

## Carrion Beetles (Burying Beetles)

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Carrion beetles, also known as burying beetles, are associated with dead animals. These strong insects can move the body of a small animal to a suitable burying place, remove soil from under the animal, and gradually bury it. The beetles lay eggs on the body, and the larvae feed on it. Recent evidence suggests that the adult beetles feed on maggots associated with the body, rather than on the dead animal itself.

The burying beetle most often encountered in our area (*Necrophorus* sp.) is black and orange, stout-bodied, and measures ½ to 1 inch in length (Fig. 1). This beetle is often covered with very small, tan colored mites, which may be parasites or merely scavengers. Little is known about why these mites are found on the beetle.



Fig. 1. A burying beetle (*Necrophorus* sp.) By A.L. Antonelli.

Another carrion beetle encountered here is a somewhat flattened black beetle (*Silpha* sp.) and it measures about ¾ to ½ inch in length (Fig. 2).

Carrion beetles are generally considered beneficial, since they dispose of and recycle bodies of dead animals. They become a curiosity when people discover them above the ground.

Management of these beetles is unnecessary and not recommended.



Fig. 2. A carrion beetle (*Silpha* sp.)  
By K. Grey.

### References

- White, Richard E. 1983. A Field Guide to the Beetles of North America. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.
- Borror, Donald J. & D.M. DeLong. 1971. An Introduction to the Study of Insects. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Holt, Rinehart, & Winston. New York.