

The Great Stag Hunt



www.greatstaghunt.org

Stag beetles



The stag beetle was found throughout much of western Europe, though in many countries it is now thought to be very rare or even extinct. As a consequence, the stag beetle is included in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). One way we have been working to ensure its survival in this country is to keep a check on where it is found, whilst trying to maintain and increase its range. We ran the Great Stag Hunt in 1998, 2002 and from 2006- 2007, receiving reports of stag beetles from thousands of volunteers across England. As a result, we have been able to draw an accurate map of where they are (see inside). We need your help to find out where the beetles are once again. Please keep an eye open for this spectacular creature throughout the coming summer and let us know about your sightings, either by going online to www.greatstaghunt.org or by filling in the form attached to this leaflet.

Please look particularly in woodlands and in the countryside, places from where in the past we have received only a few records. Is this because there really are fewer beetles in these habitats or because there are simply fewer people to report them? You are likely to see them in towns and dead on roads but the most likely place for a sighting is your own garden! Stag beetles are one of the largest insects in the UK (they can grow larger than a matchbox in size) and they are one of most charismatic beetles we have. The males appear to have huge antlers but these appendages are

actually over- sized mandibles used in courtship displays and to wrestle other male beetles. The females are a little smaller and do not have the characteristic antlers. Stag beetles have a black head and thorax and shiny, chestnut brown or dark maroon wing cases, though they can appear all black at dusk, or when seen under street lamps.

The stag beetle has a very long life cycle lasting at least four years and possibly up to seven. Once they have mated, the females lay small, round eggs below ground near to rotting wood, particularly log piles, rotting tree stumps and old fence posts.

These larvae feed on the decaying wood around them for at least three years after which they will begin to pupate into adults. They build an ovoid- shaped cocoon in the soil, up to 20cm below ground, that can be as large as an orange and take up to three weeks to build. Within it the larva will pupate and finally metamorphose into an adult, emerging from its cocoon in the autumn and spend the winter and spring in the soil.

Adult beetles begin to emerge from the middle of May, with the males appearing a little earlier than the females. The peak emergence period is the middle of June. By the end of August, as summer fades, most of them will die. Very few survive the rigours of winter. During their short adult lives the male stag beetles will spend their days sunning themselves in an attempt to gather strength for the evening's activities, flying in search of a mate.

Beetle ID guide



A stag beetle's head and thorax (middle section) are shiny black in colour and its wing cases are chestnut brown. Adult males can vary in size from 35mm to 75mm long and have large antler-like mandibles.

The females are smaller at between 30- 50mm long, with normal sized mandibles. They are often seen on the ground looking for somewhere to lay their eggs. Males, on the other hand, tend to be seen flying at dusk looking for a mate.

The beetle that is most often mistaken for a female stag beetle is the lesser stag beetle. A large lesser stag beetle can be similar in size and shape to a small female stag beetle. However, the lesser stag is uniformly black all over with matt wing cases, while the female stag beetle has shiny brown or maroon wing cases. Lesser stag beetles tend to have a much squarer overall look. Sending us a digital photo can be of great help to us in telling the two apart.

Cockchafers can be of a similar size to lesser stags and are active on warm nights in May and June, but can be distinguished from stags by their ribbed wing cases and covering of hair.

Male stag beetles (below) grow up to 7cm long



Lesser stag beetles (right) are smaller than female stags and are matt black all over.

Female stag beetles (above left) are smaller, the largest growing to about 5cm.

Cockchafers, or may bugs, can grow up to 30mm, have fan-like antennae and short hairs on their heads.



Survey form



DATE AND TIME OF SIGHTING*	LOCATION (see notes)	SEX & NUMBER	SURROUNDINGS (see notes)	COMMENTS	SIZE (from between jaws to back of body if possible)
14th June 2006 about 7pm	RURAL: 300m south of footbridge over Cloughley's Brook, Wansley, Kent Grid Ref: TR176 642	3 males	Flying along hedgerow, near oak tree	I've seen them along this hedge in previous years	
23rd July 2006 about 8.00pm	URBAN: 17 Birmingham Street, London SE27 0RT	1 male	Crawling on lawn in garden surrounded by dead elm leaves	Attracted to lights in kitchen	

Name

Address

Postcode

Email Where did you hear about the survey?

All the stag beetle data will be made available to anyone in the partnership (Stag Beetle Focus Group) who needs them. If you do not wish to be contacted, other than to receive the results of this survey, please tick the box.

Please post this survey form to: PTES, FREEPOST LON82, 15 Cloisters House,
8 Battersea Park Road, London, SW8 4YY