

## Robber Flies: Insect Fighter Jets!

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### Red-Footed Cannibalfly (Robber Fly)



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One of my favorite insects is the Red-footed Cannibalfly (*Promachus rufipes*) which is a type of robber fly (family Asilidae). I share this insect-affection with my good friend, Ron Wilson (Natorp's; *In the Garden with Ron Wilson* (iHeartRadio)). Few carnivorous insects can match the amazing acrobatics and predatory proficiency of this and other robber flies in their pursuit of prey.

Male (left) and Female  
Red-Footed Cannibalflies



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Adults of all species are predators and they will attack a variety of insects; even "armed" prey and insects much larger than their own body size. One of the appropriately named Hanging Thief Robber Flies (*Diogmites* spp.) pictured below is chowing down on a yellowjacket. There are over a thousand species of robber flies in North America representing a wide range of forms and sizes.

## Hanging Thief Robber Fly *Diogmites* sp.



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The Red-Footed Cannibalfly is the largest sized species found in Ohio; the flies measure over 1 1/4" in length. The Cannibalfly makes a loud buzzing sound as it flies and alert observers may hear the buzz periodically punctuated by a very loud "snap" which means the fly has committed an insecticidal act. I heard the characteristic buzzing a few weeks ago and again earlier this week, but wasn't able to snap a shot of the huge predator; the picture in this report was taken a couple of years ago.

The entire body design of the Cannibalfly as well as other robber flies foretell their predatory lifestyle. Their long, narrow body aids in stream-lined flight; think fighter jet. Their stout thorax is packed with muscles to operate the wings and legs and the ball-like shape serves as a battering ram; think linebacker. Each of their long, dangling legs is tipped with two formidable tarsal claws that function like grappling hooks.

**Robber Fly**  
***Asilus sericeus***



In a smashing display of aerial acrobatics, the fly slams into its airborne quarry stupefying the hapless insect victim. The high-speed collision with this insect fighter jet produces a snapping sound that may be heard several feet away. The fly then grasps its dazed prey with its claws, and uses its piercing-sucking mouthparts to inject saliva containing neurotoxic and proteolytic enzymes. The enzymes paralyze the victim and digest the internal tissues. The fly then lands, and sips the life out of its victim.

## Bee-Like Robber Flies Mating *Laphria* sp.



Robber fly larvae are also predaceous and live in the soil, or in decaying wood and other organic matter, where they feed on insect larvae. Although robber fly adults and larvae rob insects of their lives and are generally considered beneficial, a few species test the limits of "beneficial." As their common name indicates Bee-Killer Robber Flies (*Mallophora* spp.) commonly attack bees including honeybees. Likewise, robber flies belonging to the genus *Laphria* will also attack bees. These robber flies mimic bees and are sometimes called Bee-Like Robber Flies.