

The Harlequin Ladybird (*Harmonia axyridis*)

30 September 2007 - first confirmed sighting in Ashton-under-Hill.

There are 46 different ladybird species in the UK including 3 'new' species which have been introduced. One of these new species is the harlequin ladybird which was first recorded in 2004 near London and is spreading across the country. The harlequin ladybird originates from Asia, but has been deliberately released in some countries, but not the UK, as a biological control agent in some commercial horticultural crops. It probably arrived in the UK on plants imported from Europe.

The harlequin is larger than most of our native species and, if you believe the 'popular' press, has the potential to displace and eradicate a number of our native species.

Like our common 7-spot ladybird, the harlequin is a general predator feeding on a variety of small insects, particularly aphids. One of the scare-stories about the harlequin is that it will eat our native species – yes it will, but several of our native species will also attack other ladybirds, and some, given the chance, will eat their siblings!



The harlequin ladybird is very variable in colour making correct identification difficult. The picture above shows one of the most common forms, more orange than red and with 18 spots and a distinct 'm'-shaped mark on its head.

However just to confuse us, this form may have fewer spots, or have spots of different size and shape, or some of the spots may be merged, and the head may lack the 'm'-shaped mark. The next two photographs illustrate this variability:-



Another common colour form of the harlequin is a black one with 4 red to orange spots shown below:-



The larvae of the harlequin ladybird are reasonably distinctive having a very spiky body and some distinct orange markings on either side:-



The harlequin ladybird pupae are not very distinctive so are not easy to distinguish from other species, but the photograph below is fairly typical of the harlequin ladybird:-



It is not possible to identify different species of ladybirds from their eggs – they are all yellow-orange and shiny:-



For comparison – below are the adult, pupa and the larva of our very common 7-spot ladybird:-



If you want more information on ladybirds go to <http://www.ladybird-survey.org/default.htm>
Or if you want to read more about the harlequin ladybird go to <http://www.harlequin-survey.org/>

All specimens in the photographs were found in Ashton-under-Hill

Text and all photographs by Roger Umpelby