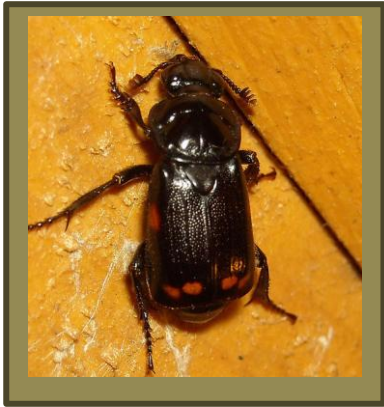


Bug of the Month

by Jim Revell

“Burying Beetle”



Class: Insecta (Insects)
Order: Coleoptera (Beetles)
Family: Silphidae (Carrion Beetles)
Genus: Nicrophorus (Sexton Beetles)
Species: pustulatus
(Nicrophorus pustulatus)



Our bug this month - the *Nicrophorus pustulatus* - is, once again, courtesy of Tom & Linda Esser's "Insect Zoological Park." Linda discovered this beetle (picture below ↓) walking across her kitchen floor (we won't ask).

A common name for our beetle is the "Pustulated Carrion Beetle." It is about 14-25mm (25mm = 1 inch), mostly black, with small elytral spots colored orange.

Among the genus *Nicrophorus*, the *N. pustulatus* has the largest egg cluster, about 200 eggs, and is known to parasitize eggs of its cousin, the *N. orbicollis* (interestingly, not the reverse though). It is also reported to parasitize the eggs of the Black Ratsnake. See the picture at the right, Pustulated Carrion Beetle larvae feeding on ratsnake eggs (Pix: grayratsnake.wordpress.com; Gabriel Blouin-Demers).

In nature, the *N. pustulatus* is not known to show the carcass-burying behavior of its members in the genus; however, in captivity, the behavior is displayed. Burying Beetle adults locate a carcass of a small vertebrate (mouse, vole, bird), and the female and/or male buries the carcass. During this process, they will remove all hair or feathers.

The flesh of the carcass is formed into a sphere (called a brood-ball) in which the beetle secretes oral or anal fluid which may act as a preservative. Both parents will defend the brood-ball from other competitors also wanting the spoils of the carcass.

The female lays her eggs in the corridor leading away from the underground crypt. The larvae feeds on carrion regurgitated by the parent, and on the brood-ball. Depending on the species, the adult male will stay with the brood until they emerge, or until the young leave the brood-ball to pupate in the soil around the crypt.

Burying beetles are good guys, cleaning up carcasses, but with maybe, one flaw, i.e., that of killing another good guy, the eggs of the Black Ratsnake.

References: bugguide.net ■ americaninsects.net ■ msu.edu ■ uconn.edu ■ cedarcreek.umn.edu

Photo References: thies-times.com ■ natureremains.blogspot.com

Jim Revell is a Bedford Extension Master Gardener Volunteer.
Read more of his articles on the "Jims Bugs" page @ www.BedfordMasterGardeners.org

