

FARM FRIDAY FUN

WITH ARIZONA AGRICULTURE

THE BUG CHICKS



Want a career investigating creepy crawlies? Entomology may just be the path for you! The Bug Chicks, Kristie Reddick and Jessica Honaker, are just about the coolest insect and spider experts around! Not only are they excellent researchers and scientists, but these bug loving ladies are great educators as well! You can check out their fun videos and other educational resources online at thebugchicks.com.

The Bug Chicks are an inspiration to science lovers and agriculturalists out there looking to start their own business. Kristie Reddick and Jessica Honaker made a career out of what they love and you can too! Just see what they had to say about their shared career path and the advice they have for those interested in pursuing entomology:

What is your Business/Company? Our company is called The Bug Chicks. We (Kristie Reddick and Jessica Honaker) are co-owners/operators and we teach people about the amazing world of insects, spiders and their relatives through a variety of different platforms.

What does a normal workday look like for you? We are a project-based business, so we don't have a traditional 9-5 schedule. We have a lot of meetings (Zoom/phone) with project collaborators, and we crank through the planning and implementation of various projects as they are happening. Sci-comm is super important for us, so there's a lot of teaching that happens too (on a variety of platforms). Consulting work, writing and video production are a big part of what we do. The day goes till we can

reach a stopping point, then we pick back up the next day. Sometimes it makes for super long days, but we love it! When we are traveling for work (like to the Peruvian Amazon or a conference) the days never end. You never know which bugs you'll see when you're in a new place!!

What is your favorite part of your career? Interacting with young people is definitely at the top of the list. We've had the privilege to work with young people of all ages, around the world, and it is always a joy. We love inspiring curiosity about the natural world while helping people feel empowered in their lives. And we, in turn, learn a lot from these people as well!

What got you interested in your career? Both of us grew up either being afraid of or apathetic about bugs, and for both of us it was phenomenal teachers that changed our minds about them.



When did you know this is what you wanted to do?

Kristie: There was a moment when I was in Kenya for a study abroad program after I had changed my career after college from acting to biology. I saw my first camel spider (which I went on to study for my Masters). It scream-hissed at me in a threat display and I was like, "Oh- this is what everyone's been talking about. Love at first sight." My world started to revolve around arthropods from that day forward.

Jess: I was originally on track to do physical therapy, but I had an invertebrate class with a fantastic professor (hi Dr. Joy!). For me, I knew I wanted to study bugs after a parasitology course with the same professor got me thinking about just how much these little animals affect our world. I couldn't stop thinking about it. So I took the leap, changed my major and went on to study bugs in grad school (integrated pest management focus). When I met Kristie, she asked me to go with her to Kenya to film the outreach portion of her thesis. When I watched her engage with students there, I loved how their curiosity was sparked and everyone was just SO EXCITED to do science. It was easy to get swept into the excitement. I wanted to be a part of that, and here I am!

What is your education level? Both of us have a Masters of Entomology from Texas A&M University. Kristie has a BFA in Theatre (with an almost-second BS in Environmental Bio), and Jess has a BS in Biology.

What class in H.S or College has helped you the most in your Career?

Kristie: For me, it was growing up on stage, acting and dancing. I think, if you like it and are good at it, it can make you a bit fearless and unconcerned about embarrassing yourself. Because of theater, I feel like I can walk into almost any teaching situation and handle the space no matter how big or small and engage with an audience. You'd be amazed what a transferable skill it is in lots of different careers. Scientists need to be able to communicate and need to show enthusiasm for their work.

Jess: I'm going to say that it was that undergrad Invertebrate Zoology class. If I hadn't taken that class, I wouldn't have known how much I actually love bugs, and how much of an impact they have on the world. My life would be very different right now.

Was there a class in school that you didn't like and thought you would never use but you find has been important in your career?

Kristie: Hmm. Math and Chemistry (which I wish I knew a bit more about because insects have incredible chemical defenses.) But confidence in math skills would have been helpful in my research. I feel much more confident than I used to. Get a good tutor who speaks your language and pushes you. Get a tutor early on- before you have trouble with comprehension. #LifeSkills

Jess: I don't think there was a class I actively didn't like (whether or not I did well in those classes is another story). In my case it was kind of the opposite - I loved classes like art and music but didn't think I'd be able to incorporate them into a real career. Turns out I was wrong. I'm able to bring a lot of that "art" into our work as The Bug Chicks.

Are there any certifications that you had to work for? We had to get an upper-level degree in Entomology in order to be most effective in what we wanted to do (teaching with bigger organizations), but there are no required certifications we need to maintain. That said, we do participate in professional development, continuing education and skills training so that we keep up with ever-changing information and technology, and to make sure that we are able to stay on top of our game.

What advice would you have for those interested in your career path?

Jess: Don't be discouraged if you want to do more than one "conflicting" thing. Be creative - there are ways to integrate everything you love into your life. As Kristie always says-- if you really, really love something, and want to do it for your career, and someone tells you no or tries to discourage you... then you are asking the wrong person.