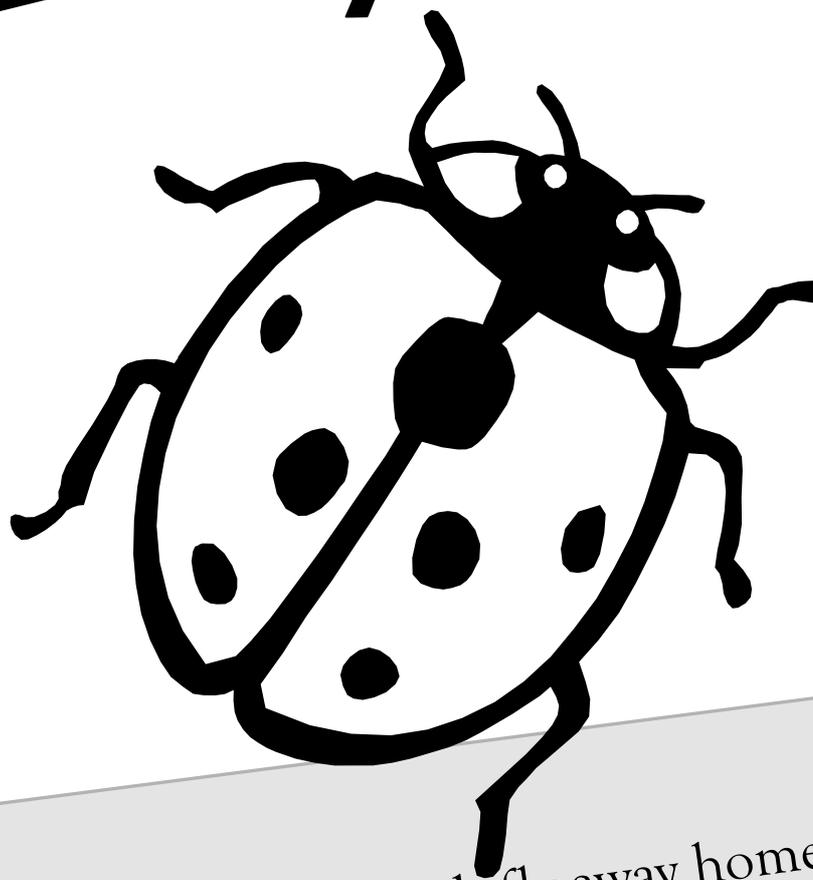


Community Heritage Initiative

Ladybirds



Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home,
Your house is on fire, your children are gone,
All but one, and her name is Anne,
And she crept under the frying pan.





Ladybirds are named after the Virgin Mary, also known as 'Our Lady', often shown wearing a red cloak in old paintings. The seven spots represent the Virgin's seven joys and seven sorrows.



There are over 3000 different ladybird species throughout the world. Forty-seven are found in Britain, but only 25 of these are likely to be recognised as ladybirds.



The thirteen-spot ladybird was last sighted in the 1950s. It is now thought to be extinct.



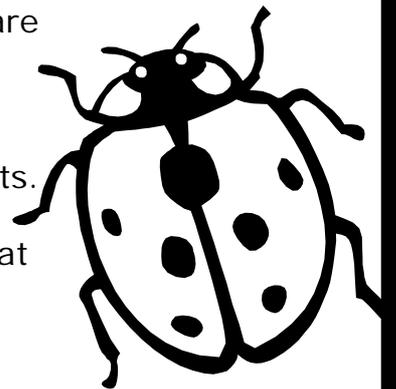
A ladybird can eat up to 100 greenfly a day.



In 1986, Wildlife Watch, a club for junior environmentalists, ran a ladybird spot survey. Three quarters of a million records were collected, and a new variety of two-spot ladybird was discovered.

Striking Features

Ladybirds have a round body that looks like half a pea, are less than 12 mm long, have small heads, short, clubbed antennae, and short legs that are only visible when they are walking. They come in a variety of colours, often bright red or yellow, with black, red, white or yellow spots. The bright colours give the ladybirds some protection because bright colours warn predators, such as birds, that they taste unpleasant. Ladybird larvae are also brightly coloured, usually grey or blue, with orange or yellow markings.

