

ALERT

TOP STORY

Arizona Insect Festival to include tribute to Tucson's 'King of Sting'

Henry Brean

Sep 28, 2023

Bug enthusiasts will pay tribute to Tucson's own "King of Sting" during the annual Arizona Insect Festival this Sunday at the University of Arizona.

This year's festival is dedicated to long-time local entomologist Justin O. Schmidt, who gained international fame for creating his own ranking system to describe the stings of more than 100 different kinds of ants, bees and wasps from around the world.



Longtime Tucson entomologist Justin O. Schmidt holds a dead tarantula hawk in a photo from 2007.

Schmidt, who died on Feb. 18, will be honored during a symposium at Sunday's Arizona Insect Festival at the University of Arizona.

Arizona Daily Star 2007

The inventor of the Schmidt sting pain index **died in Tucson on Feb. 18** at the age of 75.

Five of his friends and fellow researchers will give talks on his work and the insects that fascinated him during a symposium from 12:50 to 3 p.m. Oct. 1 in room S107 at the UA's Environment and Natural Resources 2 Building on Sixth St. just east of Park Ave.

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ENR2 will also play host to the rest of the kid-friendly festival, which runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and features live insect exhibits, educational displays, vendor booths, hands-on activities and surprises.

Both the festival and the symposium are free of charge, as is parking at the adjacent Sixth Street Garage and elsewhere on campus.

Appropriately enough, this year's theme insect is the tarantula hawk, one of only three bugs to score a 4, the most painful ranking, on Schmidt's index.

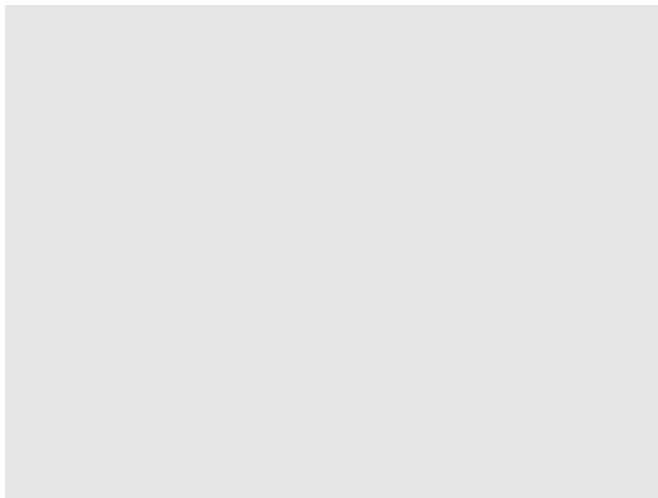
He described the experience as blinding, electric and mercifully short-lived, "like

someone dropping a hair dryer in your bubble bath.”

“Stung by a tarantula hawk? The advice I give in speaking engagements is to lie down and scream,” Schmidt wrote in his definitive 2016 book “The Sting of the Wild.”

Such colorful descriptions attracted attention well outside the scientific community, resulting in more than 200 interviews by major media outlets, an appearance on “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” and a passing mention in Marvel’s “Ant-Man” movie.

Without fail, he used his notoriety to advocate for insect understanding and protection, despite the pain his research subjects sometimes caused him.



Hundreds of Madagascar hissing cockroaches live in enclosures at Kathleen Walker's lab at the University of Arizona. The University of Arizona's Insect Festival returns this Sunday at the ENR2 Building at 1064 E. Lowell St., from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Mamta Papat, Arizona Daily Star

Schmidt spent 25 years studying honey bees at the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Carl Hayden Bee Research Center in Tucson, then launched the nonprofit Southwestern Biological Institute while working as an adjunct scientist at the U of A.

He said he’d lost count of how many times he was bitten or stung during a lifetime of handling bugs, but his ballpark guess was at 1,500 times by about 150 different species.

The symposium in his honor will include lectures with names like “The King of Sting: off-duty” and “Life is like a box of bugs: a sampler of projects with Justin Schmidt.”

For those who cannot attend in person, the event will be shown **via Zoom**. The

password for the videoconference is InsectFest.

The Arizona Insect Festival is organized by **the Department of Entomology** in the UA's College of Agriculture, Life and Environmental Sciences.



The Arizona Insect Festival returns after a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be 25 booths set up on Sunday, Oct. 9, at the ENR2 building, 1064 E. Lowell Street, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event is free and open to the public. Video by: Mamta Popat, Arizona Daily Star

Mamta Popat

Contact reporter Henry Brean at hbrean@tucson.com. On Twitter: [@RefriedBrean](https://twitter.com/RefriedBrean)

If you go

The University of Arizona's Department of Entomology will host the annual Arizona Insect Festival from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 1 at the U of A's Environment and Natural Resources 2 Building at 1064 E. Lowell St., just off Sixth Street east of Park Avenue.

Admission and parking on campus are free.

The event will feature live bugs, interactive exhibits, educational displays and a symposium from 12:50 to 3 p.m. in honor of the late Tucson entomologist Justin O. Schmidt.

The symposium will also be shown over Zoom at **arizona.zoom.us/j/89089790775**, password: InsectFest.

By Henry Brean

Reporter
