



by Marilyn Pease, HCMG

## RECENT INSECT QUESTIONS

During last month's meeting, I was gifted with a beautiful example of one of our Hill Country native beetles. Upon doing some research, I discovered it was an ironclad beetle of the subfamily Zopherinae. It has the magnificent Latin name of *Zopherus nodulosus haldemani*. Not only is it beautiful (to me, anyway), it is also considered beneficial or at least benign. The name "ironclad" comes from its extremely hard exoskeleton, one of the hardest of any insect. In order to pin a specimen of this beetle for a collection, you will need a small drill like a Dremel to make a starter hole! It also has the habit of playing dead when captured, something I found out when I was photographing it. I thought it was dead until it started to wiggle.

The reason that it should be considered beneficial is that the ironclad beetle is a fungivore, meaning that it eats fungus and, indeed, can be found feeding on lichens on the bark of our live oaks. As a fungivore, this beetle plays a significant role in the support of the soil food web, something we are only recently beginning to understand. Rest assured, this beetle does not feed on live trees and prefers to make its home in rotting wood.



Also during the meeting, several people asked me about some small bright red insects seen in great quantities recently on cacti. I went outside to investigate my cacti and took some pictures of the red insects that I have. As near as I can figure, these are nymphs of our ubiquitous leaf-footed bugs. Without a specimen, it's hard to pinpoint, but I would bet that is what they might be. The leaf-footed bug eggs should be hatching now and go through a nymph stage such as this. Check out the photos and see if these are what you see on your plants.