Tachinid Fly

The jewel-like colors and beauty of this orange tachinid fly might be easily overlooked in a field where more familiar and iconic species, including Monarch butterflies are feeding and laying eggs. Like many insects, the tachinid feeds on the nectar of flowering plants. But it young feed differently, hatching from eggs laid on an adult moth, butterflies, squash or stinkbugs. The fly's larvae enter its hosts as hungry infant parasites. While engaged in its life cycle, this tachinid and many similar species provide valuable services; accounting in the United States for an estimated 4.5 billion dollars in pest control. In this process, as in most natural ecosystems, nature has provided a way to control competing populations, and to keep a balance.

Tachinids as a group are varied; some have a short tongue (proboscis); some are long-tongued. Thus they must have an assortment of suitable non-crop plants to provide their foods and accommodation. In turn their distinctive physical forms can provide protection against an array of unwanted or invasive crop pests. Increasing the diversity of the flower populations near cultivated crop fields increases the resilience of natural enemies, allowing them to intercept a number of pests that may enter and threaten agroecosysytems. Thus, efforts to support native biodiversity and wild parcels in areas adjacent to croplands can be seen as economically significant, reducing the need for toxic pesticides, and providing flexibility, while protecting against the inevitable attacks of new pests.

Trichopoda *pennipes*