

### An extraordinary life cycle

Oil beetles have one of the most extraordinary life cycles of any British invertebrate – they are nest parasites of solitary mining bees. Female oil beetles dig nest burrows in the ground, into which they lay hundreds of eggs. Once hatched, the active, louse-like, larvae climb up on to flowers and lay in wait for a suitable bee. Their hooked feet enable a firm hold on an unwitting bee collecting pollen for its own nest. Once in a bee's nest the larva disembarks and eats the bee's eggs and the store of pollen and nectar. The larva develops in the bee burrow until it emerges as an adult ready to mate and start the whole cycle again.

### Looking for oil beetles

Oil beetles are conspicuous, charismatic insects which are often encountered when walking and enjoying the countryside. Their habit of seeking out bare ground in which to dig nest burrows means that they are frequently seen on footpaths. The best time of year to look for oil beetles is March to June.

### Oil beetle conservation

Oil beetles are a priority species for conservation in the UK, as populations have declined due to loss of flower-rich habitats owing to changes in countryside management. Oil beetles have an intimate relationship with solitary bees and are therefore dependant on the health and diversity of wild bees. The ideal habitat for oil beetles is wildflower-rich grassland and heathland – two habitats that have been lost from large parts of our countryside. By submitting your oil beetle records you are playing an important part in the conservation of these magnificent invertebrates.

### How you can help

**Please submit your oil beetle records and photographs to the iRecord app or send them in directly to the National Oil Beetle Recording Scheme.**

[buglife.org.uk](http://buglife.org.uk)

[coleoptera.org.uk/meloidae/home](http://coleoptera.org.uk/meloidae/home)

Cover photo: Violet Oil Beetle

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Black Oil Beetle digging her nest burrow.



Violet Oil Beetle larvae on a lesser celandine flower.



Violet Oil Beetle larva hitching a ride on the back of a solitary mining bee.



# Join the Oil Beetle Hunt



**Buglife needs your help to find these fascinating but threatened beetles**



**Saving the small things that run the planet**

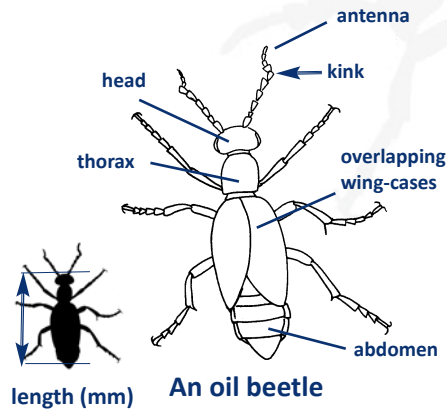
This leaflet was produced through Species on the Edge, a partnership programme of eight conservation organisations, funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.  
Find out more at [www.speciesontheedge.co.uk](http://www.speciesontheedge.co.uk)

Oil beetles are incredible insects, but they are under threat. Three of the UK's native oil beetles are thought to be extinct, and the remaining five species have suffered drastic declines due to changes in the way our countryside is managed.

### Identifying oil beetles

There are five species of oil beetle found in the UK. The **Violet** and **Black Oil Beetles** are widespread and can be locally common. The **Mediterranean**, **Rugged** and **Short-necked Oil Beetles** are rare.

Oil beetles can be identified in the field using this guide. By studying this beetle diagram before you start you can familiarise yourself with the names of the beetle body parts and key identification features. Please take photographs of the oil beetles you record and submit them with your records.

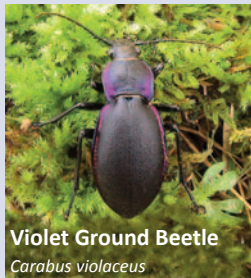


### Beware lookalikes!

Oil beetles are distinctive but can sometimes be mistaken for other beetles like these. Oil beetles have **overlapping wing-cases** which are usually shorter than their abdomens. The beetles below all have wing-cases which do not overlap.



**Bloody-nosed Beetle**  
*Timarcha tenebricosa*



**Violet Ground Beetle**  
*Carabus violaceus*



**Leaf beetle**  
*Galeruca tanacetii*



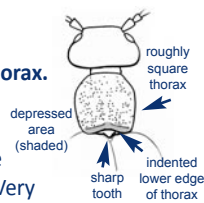
**Devil's Coach Horse**  
*Ocyrops olens*

### Violet Oil beetle

*Meloe violaceus*

Has a roughly **square-shaped thorax**. Males have **kinked antennae**. Females have slightly-kinked antennae. Black with violet-blue reflection or all black in colour. Very similar to the Black Oil Beetle but it has an **indented lower edge of the thorax with a depressed area at the base**. Has a **distinct sharp tooth at the base** of the thorax.

