Insect Power Misconceptions: Moving the Classic Bess Beetle Sled-Pull, a Discrepant Event Activity, Beyond “Gee Whiz”

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Popular features such as “Ripley’s Believe It or Not” (www.ripleys.com) are fond of anecdotes about what great powers insects supposedly have relative to our own, including superior speed and strength. Among those species that have been measured, an Australian tiger beetle holds the record for speed relative to its size at 171 body lengths per second (Kamoun and Hogenhout 1996). Though its absolute forward progress is an unremarkable 5.57 mph, if we convert the beetle’s speed to human terms, a six-foot-tall man would be moving at about 720 mph, close to breaking the sound barrier at sea level (Merritt 1999). For relative strength, the rhinoceros beetle...
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