

## **Ladybugs or Ladybeetles**

**by Lloyd Eighme retired entomologist**

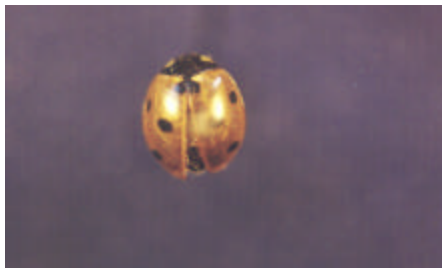
Insect common names are not usually chosen by entomologists. Common names frequently refer to the habits or appearance of an insect, but the origins of many common names are unknown and unexplainable. Some books say the name ladybug has some religious connotation. Most people remember the children's rhyme; ladybug, ladybug fly away home; your house is on fire, your children will burn. Like many other common insect names, ladybug implies a taxonomic error, but we still use it anyway because it is so widely known. In the beginnings of insect classification, scientists established group names such as family and order to organize the vast number of kinds of insects into a system that made it easier to study them. Common names of families and orders are also used such as butterflies for the order Lepidoptera and beetles for the order Coleoptera. Someone decided on the common name "true bugs" for the order Hemiptera. I do not know what they meant by the word true. Other orders are not fake bugs. Most people refer to all insects as bugs, but entomologists have to discriminate and use the common name bug to refer only to the order of true bugs Hemiptera (Hemi=half; ptera=wing. Half of the front wing is membranous). The ladybug is actually a beetle in the order Coleoptera (Coleo=sheath; ptera=wing) and it does not fit in the order Hemiptera. But, do not worry, use the common name ladybug and everyone knows what you mean, even entomologists. Most books about insects will use the common name Lady Beetle, but hopefully you will now understand why they do that. It is a beetle, not a bug.

One of the most widely known lady beetles is the one offered for sale in the gardening catalogs. Its common name is Convergent Lady Beetle because of two converging white lines on the thorax behind the head. Its species name is Hippodamia convergens which also refers to the converging white lines. The Convergent Lady Beetle is collected during the winter where it is found hibernating in clusters of thousands of beetles at the base of trees in the forest. In the spring they are mailed to gardeners who purchased them to control aphids on their rose bushes. Its first instinctive reaction is to fly from hibernation back to the gardens and fields where it came from, so it may not stay in the garden where it was released, especially if there are no aphids there, but it will eventually settle down and lay its eggs where it finds lots of aphids. Adult lady beetles do eat aphids, but not as many as the hungry rapid growing larvae that hatch from the eggs. Unfortunately, most people do not recognize the ugly larvae as even related to lady beetles and often try to destroy them, thinking they are a dangerous pest. The pupae are also mistaken for something harmful because they are fastened to a leaf or fruit by a pointed structure that looks like a beak, but actually it is the tail. Finally, when the adult lady beetles emerge from the pupa, then people recognize it as their friend. You can do a lot of good by teaching

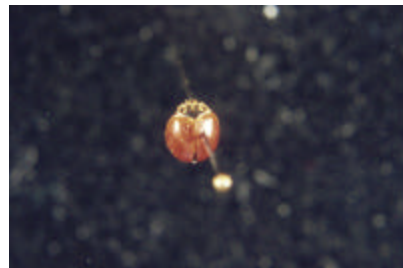
people to recognize the larva and pupa of a lady beetle, so they will not harm them.

There are more than 40 different species of lady beetles found in the Puget Sound Basin. We have collected and identified 15 species here in Skagit County and there are no doubt others that we have not discovered yet. Be sure to look at the lady beetle specimens in the Master Gardener collection where they are labeled with common names as well as scientific names.

Two common species in Skagit County are the Seven-spotted Lady Beetle (*Coccinella septempunctata*) and the Western Blood-red Lady Beetle (*Cycloneda polita*). At my place, I see the Seven-spotted Lady Beetle mostly in the garden and the Western Blood-red Lady Beetle on my apple trees. Each year people bring a small (less than 1/8 inch) beetle to clinic that they find on fruit trees, especially apple, wanting to know what it is and what it is doing. It is good to be able to tell them it is the 20-spotted Lady Beetle (*Psyllobera 20-maculata*) and not to worry about it. Actually, it does not feed on aphids, but rather it eats the mildew on the leaves. It does not do any good, but it is not harmful either, so there is no need to try to get rid of it. I wonder how many people have sprayed their apple trees to destroy a harmless little lady bug. I mean lady beetle!



The Seven-spotted Lady Beetle  
(*Coccinella septempunctata*)



The Western Blood-red Lady Beetle (*Cycloneda polita*)



A lady beetle larva



A lady beetle pupa