

Australian Minibeasts

Minibeasts are small animals that are found in places like gardens, rivers and houses. There are lots of different kinds of minibeast such as spiders, beetles and butterflies. Some minibeasts have lots of legs; some have wings.



Photo courtesy of William (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence

In the Garden

There are lots of minibeasts to be found in people's gardens. One of the most common spiders which can be found in gardens are the female redbacks which are extremely poisonous. The adult female redbacks have a black abdomen with a red stripe, which is how they got their name. The male redbacks are rarely seen. They are much smaller and do not have the red stripe. An antivenom for redbacks has been around since 1956 and since then, no human fatalities have been recorded.

You could also see butterflies gently flying with their big, colourful wings. You cannot find a baby butterfly because when they are younger, they are caterpillars. The caterpillars eat lots of food, and then build a special cover called a 'chrysalis', which they stay in until they change into butterflies. Butterflies can come in lots of different colours and sizes.

As well as creatures that fly, there are some minibeasts that slide along the ground and up walls. Snails and slugs both have soft bodies and live on the ground. Snails have a hard shell on their backs to keep them safe. Slugs do not have shells. They hide under leaves to keep safe. Slugs are seen as pests as they eat all the plants in people's gardens.

In Ponds and Rivers

Minibeasts don't just live on land but in and around water as well. One insect that lives near the water is the dragonfly. Dragonflies have four wings and long bodies. Some of their bodies can be blue and some are red. They fly very close to the water. They have very big eyes and can see things a long way away.

In Your Home

There are minibeasts that live in people's homes as well. The Australian cockroach is often found inside houses and apartments. They are a tropical breed of cockroach which can travel quickly by darting around and they have wings to help them fly. In Australia, although cockroaches are not harmful, it is very common for people to be afraid of them.

Questions about Australian Minibeasts

Answer in full sentences.

1. Name one place where you could find a minibeast.

2. What is the most common spider you might find in a garden?

3. What is the difference between snails and slugs?

4. How many wings do dragonflies have?

5. How do cockroaches travel around?

6. Finish this sentence.

To help them see a long way, dragonflies have very big ...

Questions about Australian Minibeasts

Answers

1. Name one place where you could find a minibeast.

Children to include one of the following in their answer: pond, garden or house.

2. What is the most common spider you might find in a garden?

The most common spider is the adult female Redback.

3. What is the difference between snails and slugs?

Snails have a shell but slugs do not.

4. How many wings do dragonflies have?

Dragonflies have four wings.

5. How do cockroaches travel around?

Cockroaches dart around or can fly.

6. Finish this sentence.

To help them see a long way, dragonflies have very big **eyes**.

Australian Minibeasts

Minibeasts are animals which can be found in many different environments. They are able to live in water, in the soil and in small cracks and openings. In Australia, you can find all kinds of minibeasts including, spiders, scorpions, stick and leaf insects, mantids, cockroaches, beetles, katydids and many more! They can look very different. Some minibeasts, like butterflies, are able to fly, whereas others, like earthworms, move underground. There are species like caterpillars and millipedes that have longer bodies and a large number of legs, and live mostly on leaves.



Photo courtesy of William (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence

In the Garden

Gardens hold many different species of minibeasts. During the day, spiders are often found near their webs, usually in a crevice or under something. They play an important part in our ecosystem as they eat lots of insects, therefore controlling the population of insects. Spiders are also a food source for other animals, such as birds, lizards and mammals.

Did you know the largest ever recorded insect was found in Queensland and measured a whopping 61.5cm? The insect was a rare giant stick insect, they are so named due to their effective camouflage skills and can even rock back and forth to look like twigs swaying in the wind.

In Ponds and Rivers

Other habitats where minibeasts can be found in great quantities and variety are in ponds and rivers. There are creatures that live in or near water that are like the animals found in gardens. Leeches are very similar to slugs. They have soft, stretchy bodies but live their lives in swamps and rivers. Lots of minibeasts start as larvae (babies) in water and when they are fully-grown, they are able to fly or live on land. Insects like dragonflies and mayflies grow from larva into large, four-winged insects, which live on the reeds and grasses that surround the water.

Staying Alive

Most minibeasts do not have a skeleton like humans; they have a shell on the outside of their bodies to protect them. However, some minibeasts' bodies are only soft. These animals often try to hide or blend in with the plants around them so that they are not seen. The bodies of slugs are completely soft and birds and other predators can easily eat them. Snails carry a hard shell on their backs and are able to pull back into this shell if they feel threatened. Though it is not very popular in Australia, snails are eaten by people in some countries in the world.

Questions about Australian Minibeasts

Answer in full sentences.

1. Name two different species of minibeasts found in Australia.

2. Why are spiders important for our ecosystem?

3. Where would you usually find spiders during the day?

4. How are the skeletons of most minibeasts different from humans?

5. What is a habitat?

6. What name is given to baby insects?

7. How do snails react if they are scared?

8. Which minibeasts have you spotted before? Where did you see them?

Questions about Australian Minibeasts

Answers

1. Name two different species of minibeasts found in Australia.

Children to include two of the following: spiders, scorpions, stick and leaf insects, mantids, cockroaches, beetles, katydids

2. Why are spiders important for our ecosystem?

They help control the population of insects.

