

Harlequin ladybird

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Harmonia axyridis*

AKA: Halloween beetle, Multicoloured asian ladybird

Native to: Asia

Habitat: Urban areas, wetlands, forests, shrub land, agricultural areas

Harlequin ladybird is a small to medium sized beetle (1-10 mm long) which is usually round or oval. First reported in Northern Ireland in 2007, it is a voracious predator which is able to out-compete native species and will also consume other ladybirds' eggs and larvae. It can have multiple broods throughout the year which can give it a competitive edge and can therefore spread rapidly.

It was originally introduced as a hitch-hiker on imported vegetables and ornamental plants, but may also have been intentionally released as a control of pest aphid species.

H. axyridis is highly variable and over 100 colour forms have been identified worldwide. They can have up to 19 spots on a red, black or orange background. The distribution of colour forms varies geographically and some forms also vary seasonally. They can have a distinctive 'M' or 'W' on the pronotum (back of the head).

As Harlequin ladybird is not ordinarily resident in Northern Ireland, under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to release or allow this species to escape into the wild.



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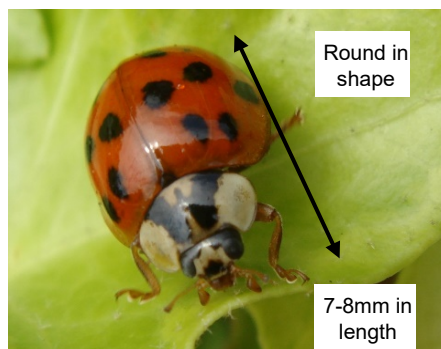
Key ID Features

Most common forms in the UK;
orange with 15-21 black spots; black
with 2 or 4 orange or red spots

- **Elytra (wing case) ground colour:** pale yellow-orange, orange-red, red or black; highly variable
- **Elytra pattern:** 0-21 orange-red or black spots, or grid pattern; highly variable
- **Pronotum pattern:** white or cream with up to 5 spots or fused lateral spots forming 2 curved lines, M-shaped mark or solid trapezoid

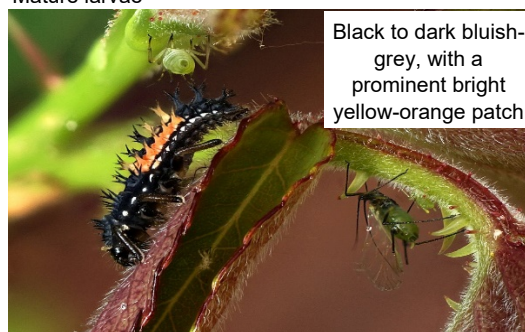


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Mature larvae



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Distinctive 'M'
or 'W' on the
back of the
head
(pronotum)



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Legs almost
always brown

By Francisco Welter-Schultes - Own work, CC0,
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Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Field signs

Harlequin ladybirds hibernate (diapause) in large clusters and they can often be found gathering at windows or doors trying to enter buildings to seek shelter for the winter. This usually happens around October, giving them their other name of the Halloween beetle.



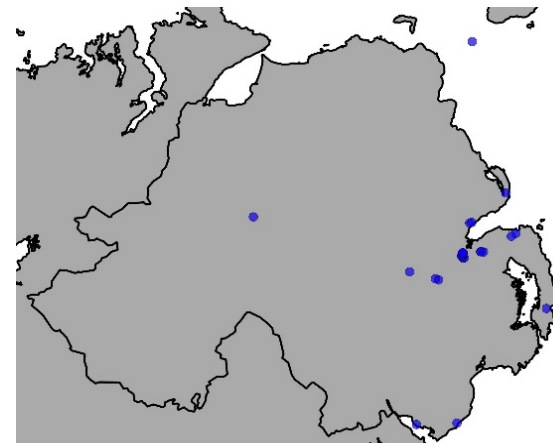
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Distribution

Records concentrated around greater Belfast area.



Source: NBN Atlas Northern Ireland – available at
<https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0000712592>
Check website for current distribution

Native ladybird species

Distinguishing the harlequin ladybird from other similar species can be difficult however;

- If it is less than 5 mm in length, it is definitely **not** a harlequin ladybird.
- If it is red with precisely 7 black spots, it is a **7-spot** ladybird.
- If it has white or cream spots, it is a **striped** ladybird, an **orange** ladybird or a **cream-spot** ladybird.
- If it is black with four or six red spots, two of which are right at the front of the outside margin of the elytra, it is a melanistic form of the **2-spot** ladybird.
- If it is large, burgundy coloured and has 15 black spots, it is an **eyed** ladybird

7 spot ladybird

(*Coccinella septempunctata*)



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Eyed ladybird

(*Anatis ocellata*)



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Orange ladybird

(*Halyzia 16-guttata*)



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Striped ladybird

(*Myzia oblongoguttata*)



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Cream spot ladybird

(*Calvia quatuordecimguttata*)



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2 spot ladybird

(*Adalia bipunctata*)



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2 spot ladybird melanistic form



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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50566706>

References and further reading:

CABI datasheet – *Harmonia axyidis* (harlequin ladybird) available

<https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/26515>

UK Ladybird survey - [Identification Guide for Harlequin Ladybird and Common British Ladybirds](#)

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