

## HARLEQUIN LADYBIRDS

Have you seen them? Sightings of this insect have been recorded in Waltham Forest.

This insect has a huge appetite for greenfly, leaving little for native ladybird that then starve. Worse still, the harlequin will turn on other ladybirds if their food resource diminishes. The invader will also prey on other types of insects, eating butterfly eggs, caterpillars and lacewing larvae.

The call is for all gardeners, wildlife enthusiasts and anyone with a love of ladybirds to examine trees, bushes and plants and record the harlequins they find.

There is a UK-wide survey to track this alien ladybird that threatens the existence of the native species. They are hoping not only to monitor the harlequin and its impact but also to use the whole study as a model for how to deal with invasive species. Originally from Asia, the harlequin was probably imported into the UK on plants that came in from continental Europe.

Residents are asked to report any sightings of the harlequin ladybird, including where it was found (using a grid reference or postcode), the date and how many ladybirds there were. A photograph of the ladybird would also help verification of each find. It is critical to monitor this ladybird now, before it gets out of control and starts to annihilate our own British ladybirds. Scientists want gardeners and wildlife enthusiasts to report sightings of the pest to [www.harlequin-survey.org](http://www.harlequin-survey.org)



The picture above shows some of the variations in the appearance of the harlequin ladybird. Because the species is so variable it can make identification difficult. Here are some features to look out for...

### SIZE

It is larger than the majority of our native species - approximately 6-8 mms. Our native 7-spot ladybird is similar in size, but the harlequin does not have the same arrangement of spots. The Scarce 7-spot are always found near wood ants nests, but the harlequin is not.

### SHAPE

The body is much rounder than most British ladybirds.

### COLOUR

It can be red, orange or mainly black (melanic). Native melanic ladybirds are rarely seen and they are usually much smaller.

### SPOTS

It can have anything from 0 - 19 black spots which vary in size. If it is black it will usually have 4 red patches.

**LEGS**

The legs of the harlequin are brownish and the hind rim of the underside is quite red. Our other large ladybird, the 'Eyed ladybird' has black legs.

**HEAD**

This has a triangular white mark on its head. Our native cream-spot ladybird always has a reddish head with no white patches.