

Insects in culture

Insects in ancient texts

Insects appear widely in ancient religious, literary, and scientific texts, reflecting their ecological importance and symbolic meanings across civilisations.

1. Vedic and Indian Texts

Insect	Referred as	Significance
Honeybee	Madhu-makshika in Rigveda and Charaka Samhita	Source of honey (Madhu) – symbolic of immortality and medicine; honey used in rituals and Ayurveda
Termites	Vranas or Kulashaka in Manusmriti and Atharvaveda	Described in context of structural damage to wood and dwellings
Ants	Pipilika in Panini's grammar and folklore	Known for discipline and industriousness; used in proverbs
Locusts/grasshoppers	Shalabha in Mahabharata, Arthashastra and yogic texts	Represented as destructive swarms; warnings for famine
Fireflies	Jyotirmakhi in folklore and poetry	Used metaphorically for fleeting light or inspiration

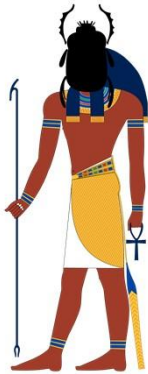
2. Insects in the Bible and Abrahamic Texts

Insect	Reference	Interpretation
Locusts	Book of Exodus – Plague of Locusts	Symbol of divine punishment and destruction
Bees	Book of Judges – “Land of milk and honey”	Represent prosperity, divine providence
Flies	Plague of flies in Exodus	Symbol of pestilence
Moths	Psalms – “Like a moth, he consumes”	Emblem of decay and fragility

3. Egyptian Texts

- Scarab beetles: Symbol of rebirth, sun, and the god Khepri; Scarab amulets were used in mummification rituals
- Bees: Symbol of lower Egypt, governance, and order; honey used in offerings and medicine

INSECTS IN RELIGION AND CULTURE



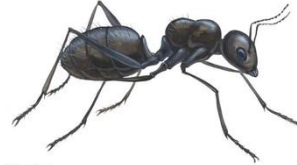
Scarabs were sacred to the Ancient Egyptians



Buddhist symbol of good Rebirth



Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies (Hebrew)



Go to the ant thy sluggard, consider her ways and be wise" is from the King James version of the Old Testament (Prov. 6:6–8)

4. Chinese and East Asian Texts

- Crickets and katydids: Referred in Book of Songs (Shijing), crickets symbolise seasons and patience. They were kept as pets or fortune omens in imperial China.
- Silkworms are mentioned in early Chinese literature and Silk Road texts; central to mythology around the discovery of silk.

Insect based festivals in folk culture

a. Japanese festival of wasps

Wasps are considered a source of protein and have been eaten in mountainous regions for centuries.

- The Japanese Festival of Wasps refers to the ***Hachimitsu Matsuri*** held in certain rural parts of Japan like Gifu Prefecture, where wasp hunting and eating—especially of giant hornets (*Vespa mandarinia*) and paper wasps (*Polistes* spp.)—is a long-standing tradition.
- "*Hebo*" is the local name for paper wasps (*Polistes*). The *Hebo* Festival is held annually in Kushiara, a village in Ena City, Gifu and celebrates the harvest of wasp larvae, which are considered a delicacy. Villagers compete in wasp nest size, and the largest nest wins prizes.
- Traditional wasp rice (*hebo gohan*) is cooked and shared.

b. Shiitumu Festival in West Africa

It is the West African Insect Harvest Celebration especially among the Dagomba people of northern Ghana, that marks the harvest and communal consumption of edible insects, particularly termites (locally called shiitumu). These termites are high in protein and traditionally collected, roasted, or sun-dried as a food source. They are considered a delicacy in many African cultures. The festival reaffirms **traditional knowledge, seasonal food cycles, and sustainable insect harvesting.**

c. Niangtaser Festival – Meghalaya's Edible Insect Celebration

The Niangtaser Festival is celebrated in Meghalaya, among the Biate tribal community in the Dima Hasao district (Assam-Meghalaya border region). Niangtaser" refers to a species of edible red ant or their larvae, which are highly prized in Biate cuisine. The ants are typically harvested from nests built in shrubs or small trees. The larvae and ants are used to make a spicy chutney, often called "Niangtaser chutney."

d. The Fireflies Festival

In Maharashtra, it is an annual event that takes place just before the monsoon season, typically between May and June. It's a natural spectacle where fireflies, or "kajwas" as they are known in Marathi, light up forests, fields, and valleys. The festival is held at various locations across Maharashtra, including Purushwadi, Rajmachi, Bhandardara, and Kothaligad

(For others refer under Insects as food)

Entomotourism

Entomotourism is a form of specialized nature tourism focused on insects, their habitats, and their role in ecosystems, culture, cuisine, and education. It combines entomology (study of insects) with ecotourism, offering experiences that range from insect-watching safaris to insect-based cuisine trails and cultural festivals involving insects.

