Give them a safe shelter to pass the winter!

The profile of a common garden insect: the ladybird

Well known amongst gardeners, it comes back every spring to feast on the aphids that parasitize our runner beans, tomatoes and even our broad beans. Ladybirds are familiar, but how much do we really know about them?

For example, did you know that this insect from the Coleoptera family lays clusters of around a hundred dark yellow eggs on the backs of leaves? Larvae are born from them, which shed their skin several times and – about 20 days later – turn into what is called an imago, which is its final form. It lives for around a year, perhaps more if those born in late spring can manage to hide somewhere to protect them from winter.

Ladybirds are essentially carnivorous. Even as larvae, their main menu is aphids, which they consume at a rate of around 100 a day. As an adult, the creature is just as voracious and is estimated to consume around 150 aphids a day but, real gastronomes, they don't turn their noses up at acarids and cochineals. So, they are true gardeners' helpers. **Therefore it is a big mistake to use chemicals to get rid of aphids, as you will also get rid of the ladybirds.** The consequence of this, as counter effect i.e. the lacking of ladybirds is that you will then never be able to stop using chemicals. It is better to let nature do its work and support having these insects in our gardens. You can do this by making them shelters made of twigs, small heaps of straw or dead leaves, a pile of flat stones or even to the extreme by installing "insect houses" sold in garden centres, which aren't deep enough to be efficient and are always more for aesthetic purposes (if you want to make one, it is better to use several planks of wood spaced 5mm apart). The important thing is that they can find a safe shelter to pass the winter; sheltered from frost, heavy rain and birds that hunt them. And if they find a shelter in your garden shed or garage, don't move them: they are inoffensive and will be ready to reproduce at the start of spring. They are insurance for a year without aphids.

It is generally thought that ladybirds are that small red insect with 7 black dots that used to be called "God's [little] cow". In fact, what is little known is that there are many types of ladybird: red, yellow, black, with two dots, 12, 17, and even 24 dots.

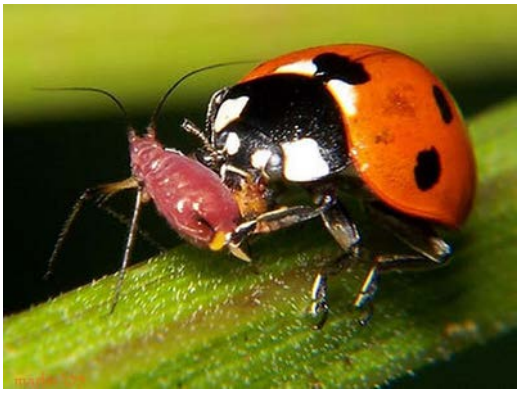
In around 1870 there were 36 species in Europe but pesticides, the loss of hedgerows, and intensive farming have meant that many of them have disappeared. **In 1960 there were only 16 species. Today many are extinct.** A fatal blow to the surviving species in the 1980s was the introduction of the Asian ladybird, an exotic species bred and sold to fight aphids in an environmentally-friendly (!) way. There are many types in an array of colours, but not always easy to distinguish from their European cousins. In fact, they are bigger, more voracious and even more prolific than our local species; they quickly acclimatised and made a large number of our traditional species disappear. They became the most widespread species of ladybird here; with an annoying tendency to invade our houses at the start of winter.

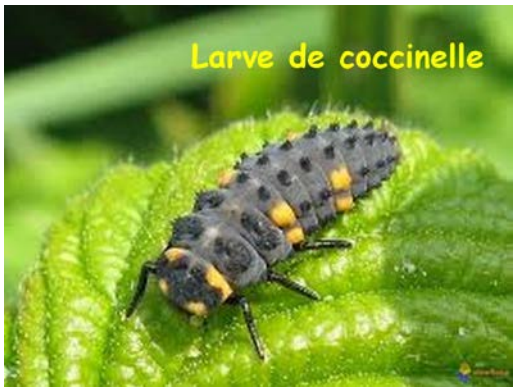
A particular peculiarity about the Asian ladybird: it bites! It doesn't do any harm, as the skin on our fingers is too thick for its little mandibles. But it's a surprise!

