

University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well

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### A Census That Can Sting

Communications and Marketing

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
**MORRIS**

## A census that can sting

(June 27, 2023) Violet Musta '25, Forest Lake, is spending her summer in Morris counting bugs.

Musta, an environmental studies major, is working with Associate Professor of Biology PZ Myers to conduct an arthropod survey,

“I have selected three sites in Morris—the lawn near the Welcome Center, the native plant garden on the west side of the Science building, and an unmaintained lot behind Subway. I’m burying glass bottles, leaving them overnight, coming back the next day to collect whatever is in the bottle, and keeping an inventory of the different bugs from each location.”

Musta plans to use this research to determine what type of land management promotes the best insect biodiversity.

The project started when Musta heard that Myers had a roomful of spiders that he was raising. She thought that was “way cool,” and pretty soon, Myers had her feeding the baby spiders.

“They’re very cute! There’s hundreds of them in there.”

Eventually, Musta and Myers started talking about having her start a research project of her own.

“I wanted to do a biodiversity project, and Professor Myers is only breeding one kind of spider.” So Musta and Myers designed this project to survey arthropods in different locations.

In order to include flying insects in the survey, Musta also spends some time at each location photographing whatever happens to fly by. Musta notes that the thistles have been thriving this year, which creates one of the hazards of her research.

“So often, I’ll see a nice bold jumper spider and I’ll kneel down to take a photo and get thorns in my legs,” Musta states.

Musta hopes the research will provide hard data on what impact land use has on biodiversity.

“The plants that we grow determine what insects can live there, and insects are really the foundation of a local food chain. So I want data on which plants are better for insects.”

Musta hopes to present her research as part of the Undergraduate Research Symposium next spring.

