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Opening extract from

Insects

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A young bush cricket

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How to be an insect spotter

Not all the tiny scurrying, creeping or flying creatures you'll see are insects. You can tell an adult insect by the fact that it has six legs and three main body parts, plus a few other bits, such as feelers.

Don't worry about getting confused, though. This section will help you tell the difference between insects and other creepy-crawlies, and between adult insects and their young.

A high brown fritillary butterfly perching on a thistle flower



Look up, look down

As an insect spotter, you're spoiled for choice. There's a whole miniature world beneath your feet... and in the trees, and in the air above your head. It would be a tough challenge to walk in the park in summer and *not* spot any insects.



Large white butterflies like these ones are very common, especially in gardens, woods and fields.

IMPORTANT INSECT SPOTTING TIPS

- Search carefully and try not to harm flowers and twigs when you're looking for insects.

- Always put logs and stones back where you found them. They're often homes for bugs.

- You have a better chance of finding insects if you move slowly and quietly.

- Be patient. You can discover a lot just by waiting and watching.



A creepy-crawly world

We tend to think of Earth as our own planet, but humans are vastly outnumbered by insects. For every single human being, there are 1.5 billion insects. And that's before you start counting other kinds of creepy-crawlies, such as spiders, snails and worms. (There's more about those on pages 12-13.)

There are about a million known types of insects in the world and thousands of new species of insect are discovered every year. Scientists estimate there might be up to eight million different types of insects, so the ones we already know are just the tip of the iceberg.

Man's pest friends

Insects can be our worst enemies and our best friends. They munch on crops and spread diseases, but they can be very helpful, too. They're nature's recycling team, getting rid of waste so it doesn't pile up.



Dung beetles eat animal dung. So do their young.



Earthworms help break down rotting leaves into soil.



Burying beetles bury the bodies of small animals such as frogs.

They may not look as cute as other creatures, but insects are very creative. They build nests, make paper, cause explosions, cultivate gardens, capture other creatures as slaves, and even farm them, just like we farm cattle.



AMAZING FACTS

- If a beetle fell off the Empire State Building it wouldn't die, it would bounce.

- Some ants "milk" insects called aphids, stroking them so they release a sweet liquid called honeydew. This sounds pretty, but it's aphid poo!

- Hungry bugs eat 20 per cent of all the crops humans grow. That's two out of every ten fields.



Gypsy moth caterpillars are serious pests to trees. They are extinct in the UK, but common in the rest of Europe. They can give you watery eyes or a runny nose if you touch them.