

Meet the Beetles



photo by Rene Limoges, Insectarium du Montreal, c. used by permission, courtesy University of Nebraska State Museum

Mini Fact:

This metallic leaf chafer is a type of scarab.

It won't be long before you're playing outside, watching lightning bugs sparkling at night or ladybugs crawling on a leaf. You may not realize it, but those friendly bugs are beetles.



photo by Scott Bauer, courtesy USDA

Asian lady beetle

Beetles are insects with hardened wing covers and chewing mouth parts. One out of every four species, or type, of living creature on Earth is a beetle.

Wing covers

Beetles' hardened wing covers protect them like a suit of armor. These help keep beetles safe from predators, or animals that want to eat them.



The caterpillar hunter beetle helps control the gypsy moth caterpillar, which destroys U.S. forests.

Wing covers also trap moisture inside beetles' bodies. This helps keep them from drying out.

Chewing mouth parts

Beetles' mouths are designed for chewing and biting. They might use their powerful mouths to grab their prey, bite it and chew it up. This is different from many other insects

that suck up their food instead.

Beetles may also use their strong mouth parts to chew holes in trees, crops and even carpets.

Billions of beetles

Experts say there are about 400,000 different species of beetles. They are on every continent except Antarctica.

The warm, wet tropics are especially rich habitats for beetles. More species live there than anywhere else.

However, people are destroying the tropical forests where beetles live so quickly that there are probably hundreds of thousands more species we may never discover.

An entire species of beetle can live on one single tree and nowhere else. Or one species may live only on the side of one mountain.

Since many beetles can live in only one habitat, such as a tree, they can't survive when they lose their homes.

Sacred scarabs

Ancient Egyptians wore scarabs (SKA-rubs) as holy charms. Models of scarabs were used to replace the heart in mummies.

Scarabs stand out in the world of beetles. Many have bright metallic colors or giant horns.



photo by Johnnie Chong, used by permission, courtesy University of Nebraska State Museum

These huge elephant beetles are a type of scarab.

Pests and helpers

Many beetles do a lot of damage. They can destroy forests and crops. Others help people. Some, such as ladybugs, eat other insect pests.

Some people even eat beetles!

Many different types of beetles feed on and bury dead animals, recycling them. In fact, scientists use beetles to clean the flesh off animal skeletons they want to study.

The important scarab

Scarabs make up one family of beetles, with about 35,000 species. Scarabs are nature's recyclers. They eat **dung**, or poop, and dead animals and plants.

Dung beetles like waste from animals such as camels and cattle. They pull it down under the ground and lay their eggs in it.



photo by Rene Limoges, Insectarium du Montreal, c. used by permission, courtesy University of Nebraska State Museum

When the beetles hatch, they eat the dung, recycling it. If dung beetles didn't recycle waste, it would stay for years, smothering the grass and plant life.

In one pile of elephant poop in Africa, there might be 80 different species of dung beetles.

This dung beetle rolls a ball of poop.

Resources



On the Web:

- bit.ly/MPscarabs

At the library:

- "Bonkers About Beetles" by Owen Davey
- "Beetles" by Trudi Strain Trueitt

Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of beetles are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:



BEETLE, CHARM, DUNG, EGGS, EGYPTIANS, HABITAT, HARDENED, INSECT, LADYBUG, METALLIC, MOUTH, PEST, PREDATOR, RECYCLE, SCARAB, SPECIES, TROPICS, WINGS.

Q	I	J	N	O	C	W	I	N	G	S	T	U	T	D
C	H	A	R	M	I	U	B	N	R	Z	S	Z	R	E
P	A	O	S	H	L	E	S	E	S	D	A	P	O	G
N	E	D	T	F	L	T	G	A	E	E	B	E	P	U
G	N	U	D	C	A	B	G	B	B	T	C	S	I	B
S	O	H	Y	T	T	I	E	K	Q	E	L	T	C	Y
M	Y	C	I	D	E	N	E	D	R	A	H	E	S	D
D	E	B	I	V	M	P	R	E	D	A	T	O	R	A
R	A	S	N	A	I	T	P	Y	G	E	I	L	Q	L
H	H	B	A	R	A	C	S	S	P	E	C	I	E	S

Cook's Corner

Cherry Tomato Snacks

You'll need:

- 10 to 12 cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/3 cup spreadable cheese (any flavor)
- 1/4 cup chopped olives

What to do:

1. Place cherry tomato halves on a plate; blot the tops with paper towels.
2. Spread cheese evenly on tops of tomatoes.
3. Spoon chopped olives on tops. Serves 4.



* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

7 Little Words for Kids

Use the letters in the boxes to make a word with the same meaning as the clue. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in the solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

1. drop (4) _____
2. candy package (7) _____
3. what you chew with (5) _____
4. house designer (9) _____
5. keep balls up in the air (6) _____
6. farm machine (7) _____
7. moving like a snail (8) _____

ECT	CRA	GLE	TH
WRA	ARC	WLI	LL
TOR	FA	HIT	TRAC
TEE	JUG	PPER	NG

Answers: fall, wrapper, teeth, architect, juggle, tractor, crawling.



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Mini Jokes



Benny: What musical group's songs do bugs prefer?
Bette: The Beatles'!

Eco Note



The world has more insects than all other living things combined. We need insects! Many insects work for us. They visit flowers and spread pollen so plants can produce fruits and vegetables. Some insects eat other insects that damage plants. These "worker" insects are welcome guests. All insects have a place in the web of life. However, some insects are a nuisance, and some can be harmful. We call insects **pests** when they hurt, damage, destroy or make us or our animals sick.

adapted from epa.gov

For later:

Look in your newspaper for articles related to science.

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