



# Big Spring Watch: 7-spot ladybird

The 7-spot ladybird is a very familiar, brightly coloured red/orange beetle. At 6-8mm in length it is one of the largest British ladybirds.

As its name suggests, it has seven black spots – three on each wing case (*elytra*), with the seventh sitting across both elytra, close to the head.

Despite a massive reduction in numbers since 1998, the 7-spot is the most common British ladybird.

## Where to record

7-spot ladybirds are widespread; look for them in fields, parks, woods and gardens.

## What to record

Ladybirds spend the winter dormant and will emerge and look for a mate on warm sunny days in spring. Record the first date you see an active 7-spot ladybird.

## When to record

The date ladybirds emerge depends on spring temperatures and where you live, so can vary greatly.

They may start to emerge as early as mid-February or as late as mid-May.

## Why 7-spot ladybird?

Volunteers have been recording this popular and easily identified species as part of Nature's Calendar since 2000. In 2015, it will be interesting to see how fast spring moves for the 7-spot ladybird, and how this compares with previous years.

As soon as they emerge, ladybirds urgently need to feed. They have limited food reserves stored in their bodies and after a long winter fast, they need to find early aphids to feed on or they'll die.

Our climate is changing. There is a shift towards un-seasonally mild weather in January and February, which can be followed by more typical freezing spells.

If ladybirds emerge too early, waste precious energy looking in vain for food, or cannot find shelter before the next cold spell, they may not survive. So every year that volunteers send in their sightings to Nature's Calendar, it adds valuable insight as to how this insect is responding to a changing climate.

In general, insects are responding to climate change faster than birds, trees or shrubs, since they only need a few warm days in order to get active.





7-spot ladybird

## Not to be confused with...

**The Adonis ladybird** can look similar to the 7-spot ladybird, but at just 4-5mm it is much smaller. It normally has six spots, although it can have 3- 15 spots.

**Harlequin ladybirds** are very common nowadays; they can be a variety of colours, including yellow or black, and they can also be red with black spots. The number of spots ranges from 0-21, but if it is red with precisely seven spots, it is a 7-spot ladybird.



Harlequin ladybird



Adonis ladybird

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## Fabulous facts

Ladybirds spend the winter asleep or 'dormant', nestled in dense vegetation or bark crevices. They hibernate in large groups, often piled on top of one another, to protect them from the worst of the weather. They emerge in spring to find a mate, eggs are laid in June and the larvae hatch soon after. The larvae form pupae and emerge as a new generation of adults in August, and hibernate from September.

7-spot ladybirds are known as the gardener's friend because they are active predators of aphids.

The 7-spot ladybird is also a migratory species; large numbers fly in from the continent in warm years, boosting our native population.

The bright colours of ladybirds warn predators that they are distasteful. They are also able to exude a pungent fluid to ward off ants, birds and people.

The average 7-spot ladybird will eat more than 5,000 aphids in its year-long life.

The 7-spot is considered to be the ladybird, the name deriving from Christian mythology in which the 'lady' is the Virgin Mary, the red colour of the insect her cloak, and the seven spots her seven joys and seven sorrows.

There are currently 46 species of ladybird in the UK, but the 7-spot is amongst the most common.



7-spot ladybird

WTPL/Anneliese Emmans-Dean

## How fast does spring move?

Nature's Calendar has teamed up with BBC Springwatch to seek your help in answering the question 'how fast does spring move?'

## Recording tips

Once you have seen a sign of spring, please record it! Remember that you need to register on the Nature's Calendar website first.

Registration [naturescalendar.org.uk/bswregister](https://naturescalendar.org.uk/bswregister)

Recording [naturescalendar.org.uk/survey/login](https://naturescalendar.org.uk/survey/login)

Please choose somewhere you visit regularly (at least weekly) to make your record, to help ensure that you spot when something happens for the **first** time.