

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Halloween Creatures

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Halloween is approaching! In honor of this spooky day, let's enjoy a few traditionally "spooky" creatures that can be found in the Sax-Zim Bog!

Our first species usually isn't seen during the month of October, unless there are a couple of warm days! Milbert's Tortoiseshell is the final species of butterfly in our area yet to be profiled, that overwinters as an adult. The final brood of the year will be one of the first butterflies seen during the spring. While butterflies may not be spooky to everyone, Milbert's Tortoiseshell has an upperwing pattern that resembles a face, making them just a bit spookier than most butterfly species!

Next: Great Horned Owl! Owls, in history and through cultures, are often seen as bad omens. They have been described as evil creatures, harbingers of death, and thought of as associating with witches. Owls are not evil, nor do they have any suspicious associations. This unfortunate understanding of owls has led to historic persecution of these birds, which does continue today.

Great Horned Owls are impressive birds and often the top avian predator in their respective ecosystems, eating everything from small mice to larger mammals like skunks!

Third, let's consider another traditionally spooky creature. Spiders are the centerpiece of decorations around Halloween. Most of the time, these spiders are more similar to tarantulas than any of the over 520 species of spider found in Minnesota. The species photographed below is Marbled Orbweaver! Marbled Orbweaver is a spider that is widely variable in their color and patterns. Abdomen color varies from bright yellow with dark markings, to reddish-orange, even to gray.

And finally, a group of species that are not usually thought of during Halloween, but associate with skeletons quite regularly... Carrion Beetles! These robust, black and orange beetle's life cycles are tied directly to carcasses. They seek out mates and breed at carcasses, breakdown carcasses, and are important decomposers in the environment. To date, we have documented 8 different species of carrion beetle in the Sax-Zim Bog. As an added spooky bonus, these beetles are frequently covered in mites!

More information about the above species found with the photos below.

(Photos of Milbert's Tortoiseshell, Great Horned Owl, and Marbled Orbweaver by Sparky Stensaas; Round-necked Burying Beetle by Head Naturalist Clinton)



Milbert's Tortoiseshell is a handsome butterfly and a top favorite for butterfly watchers visiting the Sax-Zim Bog. This butterfly uses stinging nettle as its host plant and can vary widely in abundance from year to year. This species also has been documented flying in Wisconsin from early March to early November!



The "tiger of the woods" is a great nickname for Great Horned Owls. Their chest plumage features black and orange stripes and their formidable role as a top predator certainly matches their nickname sake. Great Horned Owls are one of the more difficult species of owl to see in the Sax-Zim Bog, though they can be very easy to hear during nesting season.



Orbweavers are a wonderful group of spiders. Some are quite obvious and large, while others might be more cryptic and difficult to find. Marbled Orbweavers are not uncommon in the Sax-Zim Bog and make rather large webs along trails, especially behind the Welcome Center. This is a fairly typical color form of this species, which can range from a robust red-orange, to gray, to nearly all white “eyeball” morph with a dark central spot.



Round-necked Burying Beetle is the most commonly observed species of carrion beetle in the Sax-Zim Bog. This species belongs to the genus *Nicrophorus*, which comes from Greek roots meaning "carrier of the dead." Some species of carrion beetle are attracted to UV lights and we have attracted as many as three species to lights during moth watching sessions at the Welcome Center!