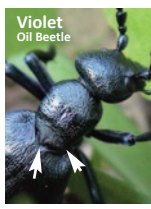
Found from March to June in meadows and woodlands in western and northern areas of the UK.



Life Size  
up to 30 mm  
long



Violet Oil Beetle



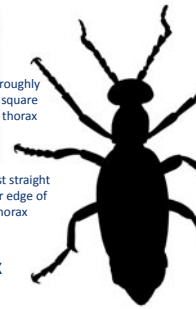
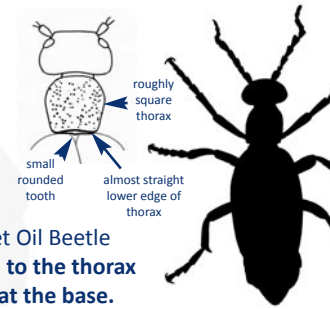
Black Oil Beetle

### Black Oil Beetle

*Meloe proscarabaeus*

Has a roughly **square-shaped thorax**. Males have **kinked antennae**. Females have slightly-kinked antennae. Black with violet-blue reflection or all black in colour. Very similar to the Violet Oil Beetle but it has an almost **straight base to the thorax** with a very **small rounded tooth at the base**. There is no depressed area at the base of the thorax.

Found from March to June in meadows and coastal grassland throughout the UK but becoming less common in the north.



Life Size  
up to 30 mm  
long



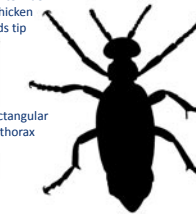
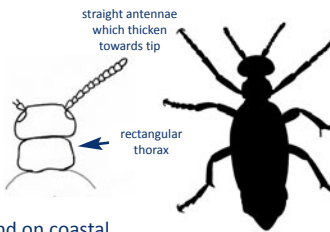
Black Oil Beetles

### Short-necked Oil Beetle

*Meloe brevicollis*

Has a **rectangular-shaped thorax** which is wider than it is long. The antennae are short, straight and slightly thickened at the tips. **Shiny, blue-black** in colour.

Rare, found from March to June. Found on coastal grasslands, dunes and heaths with sandy soils in south-west England, south Wales, and western Scotland.



Life Size  
up to 24 mm  
long



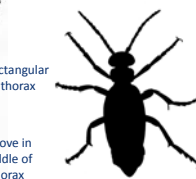
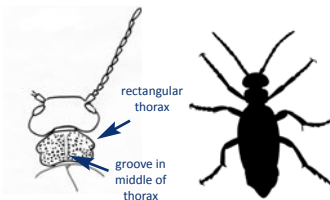
Short-necked Oil Beetle

### Rugged Oil Beetle

*Meloe rugosus*

Has a **rectangular-shaped thorax** which is wider than it is long, with a **distinct narrow groove in the middle**. The antennae are **straight**. **Dull black** in colour with a roughened surface.

Rare. Mainly nocturnal. Found from September to April in grasslands on chalk, limestone and sandy soils. Found in southern England and Wales



Life Size  
up to 19 mm  
long



Rugged Oil Beetle

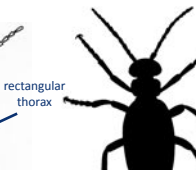
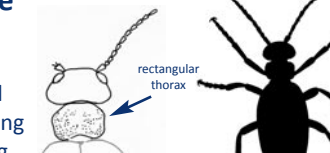
Mediterranean Oil Beetle

### Mediterranean Oil Beetle

*Meloe mediterraneus*

Very similar to the Rugged Oil Beetle. Has a **rectangular-shaped thorax** which is wider than it is long **without a distinct groove** running down the centre. The antennae are straight. **Dull black** colour with a roughened surface.

Very rare. Mainly nocturnal. Found from September to April on coastal grasslands. Currently only known from southern England.



Life Size  
up to 36 mm long  
usually up to 20 mm  
in Britain



Rugged Oil Beetle



Mediterranean Oil Beetle