A PRAIRIE SO FULL OF PLANTS (but what about the bugs?)

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Abstract: The community of prairie enthusiasts, researchers, land managers, and land owners stretches from Texas to Canada, Ohio to Colorado. We work hard at rescuing, restoring, researching and planting prairies. Yet for many, "prairie" remains defined in terms of plants. But flowering plants and insects evolved together. By definition a functional prairie ecosystem must include insects.

My work as a prairie enthusiast/amateur ecologist turned student focuses on insects, their life cycles and prairie host plants. For some insects a specific host plant is required, for others any number of host plants will do. If you can identify the prairie plants then you already know the food and shelter of some prairie insects. An example of this is sawtooth sunflower, *Helianthus grosseserratus*. Associated with it is the sunflower tortoise beetle, *Physonota helianthi,* sometimes found eating other species of sunflowers as well. Anthropomorphically speaking the beetles are cute and the larvae are clever with their protective shield of excrement and shed skins situated on their urogomphi. Another example is the *Baptisia* weevil, *Apion rostrum*, always associated with *Baptisia* and seemingly ubiquitous when collecting seeds.

Given the appropriate tools and examples of others working with insects, the prairie community can incorporate insects into their perception of prairie. One of these tools is the association of insects with the prairie plants they use. This association could be a means to become more involved in the wonderful, spectacular world of prairie insects. Be inspired by them and delighted by them because new and exciting discoveries await you, the student of prairie entomology.