



Dear students and parents,

Welcome to WestMo Bug Camp! Thanks for your interest. We are so excited to be offering this camp. I'm Dr. Gabe McNett, an associate professor of Biology here at Westminster College, where I teach courses such as Biodiversity, Entomology, Evolution, Ornithology, and Animal Behavior. I love biology, insects, and sharing those passions with others. With just under 100,000 described insect species north of the Mexico border, there exists stunning diversity right in our own back yard. You don't need to travel to the tropics or some far away land to be amazed. All you need is a little curiosity and careful observation. The good thing about our back yard diversity: it is utterly fascinating, weird, and fun to learn about. I have studied biology my entire adult life and I still learn something new every time I'm outside.

I've been at Westminster for just over ten years. My research has spanned the areas of insect communication, evolutionary diversification, and bird behavior, all with a strong emphasis on natural history and getting outside to study species in their natural environments. Recently, my students and I began a survey of insect species at Prairie Garden Trust, a unique and wonderful natural garden near New Bloomfield, Missouri. WestMo Bug Camp, in part, represents an opportunity to share with others some of what we're learning.



Enjoying the company of a friendly ebony jewelwing damselfly (*Calopteryx maculata*)



My 'critter crew' at home.

Prior to landing in Missouri, however, I grew up in Ohio. Like most other kids at that time I spent nearly every summer day outside getting dirty, wading in creeks, and catching any critter I could find. After high school I attended The Ohio State University where I got a Bachelor's of Science in Zoology. After that I took a few years to travel the world doing field research. I was fortunate to study in places like the Canadian sub-arctic, Australia, and several corners of the United States, from the mountains of Arizona to the Adirondacks of New York. In 2002 I finished a Master's of Science at the University of California in San Diego, then I moved to Columbia, Missouri to work on my Ph.D. I studied fascinating little insects called treehoppers. After finishing my Ph.D., like so many others have done after experiencing mid-Missouri and Columbia, I stayed. I now live in Columbia with my wife, three kids, two cats, and a variety of invertebrate critters.

If you've already registered for WestMo Bug Camp, then we just want to welcome you! We look forward to learning with you. If you're just checking us out, please let us know if we can answer any questions. I hope you'll consider joining us for exploration, learning, and fun.

Hope to see you in the field!