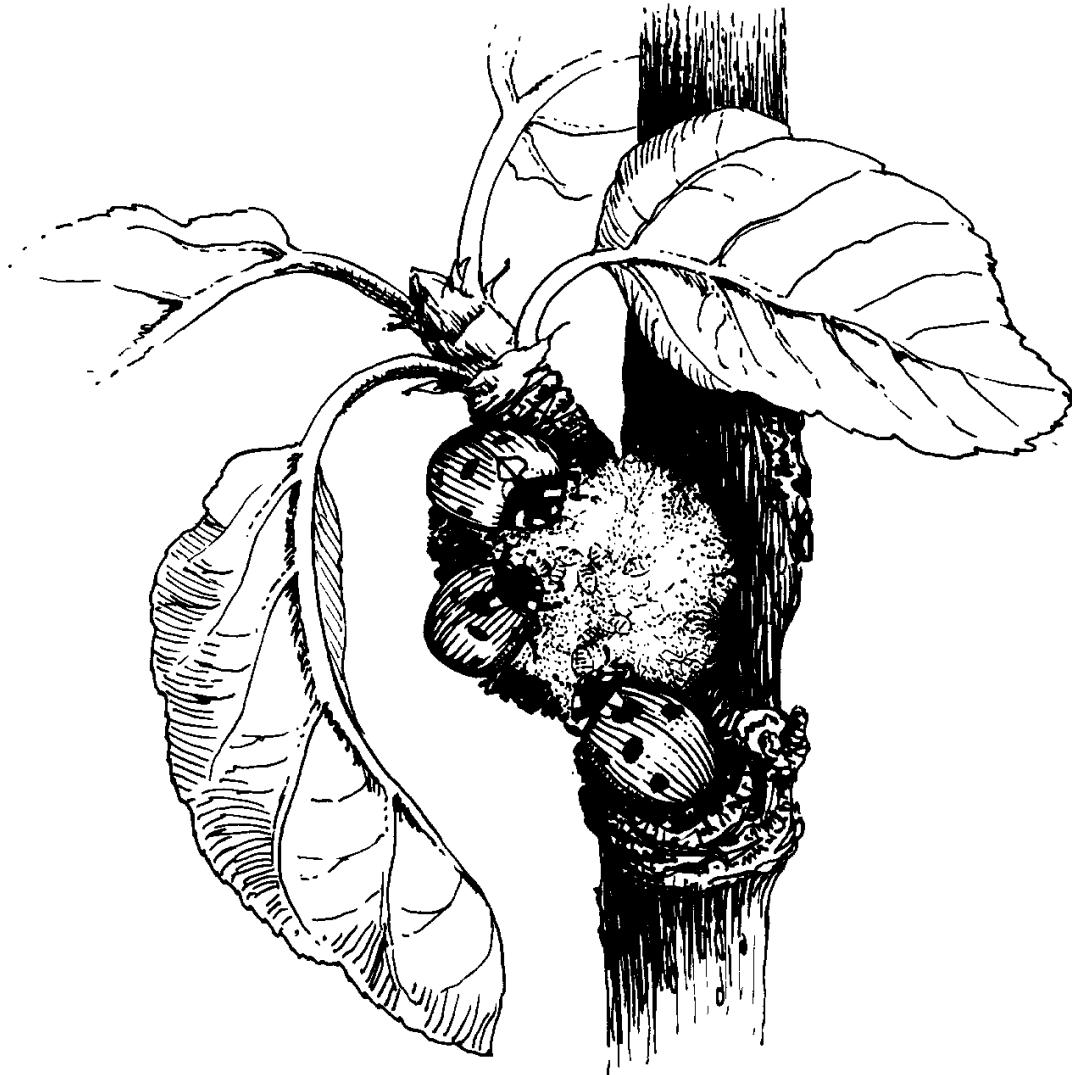


Wild About...



Ladybirds



Ladybirds



Nature notes



Ladybirds are small beetles with round bodies that look like half a pea.



They can be all sorts of colours, often bright red or yellow with black, red, white, or yellow spots. The bright colours warn predators that ladybirds taste unpleasant.



Ladybirds are quite communal insects. Whilst hibernating in winter, they will often crowd together under a piece of loose bark, or in crevices.



The growth pattern of ladybirds is very similar to moths and butterflies - they pass through three stages of growth, egg, larvae and pupa before becoming an adult.



Each ladybird lays around 50 eggs.



The larvae are generally blue or dark grey, with orange or yellow markings.



Once the larvae have emerged, they will feed on aphids constantly for approximately three to four weeks, then moult to become pupae.



The pupa is attached to a leaf by its tail and, after about two weeks, an adult ladybird will emerge.



The seven-spot ladybird is a migratory species. In spring, large numbers fly in search of aphid-infested plants where they will feed, mate, and lay their eggs.



Most ladybirds are carnivorous. Greenfly and blackfly (aphids) are favourite foods. Ladybirds are very popular with gardeners because aphids cause a lot of damage.



Some ladybirds are vegetarian. The 24-spot ladybird eats plants, and the orange ladybird feeds on mildew.



How to watch ladybirds

Ladybirds can be found in almost every type of terrestrial habitat in Britain. Species like the seven-spotted ladybird occur anywhere that plants with aphids are found, at almost any time of year. Ladybirds are most commonly found in small shrubs, trees, and grass.

Wild plants are ladybirds' favourite habitats, including creeping thistle, broad-leaved dock, field scabious and bramble. Even in winter, they can be found hibernating amongst dead plant stems.

