

Identifying the Harlequin ladybird



Actual size

Adult beetles are large and vary in colour from deep red to light orange. Spot size and number also vary according to season. Adults gather sporadically in large numbers and form aggregations in corners of rooms and window frames. In South Africa, they are frequently found on oak trees, ornamental conifers and garden roses in urban and rural areas, but can also occur in orchards, vineyards, field crops and native vegetation. [Size range 7-8 mm]

The “M” or “W” on the head distinguishes the Harlequin ladybird from native ladybird species.

The pattern may be incomplete or form a solid shape.



Larvae



The larvae of the Harlequin ladybird are dark in colour, with thick spines on each segment. Distinct orange patches on the abdomen form an “L” shape on each side. [Size range 3-10 mm]

Pupae



The pupae of the Harlequin ladybird are orange, with rectangular dark markings down the length. The spikey remnants of the larval skin are visible at the base where the pupa is attached to the substrate. [Size range 6-10 mm]

Have you seen this beetle?

Harlequin ladybird

(*Harmonia axyridis*)



Adult Beetles

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

The Harlequin ladybird is native to central and eastern Asia and has spread to Europe and North America through biological control and accidental introductions.

The Harlequin ladybird was first reported in South Africa in the early 2000s, in the Western Cape province. It is not known how the Harlequin ladybird arrived in South Africa, but it is now found in all nine provinces.

NEMBA Category 1b invader

Under the law, species in this category:

1. May not be owned, imported or bred in South Africa.
2. Must be managed and controlled as part of an invasive species control plan.
3. May not be owned or bred by any person without a permit once a control plan has been declared.

The Harlequin ladybird is an agricultural pest. Adults gather in large numbers to feed on soft fruits, damage crops, and can cause wine harvests to be tainted when adult beetles are processed with wine grapes.

Impacts on people

During autumn and winter, Harlequin ladybirds gather in large numbers in and around buildings. When disturbed, adults exude a fluid with an unpleasant smell, which stains fabrics and soft furnishings.

Impacts on ecosystems

In its introduced (non-native) range the Harlequin ladybird can outcompete and displace many native ladybird species. The Harlequin ladybird is predatory, with a broad dietary range, including the eggs and larvae of native ladybird species.

1. Collect adult Harlequin ladybird specimens, place them in a small container and freeze them in your home freezer.

Then email our researcher (minettek@sun.ac.za) who will contact you with details on how to send your sample. We aim to have 10-30 beetles per site of collection.

These specimens will be used in a genetic study to uncover the origins, route and rate of spread of the Harlequin ladybird in South Africa.

2. Sign up to iSpot and report any sightings of the Harlequin ladybird in your area. Even a single beetle observation counts!



Take a digital photo, note the date and location of your sighting and upload the photo and this information to iSpot.



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