

Fire Bugs

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In 1990, I initiated insect surveys for the Kentucky Field Office of The Nature Conservancy (KYFO) on several of the highest quality oak/pine barrens and sandstone/limestone glades left in the state. These plant communities are known to contain many state and globally rare plant species found only on these remnant natural areas. Therefore, it was thought that they might also contain remnant-requiring insects. Given that these plant communities are dominated by grasses and fire-dependent plant species, fire was an important part of their history and is used widely in their

current management and restoration. The KYFO was primarily interested in identifying those species restricted in occurrence to barrens and glade remnants which might also be sensitive to the short-term effects of prescribed burning. Our studies have focused on the three major herbivorous, grassland insect orders: the Homoptera (cicadas, leafhoppers, aphids and their relatives), the Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) and Orthoptera (grasshoppers, katydids, crickets, mantids and stick insects). The results of my survey work have identified a large number of potentially remnant-requiring insects (roughly 25 percent of the total), several of which are new to the state. On going survey work is continuing to identify new species and we are focusing our attention on an even broader assortment of insect taxa.

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