

Some little Ladybirds at large in Worcestershire.

Gary Farmer

Ladybirds are beetles belonging to the family Coccinellidae. With their bright colours and spotty patterns they are amongst the most familiar and best loved of all the insects. But not all ladybirds conform and there are many hairy, unspotted and generally un-ladybird-like ladybirds to be found in the British Countryside. These include the Kidney-spot Ladybird *Chilocorus renipustulatus*, a helmet-shaped, shiny black ladybird with bright red splotches which is more rounded in outline than typical ladybirds and has a definite flange. While the Larch Ladybird *Aphidecta oblitterata* is a more typical ladybird shape and size it is straw-coloured and lacks ladybird spots. Then there is the Ten-spot Ladybird *Adalia decempunctata*, possibly the most varied of our ladybirds. It is small and even includes a brown form smudged rather than true spots. The 24-spot Ladybird *Subcoccinella vigintiquattuorpunktata* is a real non-conformist, small and a dull orange colour, it is also very hairy and it is vegetarian, but at least it has spots.

There is also a group of much smaller ladybirds belonging to the sub-family Coccidulinae which are easily over-looked. Forget the image of the common Seven-spot Ladybird and the marauding Harlequin and instead think small, in some cases very small – 1.5-3 mm long.

The commonest of these little ladybirds that I have found in Worcestershire is *Coccidula rufa*, growing up to 3mm in length this is a species favouring wet grasslands and marshes. I found this little ladybird at several sites during 2015 including Lower Moor, near Pershore (01).



01. *Coccidula rufa* 03.07.15 Lower Moor. Gary Farmer

Coccidula scutellata (2.5-3 mm long) on the other hand appears to be very rare in the county. I have only found this species on one occasion, at Pershore Wetlands (22.05.15) where I swept several individuals from river-side vegetation. This little elongate ladybird is considered to be very local in the UK (02).



02. *Coccidula scutellata* 22.05.15 Pershore Wetlands. Gary Farmer

Rhizobius litura (2.5-3 mm long) is a more widespread species favouring meadows and even grass verges. I have swept this species from rough grassland at Lower Moor, Hill Court Farm near Longdon, and Shrawley Wood (03).



03. *Rhizobius litura* 22.05.15 Pershore Wetlands. Gary Farmer

Rhizobius chrysoloides (2.5-3.5 mm long) is a rare relative of the previous species and is very similar but usually more clearly marked and is arboreal. My only record to date is from Hipton Hill near Evesham in October 2015 when Colin Grove noticed a “small beetle” on an apple he had just picked (04).



04. *Rhizobius chrysoloides* 21.10.15 Hipton. Gary Farmer

The final species, new to me in 2015 is *Nephus quadrimaculatus* which is a tiny black ladybird, barely reaching 2mm long and has red spots. Harry Green had mentioned finding some on Ivy and purely by coincidence the following day, 20th September, I was looking for Ivy Bees *Colletes hederæ* near Evesham with Nicki Farmer when she spotted a “tiny black beetle-like thing” on an Ivy flower. On closer inspection the red spots and hairs were visible and we were able to confirm its identification (05).



05. *Nephus quadrimaculatus* 20.09.15 Evesham. Gary Farmer

So if you notice a small hairy beetle anywhere in the county it's worth checking to see if you have one of the little ladybirds mentioned above, or maybe even another species as there are several more out there somewhere.

Reference:

Roy, H., Brown, P.M.J., Frost, R., Poland, R.L. 2012. *Ladybirds (Coccinellidae) of Britain and Ireland*. FSC Publications, Telford.

Images

- 01. *Coccidula rufa* 03.07.15 Lower Moor. Gary Farmer
- 02. *Coccidula scutellata* 22.05.15 Pershore Wetlands. Gary Farmer
- 03. *Rhyzobius litura* 22.05.15 Pershore Wetlands. Gary Farmer
- 04. *Rhyzobius chrysomeloides* 21.10.15 Hipton. Gary Farmer
- 05. *Nephus quadrimaculatus* 20.09.15 Evesham. Gary Farmer