

[Back](#)**2 page(s) will be printed.**

Record: 1

Title: Little Ladybirds.
Authors: Andreae, Christopher
Source: Christian Science Monitor; 8/22/95, Vol. 87 Issue 187, p16, 4c
Document Type: Article
Subject Terms: LADYBUGS
Abstract: Details on how Ladybugs fascinate both children and grown-ups. Characteristics of the Ladybug; Various names of the Ladybug in the different regions of the world. INSET: Ladybug facts, by C.A.
Lexile: 960
Full Text Word Count: 1022
ISSN: 0882-7729
Accession Number: 9509143205
Database: Middle Search Plus

Section: THE HOME FORUM
KIDSPACE

LITTLE LADYBIRDS

WHEN you come to think of it, grown-ups can sometimes be very hard to understand. Consider the things they like and the things they don't like at all.

Oh, they can be very brave. Not scared of the dark, not frightened by all kinds of enormous blundering events like herds of elephants or armies of giants. Well, giants only exist in books or videos, of course. But even then, if you let yourself forget for a minute that they are just imaginary, they might give you g-r-r-reat sh-sh-shivery f-f-feelings up and down your back. Great fun. But not for some adults. They look serious and mutter "rubbish" or some such.

But there are certain things that make adults turn to Jell-O.

Spiders can make them run a mile. Or, even better, BEETLES!! If you find a harmless shiny black beetle under a stone and cup it between your hands to carry it into the house to show certain people, what do they do? They scream and shout and yell and stand on chairs and hide under beds with their eyes shut until you promise that your beetle is back where it belongs - outside.

Some people are just not interested in beetles, which is odd when you think how many beetles there are in the world. Did you know that (I quote an expert called Michael E. N. Majerus) "approximately one fifth of all known living species on earth are beetles"?

And then there is another odd fact about grown-ups and very small creatures. Have you ever seen their reaction to ladybugs? They love them. They say, "ooh!" and "aah!" and call them cute or sweet, and (at least they did this when I was a child) they start reciting a nursery rhyme and call the ladybug all sorts of pet names. Then then say, "ooh" and "aah"

all over again. For a moment there, you might think they had shrunk and become kids again. It's kind of endearing, really.

Now I have to tell you that in the small and distant group of islands where I live, called Britain, our usual name for ladybugs is "ladybirds." You will probably think this is silly (someone once pointed out, quite rightly, that they are not ladies and they are not birds), but there it is, that's what we call them. Did you know there are ladybirds all over the world, and scientists reckon they have observed and described over 5,200 different kinds?

There are plenty of long and tricky-to-learn Latin names for all these tiny insects (and by no means are all of them red with black spots like the ones you immediately think of), but there are also lots of common or friendly names. I say "friendly" because, as Mr. Majerus also says, "Everyone loves a ladybird." In 55 different languages, another expert has written, there are 329 names for ladybugs/birds.

My mother used to call them "barniebees," and apparently in the eastern part of Britain she came from, some people still call them this. In certain parts of Scotland, they are known as "ladyclocks." The "clocks" part of that name has nothing to do with the time, apparently. It comes from "cloaks." The theory is that ladybugs were named "lady" in Catholic countries after the Virgin Mary, who is often shown in pictures with a red cloak. Almost 200 years ago, an English country poet named John Clare called the ladybird a "clock-a-clay" and also a "ladycow."

Sometimes "ladybird" was used as a way of showing affection for another person (one American First Lady was even named "Ladybird"). In "Romeo and Juliet," a play by William Shakespeare, the 12-year-old heroine, Juliet, is called "ladybird" by her nurse at one point. Sort of like calling her "sweetheart."

My brothers and I loved finding ladybirds when we were small. I remember lots of them on the leaves of our gooseberry bushes. You would let them walk quite happily on the back of your hand, and then, blowing very gently at them, you would recite a nursery rhyme that begins, "Ladybird, ladybird, Fly away home...."

You kept on blowing - not too hard - and in the end the ladybird would suddenly open up its red, black-spotted upper wings, hesitate a moment, and then, using its much thinner under wings, off it would fly.

And all of us, children and parents, would say, "ooh" and "aah."

PHOTOS (COLOR): LADYBIRDS

~~~~~

By Christopher Andreae

#### LADYBUG FACTS

The first thing you notice about a ladybug is probably its elytra, or hardened forewings. If the "lady" has spots, they are here. Its real flying wings are under the elytra, which lift up before takeoff. Ladybugs have mouths designed for biting. Some eat aphids - soft-bodied insects that suck the juice from plants - and other insects; but others are "herbivorous," which means they eat only vegetable matter. Ladybugs have six legs. They have antennae. And it takes 135,000 ladybugs to fill a gallon container.

In winter, ladybugs "hibernate" or go to sleep. They can even be frozen in blocks of

ice and survive. Their life span is about a year. The females lay eggs, which hatch into larvae. The larvae become pupae, out of which the adult ladybugs emerge, pale at first, then gradually they change to their recognizable color and markings.

One reason people like ladybugs is that they feed on the aphids that spoil flowers, vegetables, and fruit trees.

As long ago as 1888, one kind of ladybug was deliberately introduced from Australia into California to control a pest, the cottony cushion scale insect, which threatened the citrus industry.

Ladybugs sometimes have "good years" when they breed so fast they run out of their usual food. Then they eat other things. This year in Britain, they have occasionally taken a nip at human flesh. But expert Michael E.N. Majerus, in his book "Ladybirds," writes that they don't like the way we taste. We are "rejected prey." So we can go on loving them after all....

~~~~~

By Christopher Andreae

Copyright of Christian Science Monitor is the property of Christian Science Publishing Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.

[Back](#)