

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Lowdown on ladybugs

Welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

One of the first wild animals that enters a child's world is the ladybug. We're taught from an early age that these easily recognizable insects are benign guardians of gardens, eating aphids and other pests that threaten our plants.

However, when we discuss ladybugs, we aren't talking about a single insect, but a whole family of insects, with nearly 6,000 species world-wide, some of whom have the characteristic red with black spots, and some we would never recognize. And while ladybugs are known for eating aphids, some ladybugs eat pollen, others eat mold spores, while others have become farm nuisances, with the Mexican bean beetle damaging bean and alfalfa and squash lady beetle attacking squash plants.

Here in the Southern Appalachians, when fall comes, ladybugs aren't universally loved as some become problematic as they enter homes, en masse, seeking a warm and suitable refuge from the winter's cold. However, this interloper that gives ladybugs a bad name isn't one of North America's native ladybugs, but rather an Asian import. Several species of ladybugs have been introduced into many parts of the world as a form of pest control, and that's the story with the Asian lady beetle which was introduced into the United States in the twentieth century to control aphids.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.