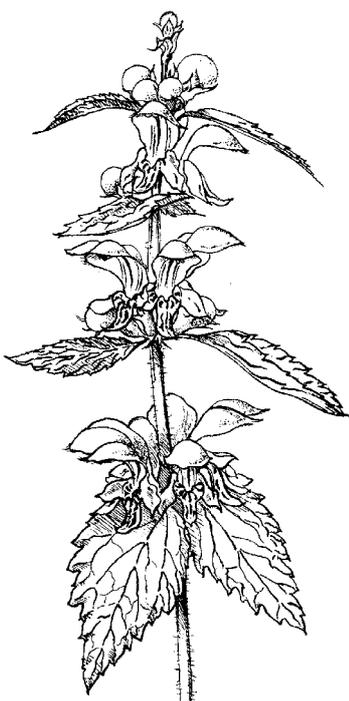


Living Arrangements

Ladybirds can be found in almost every type of terrestrial habitat in Britain. Some species, such as the seven-spot, occur wherever plants with aphids are found, at almost any time of year. Even in winter, they can be found hibernating in hollow plant stems.

All British ladybirds hibernate as adults. In autumn, they select a site, and remain fairly inactive until spring. Different ladybird species hibernate in different places. Two-spot ladybirds can be found hibernating in houses during winter.

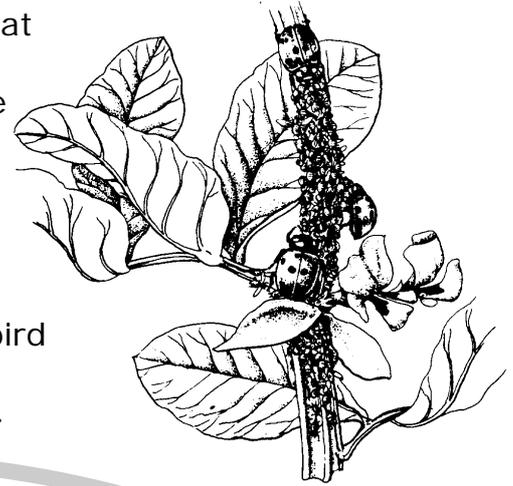
The thirteen-spot, orange, eyed and striped ladybirds have never been recorded hibernating in Britain. Where they hibernate is a mystery yet to be solved. Hibernation sites can vary from buildings, tree trunks, hollow plant stems and bushes, to fence posts in dry conditions.



At the Dinner Table

Most ladybirds are carnivorous, and prefer to eat aphids. This makes them particularly popular with gardeners, as aphids are a real pest in the garden. They also eat scale insects, another species often harmful to plants, which further reinforces the ladybirds' reputation as a gardener's best friend!

There are some exceptions. The 24-spot ladybird is vegetarian, with a particular fondness for potatoes, and the orange ladybird eats mildew.



Ladybird Life-cycle

Ladybirds pass through four stages of growth - egg, larva, pupa and adult. The whole cycle takes one year. In late spring, adults mate, then females lay eggs in batches of 20 to 50.

Adult ladybirds emerge in mid to late summer, and feed for several weeks before finding an overwintering site. Communal hibernation is common - it means it is very easy to find a mate in the spring.

After about four days, larvae hatch from the eggs. Once the larvae emerge, they have ravenous appetites and feed on aphids. They moult their skin three times as they grow.

After about 3 weeks, they moult a final time to become pupae. The pupa is attached to a leaf by its tail and, after about 2 weeks, an adult ladybird emerges.

The seven-spot is a migratory species. Large numbers fly in from the continent each spring, in search of aphid-infested plants to breed on.

If you handle a ladybird, it may release small drops of yellow liquid from its leg joints. This is actually blood, which can stain your hand and smell quite pungent. This is an example of defensive 'reflex bleeding', intended to ward off predators. On rare occasions a ladybird may bite, and can give a sharp nip.

