



Class Insecta, Insects

Order Coleoptera, Beetles

Coleoptera means “sheathed wings.” All beetles have hard forewings, called elytra, which do not help in flying but cover the membranous hind wings and protect the abdomen. Beetles are the largest group of insects, making up approximately 40% of all known insect species. Their habit, diet, and range are quite variable. About 40 families contain predaceous species. All beetles have chewing mouthparts.

Soldier beetles

Family Cantharidae

Description and life history: Soldier beetles are colorful insects, often black or brown with a red, yellow or orange head and thorax. They are elongate and flat with long threadlike antennae. Adults are commonly found on flowering shrubs and trees. The larvae are covered in dark bristles, giving them a velvety appearance. There are 468 species described in North America.

Prey species: Adult soldier beetles feed on pollen and nectar and are predators on a variety of soft-bodied insects, such as aphids. Larvae are highly predaceous, roaming in the soil and feeding on other insects, as well as snails, slugs, millipedes, earthworms, caterpillars, maggots, and locust eggs. One common species, *Chauliognathus pennsylvanicus*, can be found feeding on flower blossoms.



Soldier beetle adult. (303)
Photo: David Laughlin