

Noble Chafer Beetle



photo by Chris Harris

Noble chafer are one of our rarest beetles. This metallic, bronzy, green beetle is about 2cm long and is associated with traditional orchards where it is dependent on dead wood and old hollow trees especially cherry, plum and apple.

The key area of distribution of the noble chafer seems to be the fruit growing regions of England - Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire - with occasional records from the New Forest and South Oxfordshire. However it could be that the noble chafer is present in other counties but has gone unrecognised which is why raising awareness of this beetle is so important.

Noble chafers can sometimes be found visiting flowers such as hogweed and angelica in the summer months, feeding on the nectar of the open flowers.

The noble chafer looks similar to the slightly larger rose chafer (*Cetonia aurata*) - see right. The rose chafer has smooth wing cases whereas the noble chafer has wrinkly wing cases with small white spots. There are also differences in the shape of the thorax. The small triangular area between the wing-cases where they join the thorax (the scutellum) is an equilateral triangle in the noble chafer, but elongated in the rose chafer.

They exhibit a preference for orchards that contain mature fruit trees between 50 and 80 years old. These sites are vulnerable to removal or clearance, particularly if the trees are reaching the end of their productive life.

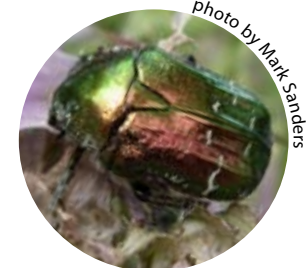


photo by Mark Sanders



Adult noble chafers emerge in early summer and live for about 4-6 weeks. The peak flight season is from late-June through July and August. During this time female noble chafers lay up to approximately 35 eggs in areas of wood mould formed by the action of fungi beneath the bark or in the centre of the trunk of old hollow fruit trees.

The larvae hatch about two weeks later. They are white c-shaped grubs about 3cm long and feed on the rotting wood debris in the tree hollows.

The larvae consume the wood mould and produce characteristic droppings, called frass, which may become abundant and accumulate like fine gravel in hollow branches or trunks.

The pellet-like droppings are at first pale in colour but darken with age. They appear to remain inside trees for several years after they are formed, if sheltered from rain. They provide good evidence that larvae have been living in a tree.