The Name Game

Ladybirds are often named after the number of spots they have. The most common ladybird is the seven-spot ladybird. Its scientific name is *Coccinella 7-punctata*, or *septumpunctata*. *Septum* means seven, and *punctata* means spots. The 22-spot ladybird's scientific name is *Psyllobora 22-punctata* or *vigintiduopunctata*.

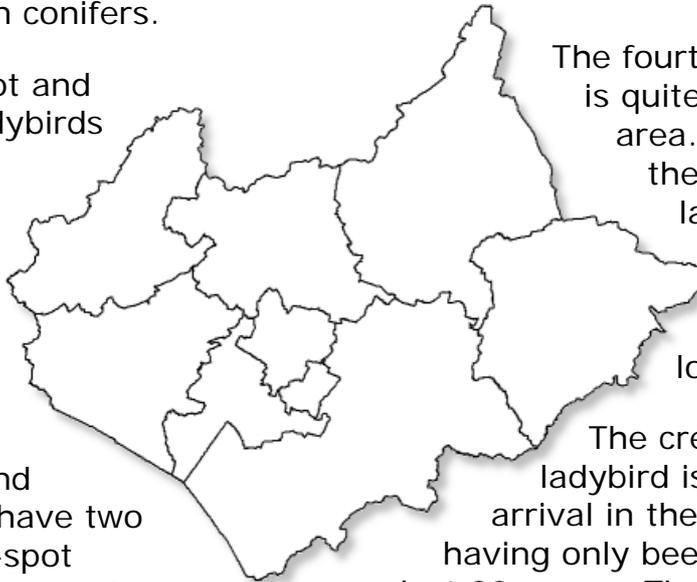
Ladybirds in Leicestershire and Rutland

The eyed ladybird is the largest species found in Leicestershire and Rutland. It is rarely found in gardens as it feeds on aphids on conifers, but is abundant in conifer plantations. The name comes from the yellow edge around each black spot, making them look like eyes. The larch ladybird is also common on conifers.

Both the 22-spot and sixteen-spot ladybirds can be found in grassland, but not usually in gardens.

The two-spot ladybird has many different colour forms, and doesn't always have two spots. The ten-spot ladybird is a close relation, but can be told apart by the colour of its legs. The ten-spot has orange legs and the two-spot has black legs. They also prefer different habitats. Ten-spots prefer to live in trees, whilst two-spots live closer to the ground.

The water ladybird is a wetland species, found only in areas of reed mace and reeds.



The fourteen-spot ladybird is quite common in the area. It is often called the clown face ladybird, as its markings are sometimes joined up and look like a clown.

The cream streaked ladybird is a fairly new arrival in the two counties, having only been recorded in the last 20 years. The orange ladybird has also made a recent appearance.

The hieroglyphic ladybird is found on heathland, where there is a lot of heather. This species is becoming rare in the area due to loss of habitat and scarcity of heather. The kidney spot, heather, and pine ladybirds are similarly rare in the two counties.

On the Way?

The harlequin ladybird is a carnivorous species from Asia. It was introduced to the USA and Europe, where its big appetite is causing problems for native species. It was first spotted in the UK in September 2004, and is now widespread in some areas. A UK-wide survey is underway to track the spread of this species. Visit www.harlequin-survey.org for more information.

Recording Ladybirds

You can collect ladybirds from trees and shrubs using a beating tray or an umbrella. Hold the umbrella upside down beneath a branch, and give the branch couple of sharp taps to dislodge any ladybirds.

For a copy of a ladybird recording pack, or to send in records of ladybirds, contact the **Community Heritage Initiative**, Holly Hayes Environment and Heritage Resources Centre, Leicestershire County Council, 216 Birstall Road, Birstall, Leicestershire, LE4 4DG, phone **0116 267 1377**, email chi@leics.gov.uk, or visit www.leics.gov.uk/celebrating_wildlife.