3. Where would you usually find spiders during the day?

Children to include one of the following: near their web; in a crevice; under something.

4. How are the skeletons of most minibeasts different from humans?

Humans have a skeleton on the inside of their bodies; insects have a shell on the outside.

5. What is a habitat?

A habitat is where an insect / minibeast / other animal lives.

6. What name is given to baby insects?

Baby insects are known as larvae.

7. How do snails react if they are scared?

If a snail is scared, it hides back into its shell.

8. Which minibeasts have you spotted before? Where did you see them?

Children to give an appropriate answer referring to minibeasts.

Australian 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 Australia, you can find all kinds of minibeasts including, spiders, scorpions, stick and leaf insects, mantids, cockroaches, beetles, katydids and many more! 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.

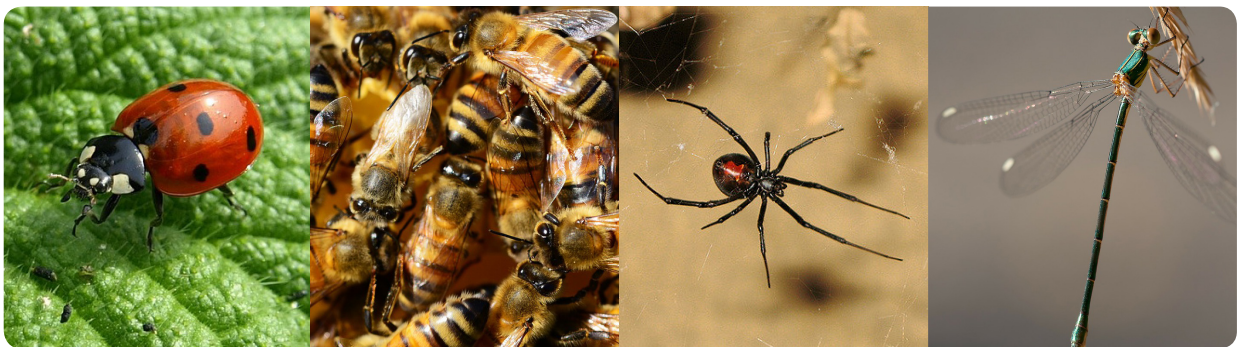


Photo courtesy of William (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence

In the Garden

Gardens hold a dizzying array of minibeasts. Bees can be attracted to the plants in a garden. Australia has a variety of bees ranging from feral bees to over 1,500 species of native bees. Bees 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. Australia's native stingless bees have the potential to play an important role in the country's agricultural industry and they have been successfully used for pollination of crops, for example mangoes, lychees and macadamias in Queensland. While these bees produce their own type of honey, they currently cannot compete with the production of honey from the introduced honey bees. Honey bees are used together with other native bees for most of Australia's crop pollination.

In gardens during the day, spiders can often be found near their webs, usually in a crevice or under something. As of 2015, at least 45,700 spider species have been recorded. They play an important part in our ecosystem as they eat lots of insects, therefore controlling the population of insects. Spiders are also a food source for other animals, such as birds, lizards and mammals. Spiders usually have four pairs of eyes arranged in different patterns, depending on their species. Despite having so many eyes, their eyesight is poor and they rely on vibration, touch and taste stimuli to find their prey.

Minibeasts need the right conditions in which to thrive. The Australian cockroach is often found outside and inside houses/apartments. These minibeasts are famous for their ability to survive, having been around since the time of dinosaurs. They can live almost a month without food and one week without its head! They are a tropical breed of cockroach, which despite its name, aren't a native species. They can travel quickly by darting around and they have wings to help them fly.

In Australia, although cockroaches are not harmful, it is very common for people to be afraid of them.

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 Australian Minibeasts

Answer in full sentences.

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

2. Name two ways spiders find their prey.

3. Why are spiders important?

4. Cockroaches are hardy minibeasts. True or False? Explain your answer.

5. Why are bees important?

6. What name is given to baby insects?

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.

Questions about Australian Minibeasts

Answers

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

Children to include 2 appropriate answers from the text: gardens, ponds, cracks, soil, hedges.

2. Name two ways spiders find their prey.

Children to include 2 of the following: vibration; touch; taste stimuli.

3. Why are spiders important?

Spiders are important as they help control the population of insects by eating them.

4. Cockroaches are hardy minibeasts. True or False? Explain your answer.

True. Children to provide an appropriate answer that references how they can survive e.g. they have been around since the time of dinosaurs; they can survive one week without a head; they can survive one month with no food.

5. Why are bees important?

Bees are important because they create honey but also pollinate flowers and crops, helping new flowers and crops to grow.

6. What name is given to baby insects?

Baby insects are known as larvae.

7. How do water spiders make sure they can 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!

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

Children to write a short description of a minibeast describing its features.