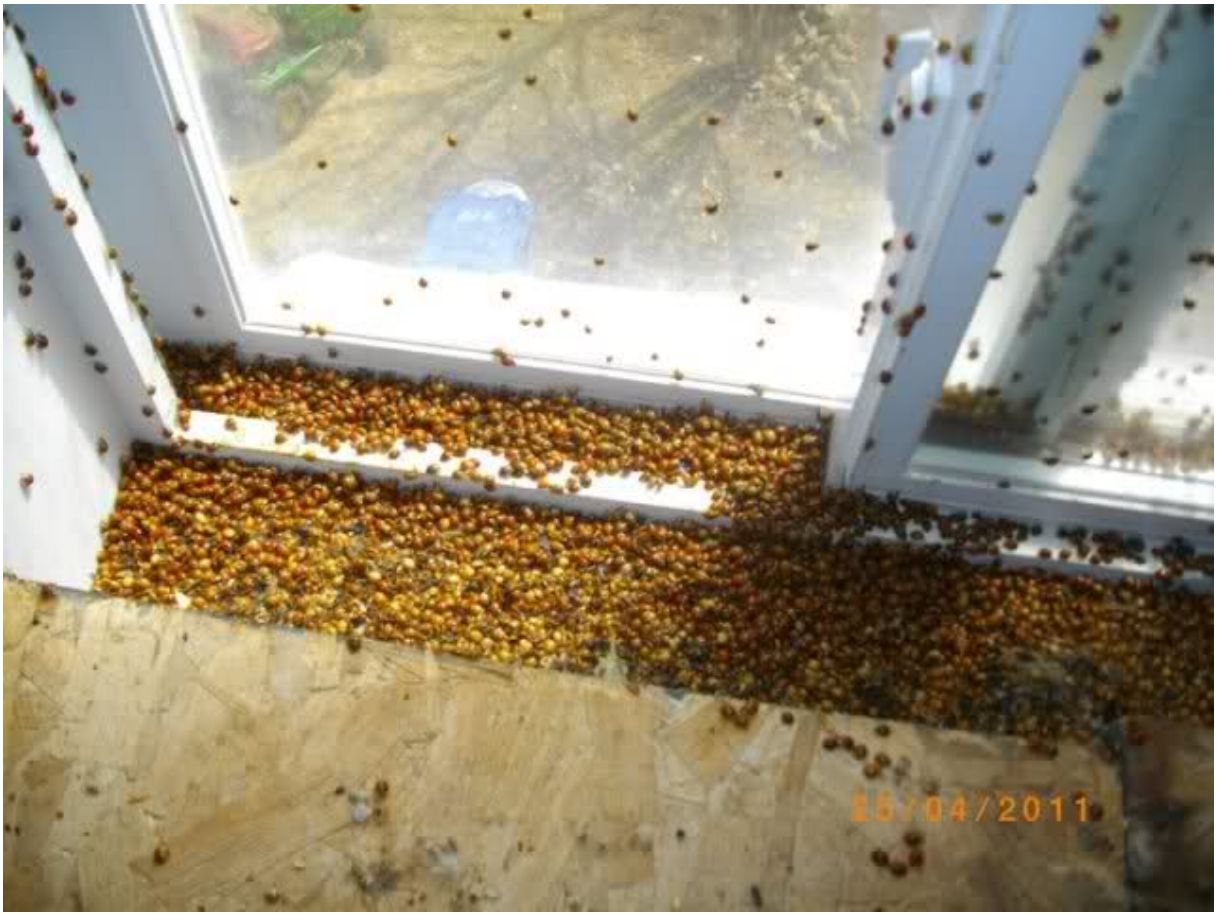
The Asian ladybird lives up to its name as the "aphid ogre"! But did our European species have really to pay the price of this invasion and see a shortage happen?