- We have many tours for butterfly watching. Wildlife sanctuaries like Bannerghatta National Park, butterfly park in Karnataka, and Zoos like Nehru Zoological Park have butterfly parks to attract tourists. Singapore Changi Airport has a Butterfly Garden.
- Firefly treks and trails are conducted in the state of Maharashtra.
- Insect Culinary trips expose tourists to insects as food across the globe.
- Magnetic Termite Mounds Tours are conducted in Litchfield National Park in Northern Australia to visit the hundreds of 6-foot mounds of Magnetic Termites, so named because the construction of their mounds aligns with the compass.

Insect based movies

Insects are abundant and are remarkably visible around us. They fascinate and horrify humanity. While they have been interwoven in culture since ancient times since the advent of films, insects have featured prominently in movies. Insect-based movies have covered a wide range of themes involving nature, evolution, anxieties of the humans. These films can be found in various genres, including horror, science fiction, and even family-friendly animated films.

- The earliest known insect-themed movie is "The Acrobatic Fly" (1910) directed by F. Percy Smith. It is a short film featuring a real housefly performing "acrobatic" stunts like juggling objects, achieved by carefully positioning the insect and filming with early macro techniques. It was one of the first examples of entomological filmmaking and remains a milestone in combining science with visual storytelling.
- "Them!" (1954) a sci-horror movie and "The Fly" (1958) were also sci-horrors. The fly was a cult classic that it was remade in 1986.

Nevertheless, there was gross misinterpretation of insects and extrapolation of information in these movies to attract the moviegoers.

MOVIES BASED ON INSECTS

The collage features the following movie posters:

- Bee Movie**: A yellow bee character with large eyes.
- Maya the Bee**: A group of cartoon bees in a field.
- The Tuxedo**: A man in a tuxedo with a large insect on his head.
- Sikandar**: A large red and black insect flying over a city.
- A Bug's Life**: A group of colorful insects on a green leaf.
- The Ant Bully**: A young boy sitting in a field of ants.
- Killer Bees**: A large, aggressive bee flying over a field.
- The Fly**: A man and a woman looking at a glowing light source.
- Joe's Apartment**: A man in a suit standing in a room filled with insects.

It is an annual free event held every spring since 1984 and is the first university-sponsored event of its kind in the U.S., typically taking place on a Saturday in February. Organized by the Entomology Graduate Students Association at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the festival blends education with entertainment. It showcases films, shorts, and TV episodes that highlight insect biology and celebrate the role of insects in popular culture.

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Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Patchwork_IIFF_Tshirt.png#filelinks

Insects in books

Insects have fascinated authors for centuries, and they appear in myth, folklore, science, poetry, fiction, and children's literature. Some books that feature insects as characters and symbols, and as subjects are given below. The list is not exhaustive

Book	Author	Insect	Description
Metamorphosis (1915)	Franz Kafka	Beetle-like creature	Gregor Samsa wakes up transformed into an insect; a powerful metaphor for alienation.
James and the Giant Peach (1961)	Roald Dahl	Multiple insects	A boy befriends talking insects—Centipede, Earthworm, Ladybug, etc.—on a magical journey.
Charlotte's Web (1952)	E. B. White	Spider (not insect)	Though technically an arachnid, Charlotte is often included in insect-related reading for kids.
The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969)	Eric Carle	Caterpillar (butterfly)	Beloved children's book teaching metamorphosis and days of the week.
Du Iz Tak?	Carson Ellis	Many	Insects speak their own made-up language in a whimsical world.
Beetle Boy	M.G. Leonard	Beetles	A boy befriends intelligent beetles in this adventure trilogy
The Ant and the Grasshopper	Aesop		Moral tale using insect characters to teach lessons about work and preparation