

Field Notes

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

July 2002



Did you know?

That **one** lady beetle can eat over 2,000 aphids in its lifetime



That some lady beetles migrate several hundreds of miles by riding the winds.



That the bright colours of lady beetles warn predators that they are distasteful or poisonous.



That hibernating groups have been found with as many as 10,000 individual lady beetles.



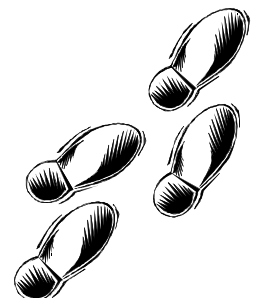
Lady beetle Survey

Although, everyone recognizes a lady beetle, have you ever wondered why they have different numbers of spots? They are actually different species. There are more than 400 species in North America, of these 170 species have been introduced to control other insects.

These introduced species may be out competing native species for food and space. The Canadian Nature Federation conducted a five year survey to find out how our native species are doing. They looked at 16 different species and asked people to report sightings of each one. They had 32,579 reports. Of these, 3 introduced species accounted for 20,350 sightings and 13 native species accounted for the other 12,229 sightings. These results indicate that the introduced species have made themselves quite at home in Canada and have expanded their ranges to cover most of Canada.



Here at Oak Hammock our participation has been so enjoyable that we decided to continue our own survey . If you would like to join us come out on our Tuesday afternoon marshwalks in July and August and help us search for lady beetles.



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Lady beetles

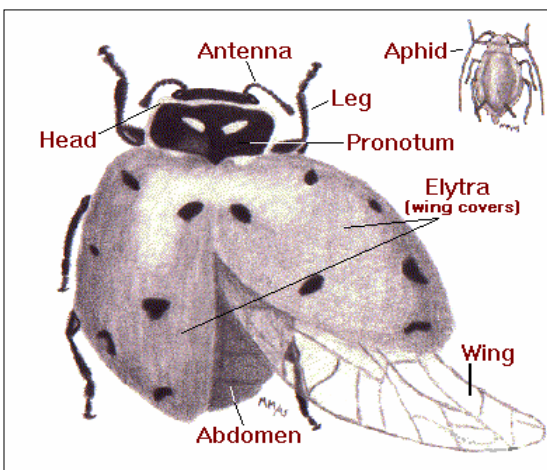
Although many of us use the term, ladybug, the proper name is lady beetle or ladybird beetle. Adult lady beetles have six legs and a round or oval body with a rounded top and flat underside. Like all beetles, lady beetles eat with big jagged teeth instead of sucking food like some other insects. Lady beetles fold their soft wings under hard wing covers called "elytra". When flying, they lift their elytra up and out of the way.

Lady beetles are primarily carnivorous. They eat as many as 5000 insects during their lifetime. Here in wetlands they help control populations of these insects. Aphids are their favourite food.

Female lady beetles lay tiny yellow eggs in clumps on the underside of leaves. Some lay up to 1,000 eggs. After four or five days, the eggs hatch into larvae that look like tiny spiky accordions with legs. The larvae spend four or five weeks eating aphids, shedding their skins three times before turning into pupae, which resemble little lobsters without legs or claws.

About 10 days later, pupae squeeze out of their skins and emerge as lady beetles. It takes about 24 hours for lady beetles to get their bright spots. They then roam around for a few weeks eating aphids before finding a place to sleep for the winter.

During the autumn, lady beetles crawl to over-wintering sites where a few to several thousand will gather in an aggregation. The aggregation site may be located at the base of a tree, along a fencerow, under a fallen tree, or under a rock.



Lady beetle Anatomy

Head - sometimes almost hidden

Leg - lady beetles have six

Wings - tucked away except when flying

Abdomen - sometimes full of eggs

Elytra - (wing covers) protect the wings and body; one wing cover is called an elytron

Pronotum - a shield protecting the neck from ants and other predators

Antenna - for finding food and friends

Aphid - lady beetle lunch

Adapted from the Canadian Nature Federation website, <http://www.cnf.ca/beetle/index.html>.



Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre is a joint project of Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Province of Manitoba

