

This 'Bug' Has Religious Roots to Its Intriguing Name

According to legend, pests were destroying crops, so farmers began praying for help. Lo and behold ... these began to show up in the fields, and the crops were saved. Hence their name ... find out the whole story behind their name, and gain a new appreciation of these helpers.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Who doesn't love ladybugs? They're fascinating to study, and they serve as a natural form of agricultural pest control
- An intriguing fact about ladybugs is that the "lady" portion of their name is a reference to the Virgin Mary
- Most ladybug species are plant-friendly, eating thousands of aphids and other pests during their lifetime. However, a few species eat plants and are pests themselves

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published June 26, 2015.

Who doesn't love ladybugs? They're fascinating to study, and they serve as a natural form of agricultural pest control.

An intriguing fact about ladybugs is that the "lady" portion of their name is a reference to the Virgin Mary.

Most ladybug species are plant-friendly, eating thousands of aphids and other pests during their lifetime. However, a few species eat plants and are pests themselves.

10 Fascinating Facts About Ladybugs



1. **Ladybugs aren't technically bugs ... they're beetles** — Ladybugs, also called ladybirds and lady beetles, belong to the family Coccinellidae. They aren't true bugs, though – they're beetles, as evidenced by their hard shells that hide a set of delicate wings.

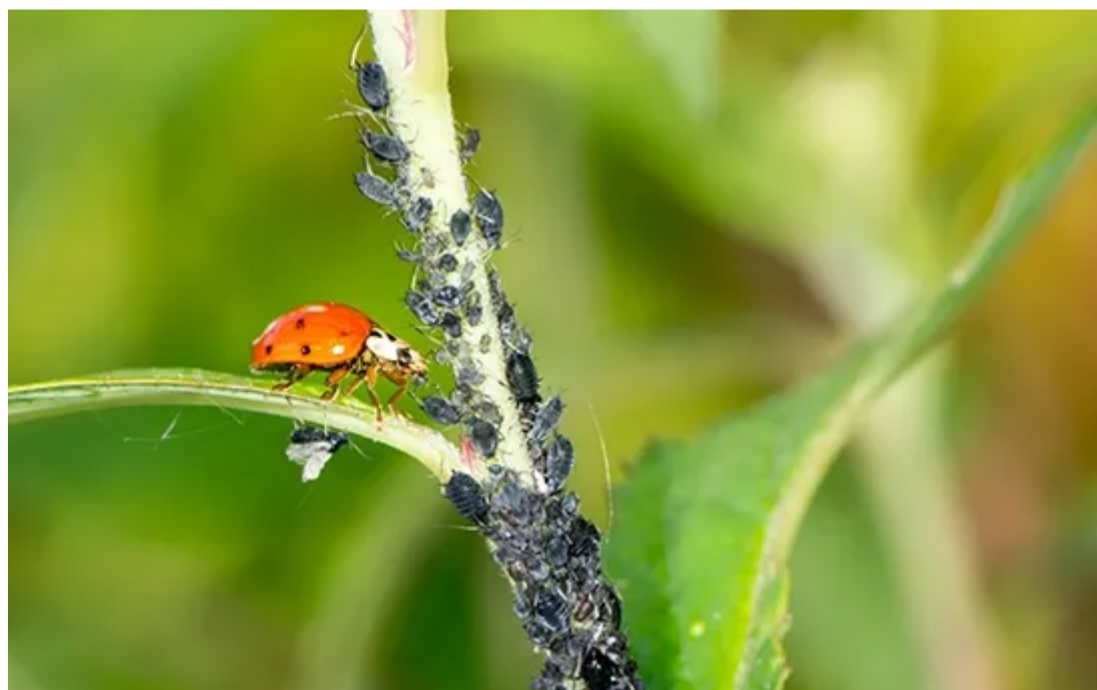
Ladybugs are missing several key characteristics of true bugs, including beak-like mouthparts. They also go through a larval stage, unlike bugs.

The average life span of a ladybug is 2 to 3 years. They grow to 0.3 to 0.4 inches, which is about one-third to one-half the length of a regular-size paper clip.



2. **The “lady” in ladybug refers to the Virgin Mary** — The legend goes something like this: During the Middle Ages, the crops in Europe were being devastated by pests, so the farmers began praying to the Blessed Lady, the Virgin Mary, for help. Lo and behold ... ladybugs began to appear in the fields, and the crops were saved.

The farmers believed the black and red beetles were sent by the Virgin Mary, and so they began calling them lady beetles. The ladybug’s red color is thought to represent Mary’s cloak, and the black spots represent her sorrows.



3. **Ladybugs dine on crop-destroying pests** — One of the reasons ladybugs are popular with humans is they serve as beneficial predators of plant pests like aphids, white flies, and mites. Ladybugs lay hundreds of eggs among colonies of aphids and other pests.

The clusters of eggs include both infertile and fertile eggs. It is thought that the infertile eggs provide a source of food for the larvae that hatch from the fertile eggs. When they hatch, the larvae also immediately begin feeding on aphids.

An adult ladybug can eat 50 aphids a day, and over the course of its lifetime can consume up to 5,000 aphids.



4. **Ladybug colors and markings are variable** — Adult ladybugs are round with a semi-circle shape. They have short legs and antennae, and tiny heads. Most ladybugs are red or orange with black dots, but whether there are dots – and how many – varies from one species to the next. Some species even have black coloring and red dots.



5. **Ladybugs are a turn-off to predators** — The bright colors and distinctive spots on ladybugs are only attractive to humans – not to their predators. The little beetles also harbor a secret weapon: when threatened, they secrete a fluid from the joints in their legs that gives them a foul taste. They can also play dead.

Their coloring is thought to serve as a reminder to predators that they taste disgusting.



6. **Ladybug larvae don't look anything like adult ladybugs** — Ladybird larvae look a bit like tiny alligators. They have long bodies, bumpy skin, and 3 sets of legs that protrude from their sides. They are typically blue, with black or orange stripes.



7. **Ladybugs hibernate** — In the fall when the weather starts to cool, ladybugs seek shelter, typically in protected locations under leaves or behind bark. Thousands of ladybugs can gather in the same place to take advantage of the collective warmth.

The Asian multicolored ladybug prefers to move right into people's houses for the winter. And the species known as the convergent ladybug is known to gather in the mountains in such large numbers they can be scooped up by the bucket.



8. **Ladybugs are everywhere** — Ladybugs can be found anywhere in the world with an available food source and temperatures that aren't freezing. Their range is from North America, excluding the arctic region, down to the southernmost tip of South America. They are found east to Europe and Asia, and Africa and Australia.

Ladybugs can usually be found on milkweed, broccoli, and other plants that attract aphids. Once they eat all the aphids on a plant, they move on to the next plant.



9. **Some ladybug species eat plants instead of plant pests** — Ladybugs belonging to the subfamily Epilachninae are plant eaters that feast on the leaves of beans, grains, potatoes and other crops. Their agricultural effect is usually mild, but populations can grow out of control when their natural enemies aren't present in sufficient numbers. When that occurs, these plant-eating ladybugs can do major damage to crops.



10. **The dots on a ladybug's back do not indicate its age** — A common myth about ladybugs is that the number of dots on its back tells its age. This isn't true, however, it's sometimes possible to determine the species of a ladybug by noticing the number and position of its dots. The seven-spotted ladybug, for example, has seven black dots on its red back.

Sources and References

[Today I Found Out](#)

[Canadian Geographic](#)

[About.com](#)

[National Geographic](#)

[Wikipedia](#)
