



Department of Biology

Heather Axen and Violet Roskens in Singapore

Heather Axen and Violet Roskens, went to Singapore this summer to collect wasps of the family Vespidae which includes the stinging paper-making wasps as part of an NSF-funded project (to Biology faculty Kurt Pickett and Bryan Ballif). Southeast Asia is hypothesized to be the site of the origin of sociality in the family Vespidae. In order to capture data from all representatives of this evolutionary unit we successfully collected members of all three social wasp subfamilies and the solitary subfamily that is their closest relative. We collected specimens for DNA and morphological studies and trophallactic fluid (which are wasp regurgitations transferred from one wasp to another for food sharing purposes) for behavioral studies. Singapore offers an abundance of culinary and traffic adventures. Our typical collecting day involved driving for a couple of hours through New York City-style traffic and illogically arranged one-way streets (on the left), wondering around mangroves, rainforests, or public parks, and collecting every wasp and wasp nest we came across. Singapore wasps are much larger than anything we have in Vermont so collecting nests required more protection than a bee suit. Despite collecting hundreds of wasps and several nests we each only got stung once!

