

Press Release

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World's most invasive Ladybird found in Ireland

An invasive species of ladybird has been found in County Cork and County Wicklow. Commonly known as the harlequin ladybird, this is no ordinary ladybird. Experts warn that it could be the most invasive ladybird on Earth and now threatens some of Ireland's unique biodiversity.

The sightings came from two members of the public that spotted the ladybird in their homes. Colette O'Flynn from the National Biodiversity Data Centre believes that the ladybirds were seeking shelter from the cold conditions. She said 'this is not uncommon for this species'.

She added 'the specimens found could represent the tip of the iceberg in terms of a new invasion to the island of Ireland. The harlequin ladybird is one of the fastest spreading invasive species in Europe. We were lucky in the past when two previous sightings from Northern Ireland were not associated with a breeding population in the wild'.

If the harlequin ladybird becomes established, it will lead to a decline and in some cases the extinction of some of our native ladybird species. Ireland has 15 native ladybird species which are threatened by the arrival of the harlequin ladybird.

This is a highly mobile species, which makes controlling it difficult. It can also live in a variety of habitats including trees, low growing plants such as nettles and also cropland. It can overwinter in houses or other sheltered areas.

The harlequin ladybird has a wide and varied diet. It can feed on aphids and other invertebrates. It also feeds on pollen, nectar and ripe fruit. It can, in some circumstances, cause problems in orchards.

This is not just a pest species for our native biodiversity. This species can become a nuisance in homes when it aggregates in sometimes dense colonies. When disturbed, the harlequin ladybird can produce a yellow secretion which can stain soft furnishings.

John Kelly from Invasive Species Ireland said 'We are devastated that the harlequin ladybird has been found in Ireland, and very grateful to the members of the public that reported it. We are working with experts and members of the public to raise awareness and try to establish if we are dealing with a much bigger problem. We're asking everyone to tell us about any suspected cases of this species. For more information on how to identify this species, please see the www.invasivespeciesireland.com website for an ID sheet.'

Ends

Notes for Editors

- Photos of the specimens found in Ireland are available – e-mail coflynn@biodiversityireland.ie to request them
 - John Kelly ISI Manger and Colette O' Flynn National Invasive Species Database Manager are available for interviews
 - Invasive species are estimated to cost Europe at least E12 billion per year
 - The Harlequin Ladybird is native to Asia
 - It is considered an invasive alien species in Europe and North America
 - In France, Belgium and the Netherlands it has been sold as a biological control agent of aphids and coccids since around 1995
 - It was intentionally released in at least 9 other European Countries
 - It is now considered established in 13 European Countries
 - Dr. Roy Anderson officially verified the identity of the two reports from Cork City & Co. Wicklow
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The **National Invasive Species Database** provides up-to-date centralised information on the distribution of invasive species in Ireland. It answers the questions: What invasive species do we have in Ireland? Where exactly are they? The database has been developed as a resource to assist recording, monitoring and surveillance programmes, and provides the infrastructure for development of an early warning system for invasive species.

The associated website: <http://invasives.biodiversityireland.ie> is a portal to the searchable database that is linked to interactive GIS distribution maps with full record information on invasive species sightings. The website also contains Species Alerts that are issued when confirmed sightings of potentially invasive species arrive in Ireland, database up-dates, an Invasive Species Survey where people are urged to report sightings of eight of Ireland's most unwanted invasive plants and record submission facility.

The National Invasive Species Database is joint funded by The Heritage Council and The Environmental Protection Agency and was established by the National Biodiversity Data Centre in 2008.

The **Invasive Species Ireland** project is a joint venture between the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Invasive Species Ireland project aims to substantially reduce the impact of invasive species on Irish biodiversity, to contribute to halting the biodiversity loss by 2010 and beyond; and to minimise economic and social costs caused by invasive species.

Through partnership working, the vision for Invasive Species Ireland is that the island of Ireland will have a high performing system for managing invasive species risks to the economy, environment and human health. The project is working with stakeholders, partners, and the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland to develop an understanding of, and confidence in the systems required to achieve effective prevention and management of invasive species.

For more information on the Invasive Species Ireland project see www.invasivespeciesireland.com