

spp.) and dogwood (*Cornus* spp.); as long as the host is known, the species can be readily identified in the field.

At this point you may be wondering why the species name refers to the plant genus *Spiraea* rather than *Physocarpus*. In fact, ninebark was already known as the host plant when Say (1826) described the species, but the name *spiraeae* was given because at the time ninebark was included in the genus *Spiraea* (Wheeler & Hoebeke 1979).

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Megacyllene decora (amorpha borer). Mississippi Co., Missouri.

collecting focuses almost exclusively on these insects, since my other favorite groups (jewel beetles and longhorned beetles) are, for the most part, restricted in their adult activity to the spring and summer months and long gone by the time fall rolls around. There are, however, a few longhorned beetles that buck the normal spring/summer rule for the family, namely species in the genus *Megacyllene*. The most commonly encountered of these is *Megacyllene robiniae* (locust borer), and anyone who has examined goldenrod (genus *Solidago*) and its profuse blooms during the fall has likely encountered this familiar beetle with its narrow, alternating, zig-zag bands of black and yellow.³ I have seen this species many times and in many places; however, I still always enjoy seeing it anew in the field each fall—perhaps as some sort of confirmation that the fall season truly has arrived.

Another species in the genus that is far less commonly encountered, however, is *Megacyllene decora* (amorpha borer). I have encountered this stunningly beautiful species in only a handful of locations in Missouri (MacRae 1994)—all where stands of its larval host plant, *Amorpha fruticosa* (false indigo), grow in association with goldenrod and snakeroot (genus *Eupatorium*). These sites are primarily in the big river valleys of the state (Missouri and Mississippi Rivers), although I have found at least one site in the prairies of west central Missouri. Earlier this summer while traveling through the southeastern lowlands of



A Classic Fall 'Bycid

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In eastern North America, autumn is the beginning of the end for most insect groups. Preparations for winter are either complete or well underway—eggs have been laid, nests have been provisioned, and larvae (hopefully) have eaten well enough to endure the long, cold months that lie ahead. But for a few insects, fall is just a beginning. Triggered by cooler temperatures, shortened daylength, and invigorating rains, adults of these insects burst forth under crisp, blue skies to feed amongst a plethora of fall flowers or prey upon other late season insects before the advancing cold, finally, forces a close to the season. As a beetle man, my favorite fall insects must be the “fall tigers” (i.e., tiger beetles) that come out in force and [zip across barren sand dunes](#) or bask on [exposed rocks of dolomite glades](#). My fall insect

² Originally posted September 12, 2012 at *Beetles in the Bush* (<http://beetlesinthebush.wordpress.com>). Photos by the author.

³ If you see a “locust borer” in the spring, it is actually the closely related [Megacyllene caryae](#) (hickory borer), while further west in the Great Plains during fall you might find [Megacyllene comanchei](#).



The species is distinguished from related species in the eastern U.S. by its wide black and yellow bands.

Missouri, I noticed a stand of native *Hibiscus* growing within a wet ditch along the edge of a small city park and stopped by to look for the even rarer *Hibiscus*-associated jewel beetle, *Agrilus concinnus* (MacRae & Nelson 2003, MacRae 2006). While I did not find that species, I did notice fairly good numbers of *A. fruticosa* plants along the edge of the ditch as well and young goldenrod plants that had not yet reached flowering stage. At that moment I knew I had a good potential site to look for *M. decora* and made a mental note to stop at the site again later in the season when goldenrod began to bloom.

Last week I returned to the site to find not only goldenrod in its earliest stages of bloom, but an even greater number of *Eupatorium serotinum* plants already in bloom. I wanted to photograph the beetle, of course, but what I was really hoping for was to find and photograph the beetle on the stems of its *Amorpha* host plant (I have only seen this once before—all other sightings of the beetle have been on flowers of goldenrod and snakeroot). I approached each *Amorpha* clump cautiously and searched the stems carefully, also keeping an eye on the goldenrod and snakeroot blooms as I moved from one clump to the next. After searching a number of clumps, I finally found the adult shown in these photos. Fortunately, I knew from previous experience in collecting these beetles that they are not a particularly wary species (few aposematically- or mimetically-colored beetle are), so I was able to get a number of good photographs before I (stupidly) bumped the beetle with the diffuser over my flash heads and disturbed it.



"Blue sky" settings: ISO160–200, 1/200 sec, f/14–16, camera pointed near (not at) the sun.



Normal "normal" full-flash settings: ISO100, 1/250 sec, f/16.

It would be another half hour before I would find a second beetle, and in total on the day I saw only three (all on *Eupatorium*). This and the very early stage of the goldenrod blooms suggests to me that the beetles were just beginning to emerge—over the next few weeks I am sure they will become more numerous at the site, so I may yet have an opportunity to photograph one on its larval host plant when I pass by the area in a couple of weeks.

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