

INSECT CHAMPIONS

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In this day and age, man is constantly involved in breaking records. Attempts to run or drive faster, jump higher, build larger and higher buildings etc. is forever continuing. In the insect world records are also set, some of which, when compared to those of man, make him look insignificant.

The **loudest noise** produced by any insect is that of the male cicada (Order Hemiptera; family Cicadidae) which can be detected more than 400 m away.

The **fastest wing beat** of any insect under natural conditions is 62,760 a minute by a tiny midge (Order Hymenoptera). The muscular contraction-expansion cycle $1/2,218$ th of a second, also represents the **fastest muscle movement** ever measured.

The **longest jumping insect** is the common flea (Order Siphonaptera). In 1910 a specimen performed a jump of 330 mm, which is 330 times its own body length. To equal that man would have to jump a distance of approximately 10 street blocks.

The **fastest flying speed** for any insect, amongst which counts the Dragon fly (Order Odonata), is 39 km/h, rising to a maximum of 58 km/h.

The **most economical 'fuel consumption'** is found in bees (Order Hymenoptera). A relay of these insects (with maximum speed 18 km/h) would use only 4,5 liters nectar in

covering 6,5 million km at an average speed of 11 km/h.

The **most productive bee hive** recorded was in California in 1974 where 183,2 kg of wild honey was extracted from a single hive.

The **most numerous** of all insects are the springtails (Order Collembola) which have a very wide geographical range. It has been determined that the top 290 mm of soil in one acre of grassland contains 230 million springtails (*i.e.* more than 45 000 per square metre). Surely an extreme case of overcrowding!

The **greatest swarm of locusts** (Order Orthoptera) ever recorded covered approximately 5 180 km² and was observed crossing the Red Sea in 1889. Such a swarm was estimated to have contained about 250 000 million individuals weighing about 500 000 tons and capable of consuming 28 times as much food per day as the population of New York City.

Queen termites (Order Isoptera) attain the **greatest age** in insects and have been known to lay eggs for up to 50 years.

Amongst the **strongest insects** are dung beetles (Order Coleoptera) and ants (Order Hymenoptera) who are capable of lifting objects 682-times their own body weight — to match that man would have to lift 54 tons.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

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