

## Nighttime Gems

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One night this December, I noticed two dazzling gems feeding upon the fruit of my backyard Turk's cap. One, with its crimson head and patchwork of black, white and yellow on its abdomen, was a Turk's cap red bug. The other, a smartly-dressed spot-sided coreid, wore nestled cream and brown triangles on its head and wing tops, which ended in beige. A leaf-shaped chocolate drop adorned its back, and six spotted legs grasped the leaves. Several times since, I've seen both bugs on the Turk's cap at night and during daytime.

Both the Turk's cap red bug (*Dysdercus concinnus*), also called pale red bug, and the spot-sided coreid (*Hypselorotus punctiventris*) join the 4,500 or so North American species in the order Hemiptera, for "true bugs." Distinguishing these insects are their beaks, or sucking mouthparts, with which many drink juices from plants. Also, between a true bug's two wing sets, its back forms a triangle-like shield, the scutellum. Additionally, with its incomplete metamorphosis, this insect undergoes neither a larval nor a pupal stage. Rather, bugs hatch as nymphs, or miniature versions of adults, which grow and molt, shedding their exoskeletons, in stages called instars.



Turk's cap red bugs (*Dysdercus concinnus*)

Members of the Turk's cap red bug's genus, *Dysdercus*, are known as cotton stainer bugs, since some genus members puncture and drink from young cotton bolls, leaving brownish stains and causing most bolls to drop to the ground. The Turk's cap red bug, however, feeds on mallows—flowering plants in the hibiscus, or mallow, family— particularly the Turk's cap, a resilient shrub which appears to suffer no grave damage from its occupant. Those concerned about their Turk's cap, though, can shake the bugs off into soapy bucket water.

The Turk's cap red bug, and other cotton stainer bugs, lay clusters of yellowish eggs in sand or decaying plants. The bugs undergo five instars, the first four lasting from four to five days, the last, double that time. They spend the first stage underground.

The Turk's cap red bug occurs from coastal South Texas to Northeast South America. It is in the family Pyrrhocoridae, which derives from the Greek "pyrrho" for "fire," so named, presumably, for its fiery colors, and "coris" for "bug". The bug's vividness may allow it to mimic a creature that is particularly unappetizing to birds.



The spot-sided coreid occupies the family Coreidae, for leaf-footed bugs, which have leaf-like hind legs. Family members have large, four-segmented antenna and big compound eyes, as well as simple eyes. They suck on plant juices and, when distressed, emit a foul odor.

This bug, found in Arizona and the southeastern U.S. down to Central America, feeds on mallows like Turk's cap, as well as other shrubs. It flies well, opening its wings to reveal a red patch on its dorsal abdomen.

I welcome these stunning and benign bugs to my yard, and I am grateful to have my ever-burgeoning Turk's cap, a plant native to this area, for them to happily feed upon.

Spot-sided coreid (*Hypselorotus punctiventris*)