

RED MILKWEED BEETLE

Coleoptera: Cerambycidae

Tetraopes tetraophthalmus

Bug
of the
Month



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Red milkweed beetles are named after their host plants, milkweeds (*Asclepias* species). Milkweeds contain toxins called cardenolides. When the beetles eat milkweed leaves, they use the cardenolides to become toxic themselves. Their bright red color warns predators that they are toxic, which is called aposematic coloration. Toxicity is their best defense against being eaten.

Milkweed beetles are native to the northeastern United States and are commonly found in Pennsylvania milkweed patches.

They can be found on multiple species of milkweed, but mostly use common milkweed. These beetles live near milkweed plants for their entire life cycle. Female beetles lay their eggs inside milkweed stems. In the spring, the eggs hatch and the larvae eat milkweed roots. Adult beetles emerge from the soil in the early summer and feed on milkweed leaves. To avoid eating the sticky sap that milkweed produces, the beetles make notches in the end of the leaves before eating. In the fall, the females lay eggs again and the cycle continues.

When these beetles are startled, they typically make a high-pitched noise and fall off the plant. So, if you find one on your milkweed and touch it, it might squeak!

Red milkweed beetles are just one of many species that lives on milkweed. To learn more about the fascinating insect community found on milkweed, visit the Center for Pollinator Research Website.



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