This is a question that concerns specialists and entomologists. For the majority of gardeners, a ladybird is a ladybird, and given that it gets rid of our aphids, we aren't too bothered about where it comes from.

Alain Redon
Jardin Familial de France no. 502/2017




Larve de coccinelle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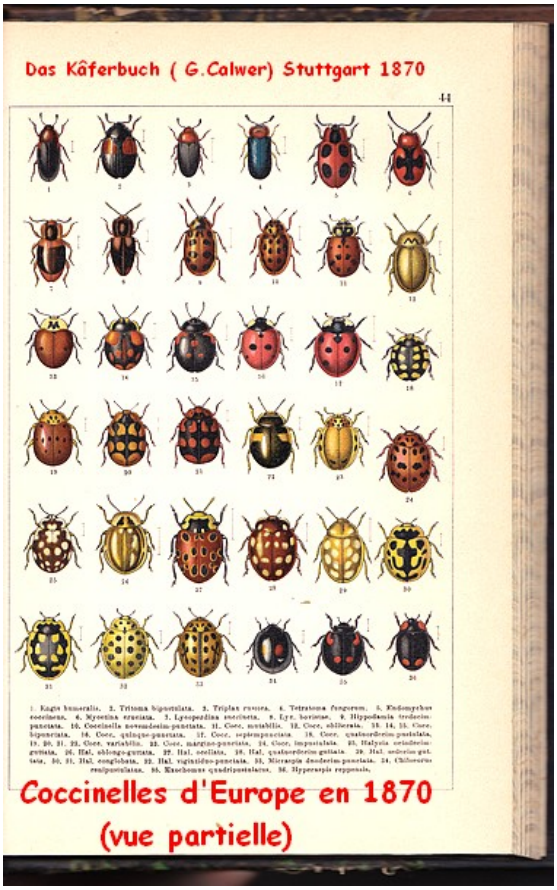

Coccinelles d'Europe en 1870
(vue partielle)

161 — Subcoccinella vigintiquattuorpunctata L., p. 101.
162 — Coccidula scutellata Herbst, p. 101.
163 — Novius cardinalis Muls., p. 102.
164 — Scymnus frontalis F., p. 102.
165 — Hippodamia tredecimpunctata L., p. 102.
166 — Anisosticta novemdecimpunctata L. p. 102.
167 — Titthaspis sedecimpunctata L., p. 102.
168 — Adalia bipunctata L., p. 103.
169 — Adalia bipunctata L., p. 103.
170 — Coccinella septempunctata L., p. 103.
171 — Thea vigintiduopunctata L., p. 103.
172 — Calvia quattuordecimguttata L., p. 103.
173 — Propylea quattuordecimpunctata L., p. 103.
174 — Anatis ocellata L., p. 103.
175 — Chilocorus bipustulatus Schiba, p. 103.

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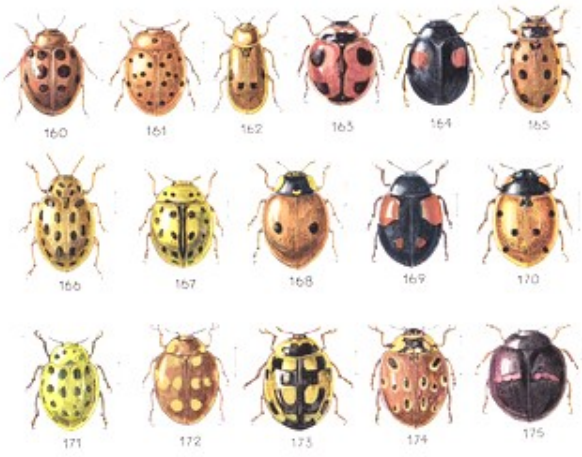

Coccinelles d' Europe en 1960