

Cockchafer

Melolontha melolontha

Insects · On the wing May-Jun



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A large, heavy brown beetle with a black thorax, whitish triangular markings along the sides of the abdomen and remarkable fanned, leaf-like antennae — much larger in males. Cockchafers appear suddenly in May and June around Dumfries, flying at dusk with a loud clumsy buzz and colliding with lit windows, which is how most people meet one.

BEHAVIOUR

The adult life is brief — a few weeks of flying, feeding on leaves and mating. The larva, a fat white C-shaped grub, spends three to five years underground eating roots, and historically caused serious damage to grassland and crops; in past centuries swarms were destructive enough to be recorded in parish accounts. The fanned antennae are scent organs, used by males to find females.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Scarab beetles (Scarabaeidae)
SIZE	25–30 mm
STATUS	Native; common, with numbers recovering since pesticide restrictions

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