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# Ladybird spider

(*Eresus sandaliatus*)

The male spider's stunning appearance helps attract a mate

|        |            |
|--------|------------|
| Phylum | Arthropoda |
| Class  | Arachnida  |
| Order  | Araneae    |
| Family | Eresidae   |
| Genus  | Eresus     |

Diet: Insects that they ambush in their burrows

Size: 10 to 16 mm

Rarity: Endangered and critically rare



## What's the story?

Thought to be extinct in Britain, the Ladybird spider was rediscovered on a Dorset heathland in 1980, where only a few individuals remained. With careful management this population has grown to around 1,000 spiders.

Each year a few spiders are moved onto new sites in the Dorset heathlands, with the hope of forming new populations. Transported in plastic bottles filled with soil, moss and leaf litter, the bottles are planted into the ground. The spiders can either relocate or remain in their ready built home.

## Description

Female Ladybird spiders and juvenile males are black and velvety with white stripes on their legs. Mature males develop striking red abdomens with black spots (hence ladybird). Females grow to about 16 mm, while males are typically under 10 mm.

## Lifecycle

Mature males (3+ yrs) emerge from their burrows late April - early May on sunny, calm days. They search for a female to mate with (in her burrow) and then die.

The female spider lays and cares for up to 80 eggs, but dies within a few weeks. Spiderlings emerge the following spring and disperse a short distance (often less than 1m) to find a place to excavate their own burrow.

Females mature after 4-5 years, but may live a few years longer if not found by a male.

## Where in UK?

In the whole of the UK, Ladybird spiders are currently only found on 8 sites in the Dorset heathlands.



## Habitat

The Ladybird spider depends on lowland heathland. They favour south-facing, sheltered slopes with well drained sandy soil. In amongst the stones and heather, they build vertical silk-lined burrows crowned with a canopy of silk.

## Threats

Dramatic declines in heathland habitat due to agriculture, forestry, development and other land-use changes, coupled with the spiders' very specific requirements, all increase the vulnerability of the Ladybird spider to extinction.

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