

Minute Pirate Bug

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The minute pirate bug, *Orius tristicolor* (Fig. 1), is probably the smallest of the common predatory insects found in many fields and orchards. Adult pirate bugs are about 1/8 inch long, flattened, black and white, occasionally brownish. In the later nymph stages, they are similar in shape to the adult. Both adults and nymphs are very active and may be found on all aerial parts of plants.



Fig. 1. Minute pirate bug resting on edge of leaf. By H. Riedl.

Life Cycle

Like most true bugs, the minute pirate bug spends the winter as an adult in sheltered spots, such as trash, under tree bark, boards in and around houses and buildings. Minute pirate bugs usually appear quite early in the season. Eggs are white or clear (translucent) and are inserted into plant tissue. They reach only about .25 millimeters or 1/75 inch in diameter. This species completes 3 to 4 generations per year in the areas where it has been studied.

Beneficial Effects

Both the adult and immature or nymphal stages of the minute pirate bug attack aphids, mites, and immature stages of other small insects. They are particularly effective in controlling destructive thrips species. It often frequents the undersides of leaves and thus escapes the treatment of crops with insecticides fairly well. Some evidence indicates that they will occasionally probe the plant with their beak, but apparently this has no harmful effects on the plant.