

British Ladybirds in Crisis



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Familiar British ladybirds are facing their biggest danger since the last ice age. A new invader from south-east Asia, the Harlequin ladybird is threatening to displace the resident species that for generations have helped us to control aphid populations. The threat is so great that experts are recommending that the Government adds three species of resident ladybird to the UK Priority Species list. The Harlequin may bring ladybirds into disrepute by damaging house decor.

The Harlequin ladybird eats the young of other ladybirds as well as aphids. In America the invader has become a significant economic pest and has already had a huge impact on populations of resident ladybirds. Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust and experts are predicting that resident ladybirds will be hit hard and are recommending that the 7-spot, 2-spot and 5-spot ladybirds will all decline so quickly that they have been put forward for addition to the Government's Priority Species List.

"The Harlequin is already becoming dominant in parts of South West London, Essex, Suffolk and Derby" warned national ladybird expert and Cambridge University Scientist Dr Mike Majerus, "I think that the Harlequin will be over the whole of mainland Britain by the end of 2008 and that the native aphid feeding ladybirds will suffer very greatly and will be expelled to the ecological margins."

Harlequin ladybirds have a unique bad habit. They damage soft fruits while drinking large quantities of fruit and plant juices in the Autumn. They then crowd together inside houses to overwinter. During the winter they expel a dark sticky fluid that destroys curtains, wall paper and carpets. "The first individuals only arrived here in the summer of 2004, but we are already cataloguing overwintering aggregations of 100s inside houses" reported Dr Majerus.

"The loss of our resident ladybirds would be a tragedy" lamented Matt Shardlow, Buglife Director, "This issue highlights the importance of nipping invasive species in the bud before they damage our biodiversity and economy".

The Government is currently drafting legislation that will ban the sale of species already known to be invasive and will legally underpin guidance to restrict trading practices that risk the establishment of invasive species. However, conservationists are dismayed that it has taken nearly three years for the Government to implement recommendations from their own 'Review of non-native species policy' and a number of key recommendations have yet to be addressed. Including who is responsible for taking action to stop the spread of species like the Harlequin ladybird when they start to become established and how the risk these species pose will be assessed before they become a problem.

Further Notes :

Are Ladybirds Britain's favourite bugs?

Ladybirds are strong contenders for the grand title of the 'Nations Favourite Bug' in Buglife's Big Bug Vote. The bug voting has been taking place whilst David Attenborough's new series Life in the Undergrowth has been showing on BBC1. Spiders and dragonflies took an early lead with ladybirds and bumblebees now catching up. Visit the Buglife website www.buglife.org.uk to vote for your favourite invertebrate before the 21st December. Here you can also find out more about the stars of the series, get free bug posters, plus there's a chance to win a copy of David Attenborough's new Life in the Undergrowth book!

Buglife-The Invertebrate Conservation Trust is the first organisation in Europe devoted to the conservation of all invertebrates, and is actively engaged in saving Britain's rarest bugs, butterflies, snails, bees, wasps, ants, spiders, beetles and many more fascinating creatures. Set up in 2000, the charity now has six members of staff working on diverse projects including a national bumblebee survey and riverfly conservation. Buglife has developed fun, informative webpages to tie in with the new BBC series, which can be found at: www.buglife.org.uk.

The Priority Species list was set up in response to the 1992 Rio Convention on Biological Diversity. The UK uses the Priority List to firstly identify species requiring urgent conservation action and secondly to measure progress towards meeting the 2010 target of 'Halting Biodiversity Loss'.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill is currently going through Parliament, it contains clauses that will set up the new agency Natural England and will place a greater emphasis on the need to conserve biodiversity.

Life in the Undergrowth – the episode on 14 December starred ladybirds. Fronted by Sir David Attenborough, the series lifts the lid on a miniature universe living right beneath our feet. Using the latest cameras, viewers will be taken into their world to discover the amazing stories of the most successful creatures on Earth: the invertebrates. For further information about the series, visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sn/tvradio/programmes/lifeintheundergrowth/> #

Scientific names – Harlequin ladybird *Harmonia axyridis*; Seven-spot ladybird *Coccinella septempunctata*, Two-spot ladybird *Adalia bipunctata*; Five-spot ladybird *Coccinella quinquepunctata*

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