

September 4, 2023

My wife Peggy and I camped with our 2.5 year old son over Labor Day weekend at Schafer State Park on the Olympic Peninsula, which sits on a small bend of the East Fork Satsop River. Peggy is about 12 weeks pregnant, and this trip was intended to be an easy getaway for the weekend. We had a lot of fun camping, and our son enjoyed riding his bike around the campground and playing in the river. On Sunday night, we made a plan to wake up early Monday morning around 6 am to begin our drive to Seattle to get ahead of holiday traffic.

We woke up just after 6 and the campground was absolutely silent. It appeared that no one else was awake. At about 6:15 am, Peggy walked over to the fresh water spigot by the campground bathrooms to fill up our personal water bottles. After she returned, we did our final preparations and left the campground to head back to Seattle.

We arrived home and unloaded our gear from the van. Peggy started getting ready to take Harry to the Children's Museum at Seattle Center. Having drunk much of her water on the ride home, she refilled her water bottle at our kitchen sink. As it filled to the top, she noticed a spider floating at the surface of the water, dead. She mentioned it to me, and I watched her fish it out with a spoon. I asked her if she was going to dump the whole bottle, and she asked "why bother, it's just a spider, right?" I shrugged back. We figured the spider got washed into the bottle at the faucet, but no big deal.

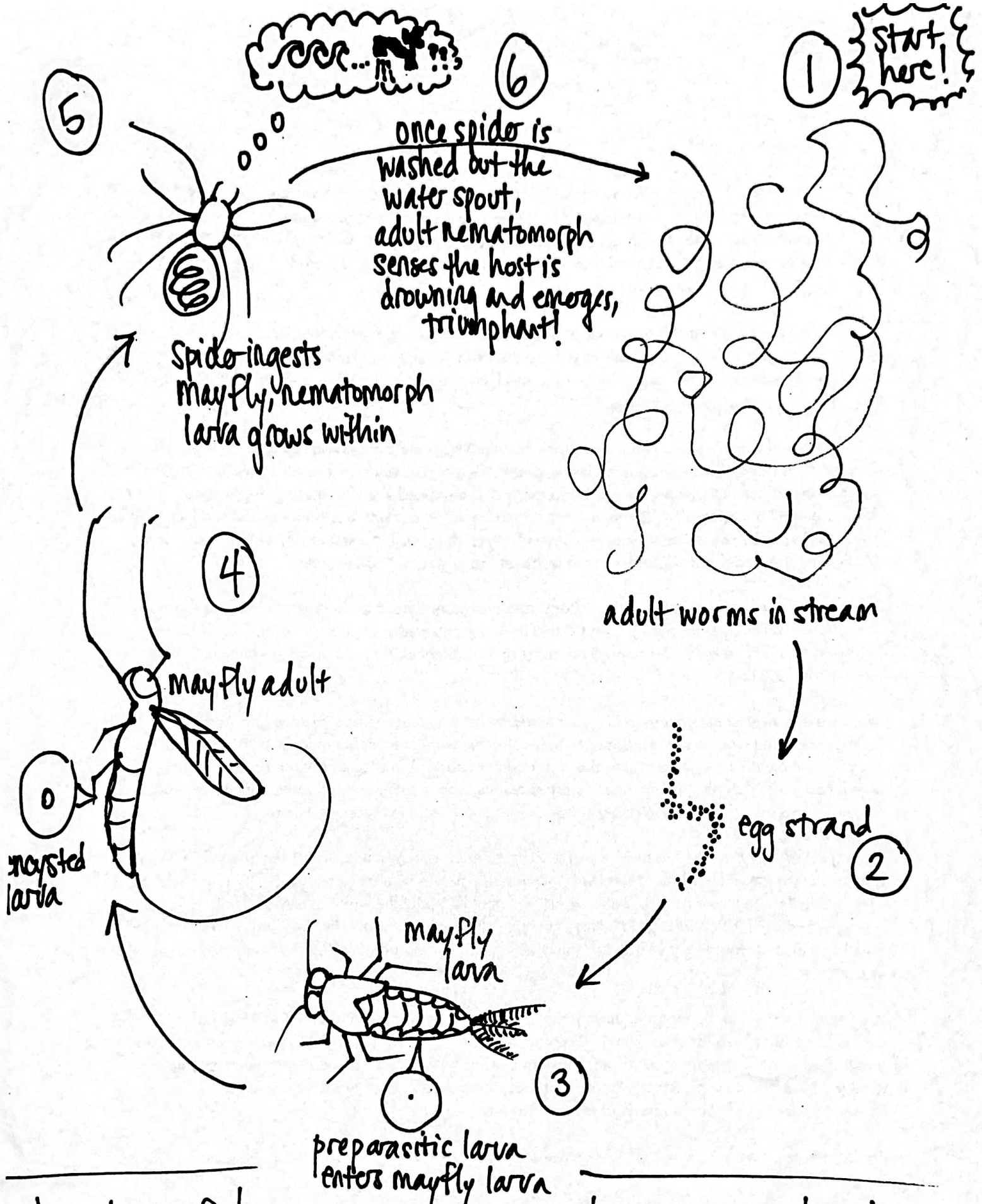
She paused, and then peered into the water bottle one more time, and that's when she saw the worm. She started exclaiming repeatedly "what is that?!" The worm was at the bottom of the water bottle wriggling around in a knot. She poured out most of the water and then dumped the remaining volume into a bowl, isolating it.

We were of course very concerned in a very fundamental way that she had ingested eggs or "something" that would take up residence in her, but we were extra concerned given her pregnancy. I took several pictures, began scouring the web for information about "spider worm parasites" and she sent a note to her physician. Of course I started reading about some dramatic incidents, for example certain worms infecting the respiratory system, emerging from one's esophagus, etc.

Having never encountered this before and reading so many different accounts, I realized I wasn't really able to determine what exactly it was I was looking at. I didn't want to scare Peggy either, so I had the idea to see if there might be a parasite expert who could identify the worm at UW. I searched for "[parasite professor UW](#)" and found a link to your faculty page and soon after fired off my email for an ID thinking maybe it would help Peggy's physician prescribe some kind of anti-parasitic medication as fast as possible!

Your email identifying the worm as a nematomorph and the accompanying information about its lifecycle was a major relief for both of us. I came to understand why this worm in all probability didn't pose any threat given it basically emerged from its host into captivity, wasn't consumed, and given its lifecycle wouldn't have had any opportunity to mate or reproduce. And after our excitement settled I was very happy to donate it to your lab for your students to enjoy.

But from now on we will absolutely think twice about any insect or spider we find in the water.



the story of how our nematode came to be in Peggy's water bottle.