

Minibeasts

Minibeasts are a group of animals that are all 'invertebrates'. This is a term for animals that do not have a backbone. Minibeasts can be found in many contrasting environments. They are able to survive and thrive in places that other animals wouldn't be able to, such as in tiny cracks in walls and within the soil beneath our feet. In the United Kingdom, there are well over 30,000 different species of minibeast, such as stag beetles, caterpillars and snails. The appearance of minibeasts can vary greatly. Some species, like ladybirds, are able open their shells to release wings, allowing them to fly. Other species such as earthworms are able to generate slime, which allows them to move easily underground. There are also species like caterpillars and millipedes that have elongated bodies and a large number of legs. Some are coloured to allow them to easily hide on leaves and branches.



In the Garden

Gardens hold a dizzying array of minibeasts. Honeybees and bumblebees are often found in the vicinity of flowering plants. They are incredibly important to the life of the garden as they collect pollen to make honey and by hopping from flower to flower, they transfer the pollen to the parts of the plant needed for more flowers and plants to grow. This is known as pollination.

Minibeasts need the right conditions in which to thrive. If a garden or park has a hedge skirting round it, you might be lucky enough to find a stag beetle. These are the largest insects in Britain, and can grow up to 7cm long. They have a hard outer shell, known as an exoskeleton, and large, extended jaws that look like the antlers on a deer's head. Finding a stag beetle is increasingly rare as they are quickly becoming extinct. Soon, this species will have disappeared from the United Kingdom forever. If you are on the hunt for beetles, the best places to find them are dark and moist. They especially like to hide in rotting wood and leaves, as they have food and also somewhere to live in safety.

In Ponds and Rivers

Minibeasts are also found in ponds and rivers. There are insects that spend their entire lives in or near water. Minibeasts tend to have brief lives, with most living much less than a year. A large number of minibeasts begin their lives as larvae (babies) born in water and then once they have matured to adulthood, they may then have the ability to fly or live on land. Insects like dragonflies and mayflies emerge from larvae, transforming into large, four-winged insects which spend the rest of their lives on the tall reeds and grasses that surround the water. Not all minibeasts that live in ponds and rivers are insects. Some spiders live in water. Because water spiders don't have gills they have a clever way to get the air they need to breathe. They spin webs on the surface and collect air bubbles to fill it. They use these air bubbles to breathe whenever they need to!

Questions about Minibeasts

Answer in full sentences.

1. Name two places where you might find a minibeast.

2. Why can't you see a ladybird's wings if it isn't flying?

3. Where would you look if you were trying to find a beetle?

4. Why are bees important?

5. Why is it hard to find a stag beetle?

6. How are stag beetles different from earthworms? Give two ways.

7. How do water spiders make sure they can breathe?

8. Write a short description of a minibeast you have seen. Use adjectives to give a full description.

