

The Oil Beetle

There have been quite a few sightings of bugs that take on the appearance of 'cat poo on legs', as someone has described them locally. So, off I went to investigate - thanks to the Arboleas Forum I got a strong lead!

There are different species of oil beetle (meloe), also known as the blister beetle. It got its name because when feeling threatened it secretes an oily deposit from the leg joints, which is toxic. Be warned that this substance can cause blistering of the skin if touched by humans or animals. The Spanish name for these creatures is aceitera or curilla.



These beetles have an interesting life history - once hatched from the egg the tiny larvae crawl up to a flower head and using their strong claws attach themselves to a passing solitary bee, who takes them back to its nest burrow; once there it settles in, feeding and developing on the pollen and nectar resource provided for the bees larvae.

The basic colour of the beetle is black and some species have red or orange stripes crossing each segment of the body. The legs are positioned towards the front of the body so the cylindrical abdomen is dragged along the ground. If you look closely you can see they have very small wing formation but they are a flightless beetle.

The female is much larger than the male and carries the same colouring. The male will follow the female persistently until he is accepted as a mate! The female lays 1000s of eggs in the ground and in particular near flowering plants to enable the larvae to progress their journey to the bees nest. Once mature they leave the bees nest and as herbivores they feed on leaves and flowers.

The species that most of us have been seeing in the Almanzora Valley area of Spain (*Berberomeloe insignis*) is actually endemic to the Almeria, Murcia and Granada regions. Unfortunately their survival is threatened due mainly to destruction of their habitat by construction of golf courses and building complexes and also plastic greenhouses, where the use of pesticides is having a bad effect on the population of wild bees that the beetles larvae is so dependent on.



Credit for this image of *Berberomeloe insignis* goes to Jesús Contrera - www.indalodeoz.com