

Harbor Island, Naturally

SEPTEMBER 2017

A PERSONAL PROJECT OF JOHN ALBERT



MILKWEED ASSASSIN BUG

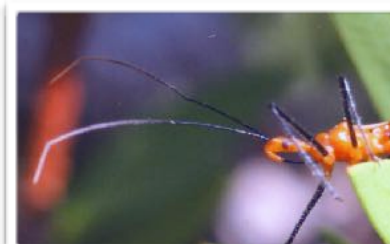
A WELCOME VISITOR

While photographing butterflies feeding on our bottlebrush bushes I glanced down and saw this orange and black bug. In all our years on the island we had never seen one of these. After several sessions with our insect books and internet searches it was identified as a Milkweed Assassin Bug (*Zelus longipipes*) This is truly a bug in that it has mouthparts that are modified for piercing and sucking. Note the hook in the photo on the right. This needle like hook is called a rostrum.

for prints contact
johnlalbert@gmail.com

The rostrum has hollow spikes called stylets.

Hunting by ambush during the day they hide in the foliage of shrubs awaiting their prey. The forearms are coated with a sticky fluid which traps the prey. Then the bug prepares its victim for extra-oral digestion by injecting enzymes that dissolve tissue. Then Assassin Bug uses its



stylets to suck up the dissolved tissue. The prey consists of most soft-bodied insects such as mosquitos, beetles, flies, as well as worms and caterpillars. They are very valuable to food crops such as corn. Once again a small creature often unseen by us is found to be very valuable and interesting.

These bugs do not bite humans unless they are handled or contacted accidentally. Then the bite can be painful.

I do not know of any special connection to milkweed.

Sources

<http://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/>