asian jungle.

At most, this small water tiger has but a few weeks to live. In that short time it will fearlessly attack tadpoles, small fish, salamanders and every form of insect larvae it can find. It stalks its prey like a true carnivore, pounces on it and injects into the victim a potent digestive fluid that turns the victim's organs and tissues to a jelly, which is sucked out and satisfies the little tiger's appetite. Satisfied for but a short time, the water tiger, after a short rest, goes on the prowl again, after more victims.

If other prey is in short supply or too elusive to be easily captured, this miniature carnivore will become cannibalistic, attacking others of its own kind. If, as sometimes happens, there is an over-supply of water tigers in a small lake or pond, they may kill all the fish before the fish have a chance to grow; this occasionally happens in a fish hatchery, and the depredations can result in actual disaster. There are records where an over-abundance of water tigers have completely decimated a rearing pond where thousands of baby fish were being raised.

Transformation Time
When the last victim's body has been drained of its body fluids, and the larva, which is the water tiger, is propelled by a force it cannot resist, it crawls from the pond, and up onto the shore, where right by the water's edge, it builds about itself a crude cell of earth. This is the time for the transformation. Inside the earthen cell the water tiger's body undergoes a change. Three or four weeks later, the cell ruptures and out crawls a beetle with an oval body and a black overall color; it has become a diving beetle. It can fly now, but its preferred habitat is in the waters of the nearby pond.

During its water tiger days it was seldom seen. Now it becomes a conspicuous object, a creature of interest for folks who visit ponds and lakes and see, on the water's surface, the skating beetles. If a closer scrutiny is conducted, the dimpling of the surface film, where the breathing tubes of the diving beetle is projecting, can be discerned.

Breathing Tubes
On the rear of the diving beetle's body are the breathing tubes; while the body of the beetle hangs head downward, the tubes are bringing in air that the insect needs, for now it is dependent on oxygen. However, it hangs there but for short intervals; soon it will capture a few air bubbles and holding the bubbles under its wings it will dive to the pond bottom. The extra supply of air, in the form of bubbles, can prolong its underwater stay.

The diving beetle is a peculiar looking insect. Viewed at close range, and head on, the eyes seem very large, and located on the outer margin of the head. The rear legs are developed into swimming oars. The diving beetle is known to be distasteful to fish; it emits a disagreeable fluid that renders it safe from most underwater residents.

The eggs are laid in the stem of a water plant, and hatch into larva, cruel, bloodthirsty little monsters with all the carnivorous characteristics and habits of a true Asian tiger.

Research Shows Effects of Litter

CORVALLIS — The make-up of the forest litter underneath Douglas fir forests has an important effect on the growth of the trees.

A research project conducted by Dr. C. T. Youngberg, Oregon State University Agricultural Experiment Station, showed that different types of forest litter, when added to poorer soils in greenhouse tests, had different effects on the growth rate of seedling Douglas firs.

The OSU research project is an outgrowth of a soil and vegetation survey made in Western Oregon's Alesia Basin. Tests were made of the chemical and biological properties of forest litter in the area.

Youngberg pointed out that the studies could lead to a better understanding of soil capacity and productivity in Douglas fir stands.

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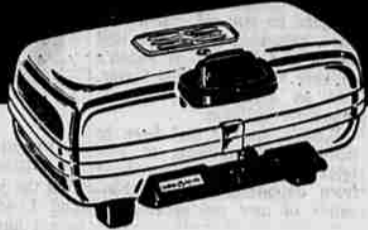
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