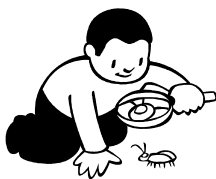
All British ladybirds hibernate as adults. In autumn, they choose a site, and they are inactive until the following spring. Ladybirds of different species hibernate at different sites. Adults of the two-spotted ladybird can be found hibernating in houses during winter. Hibernation sites may include buildings, tree trunks, dead plant stems and bushes, or fence posts in dry conditions. The 13 spot, orange, eyed and striped ladybirds have never actually been recorded hibernating in Britain. Where they hibernate is a mystery!

Equipment

To study ladybirds, you can use:

- a beating tray
- a sweep net
- a pooter
- jam jars or clear plastic tubs

To find ladybirds, inspect bushes and grass tussocks, especially ones with lots of aphids, or use a beating tray. Also check around window frames, in hollow stems, or in cracks in walls and fences.



Keep Safe

If you handle a ladybird it may release small drops of yellow liquid on to your hand. This is actually blood, which will stain your hand and smell quite pungent. This behaviour is an example of defensive 'reflex bleeding' to ward off enemies and alarm them. On rare occasions a ladybird may bite and will give quite a sharp nip.

Look out for the harlequin ladybird, and report it if you think you have seen one. Harlequin ladybirds are not native to Britain, and are likely to harm native species by eating their food, and the ladybirds themselves!

Wild About...



Survey for seven-spot ladybirds

The seven-spot ladybird is the most common ladybird in Britain. It hibernates through the winter until the weather begins to warm up again. By April, seven-spot ladybirds will be very active, and you may find them in the garden, the local park, school fields, open countryside or in woodlands. Look on plants that provide shelter and food (aphids).

The earliest dates that people see the first seven-spot ladybird each year can tell us a lot about climate change. Look out for ladybirds and use the form below to record what you see.



Send the form to **Community Heritage Initiative, Holly Hayes, Environment and Heritage Resources Centre, Leicestershire County Council, 216 Birstall Road, Birstall, Leicester, LE4 4DG.**

Seven-Spotting

On which date did you first see seven-spot ladybirds?

Where did you see them?

Place name

Postcode

How many ladybirds did you see?

Where were they?

In the garden

In open country

In woodland

Your details

Name

Address

Ladybirds

Wild About...



Survey for ladybirds

You can collect ladybirds, from trees and shrubs, with a beating tray or an upside down umbrella. Hold the beating tray, or umbrella, underneath a branch of a tree or bush. Give the branch a couple of sharp taps to dislodge any ladybirds. Look at what colour the ladybirds are, and how many spots they have. Record what you see in the table below. Also record what type of plant you found the ladybirds on.



Send the form to **Community Heritage Initiative, Holly Hayes Environment and Heritage Resources Centre, Leicestershire County Council, 216 Birstall Road, Birstall, Leicester, LE4 4DG.**

Spot the Ladybird

Name	
Address	

Date	Postcode	Grid reference	What colour is the ladybird?	What colour are the spots?	How many spots?	What plant is the ladybird on?
Example: 1/4/05	LE4 4DG	SU123456	red	black	7	nettle

Ladybirds



What to do

Make a hotel for over-wintering ladybirds

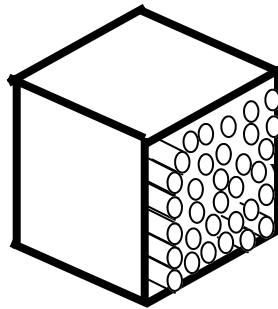
Shelter is important to ladybirds for winter protection. Some insects will choose snug-fitting places to rest. In the wild this will include hollow plant stems (such as from fennel, hogweed, garden bamboo and elder), nooks and crannies in walls or tucked into crevices in tree bark. If there are not many natural places to hide, you can make a ladybird hotel.

You will need:

- Hollow plants stems, such as hogweed or bamboo
- String

Collect some hollow stems in the autumn and tie them into a bundle. Tie the bundle to a branch in a hedge or bush, or to fences or walls, out of the wind and rain. Look for the types of places that ladybirds are already using.

For more shelter, you can use a wooden box. Cut the stems into neat lengths and fill the box with them. Get help from an adult to fix the box to a wall or fence.



What should you do if you find a ladybird inside in winter?

If you find a ladybird inside your house in winter, it will not survive because it is too warm and dry. You can help it by putting it outside, in a sheltered place, such as a shed, unheated garage, log pile or in a ladybird hotel. Don't put it on twigs or leaves on the ground as frost will kill it.



What to do

Make a pooter, a beating tray and sweep net (see the Field Kit section to find out how) to collect ladybirds that you can study close up. Remember, always put animals back where you found them when you have finished.

Make models of ladybirds you see

You will need:

- a sweep net or beating tray
- a paintbrush or pooter
- a clear plastic tub or a glass jar
- paper plates or circles of card
- paint/colouring pens, pipe cleaners, sticky tape,
- a place to catch ladybirds (don't disturb them if they are over-wintering)



Using a beating tray or sweep net, collect some ladybirds, carefully pick them up with a paintbrush, or pooter, and place them in the jar.

Take a close up look at the ladybirds. Draw the ladybird's design on to the paper plate or card circle. Do all red seven-spotted ladybirds have their spots in the same place? How about others you see? You could look at recording different colours and also how many different spot patterns you see. You can also draw ladybirds in your nature diary.

Make the plate into a ladybird model by adding pipe cleaner legs and a small card circle for the head. Use your observational skills to make sure you give it the right number of legs. Make a sketch in your nature diary.