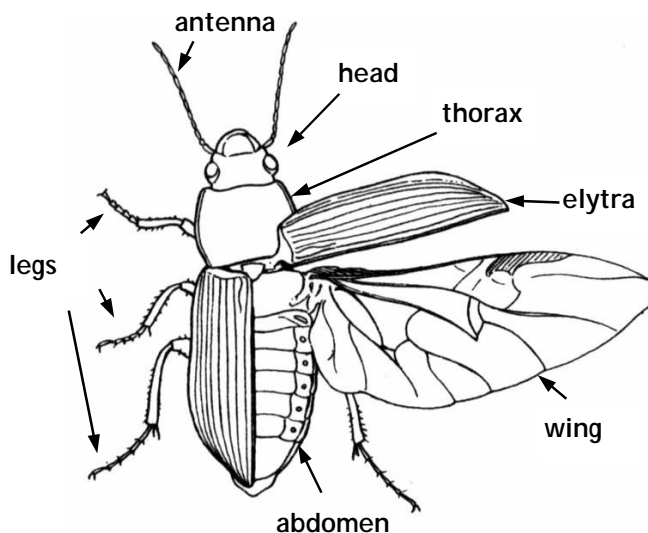


Beetles

By Stuart Munro

Beetles are EVERYWHERE, they are to be found all over the world; from the tropical rainforests to the deserts and even in the cold arctic regions. They live in trees, on the ground (hiding under logs & stones or in the bushes), some live in the nests of bees/wasps/ants and birds, or burrow into wood and some even live in the water of ponds & rivers (but not in the sea).

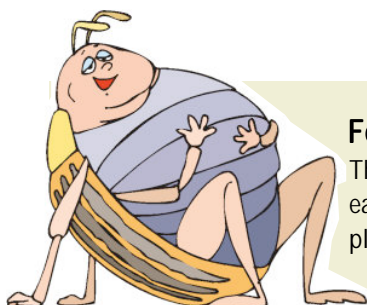
Beetles have a hard outer shell, called an **EXOSKELETON**, they do not have bones inside them like we do. This limits the maximum size they can grow to; but there are still some very large beetles in the world. As with most insects, beetles have 3 main body sections; **head, thorax & abdomen**. Most beetles have 2 pairs of **wings** and can fly, however their wings are usually not visible because they are protected under the hard case which covers their abdomen; this covering is called the **elytra** and is actually made from the first pair of wings which have become hardened in beetles, these elytra then protect the more delicate flight wings from damage as they run around on the ground – sometimes the elytra are fused together in some ground beetles which are then unable to fly.



Beetle Babies



The young beetles (called a **LARVA**), look nothing like the adult beetles and are usually not seen by us, preferring to hide under stones or burrow into the ground or dead wood where they will change first into a **PUPA** (quite like butterflies) and then hatch out into the fully formed adult (called an **IMAGO**). These larvae often look like caterpillars, and quite often eat different foods than they will as adults.



Food, glorious food!

There is very little in this world that probably isn't eaten by one type of beetle or another; some eat plants, seeds, nectar from flowers, dead animals, other insects and even poo!!

What's in a name?

Beetles are grouped together in the Order **COLEOPTERA** which comes from the Greek words *coleos* = sheath and *pteron* = wing.



Beetles are the largest Order in the animal kingdom; estimates range between 330,000 to more than 500,000 species worldwide, with more than 3,700 found in Ireland & Britain so far. (New species are being discovered all the time and these numbers will probably get larger!).

All Shapes and Sizes

Not all beetles are the plain brown or black that you see most commonly, many are very brightly coloured and can even be shiny metallic blues, greens and reds!

When it comes to size & shape, beetles hold most of the records in the insect world; the South American Hercules Beetle (*Dynastes hercules*) (below) is probably the largest beetle in the world at 180mm long, whereas the smallest beetles can be less than half a millimetre long!



The Hercules Beetle

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