

African black beetle

Other names: *Heteronychus arator*

Order: Coleoptera

Family: Scarabidae

Larvae feed on and can damage seedling roots, however, adults cause most of the damage by chewing around the base of seedling stems (girdling them) just below the soil surface. Dead or dying toppled seedlings are often a symptom of African black beetle (ABB). Other related species that cause similar damage or symptoms are the red-headed cockchafer (*Adoryphorus couloni*), *Heteronyx elongatus* and *Gonocephalum elderi*.

The development of protective netting, placed around seedlings, has resulted in significantly less damage being caused by this species. Throughout southern Australia ABB populations are likely to occur in high rainfall zones on ex-pasture sites with heavy loads of ryegrass or Kikuyu.

Larvae are typical cockchafers with curled white bodies and yellow-orange heads. They may grow up to 25mm in length. Adults are shiny black, cylindrical in shape and up to 12mm in length. There is one generation per year. Newly emerged beetles occur in autumn and are dark brown becoming black as they mature.

Mating occurs in spring and egg laying occurs from September to December. Most eggs hatch in November and it is common to find adults and larvae until December. Larvae feed until January - February and then pupate in the soil before emerging as new adults. In autumn (March-April) immature adults actively fly around in search of pastures, before activity declines with cool winter temperatures.



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Heteronychus arator

From top; African black beetle adult; Typical damage symptoms. Damage by *Gonocephalum elderi*, Redheaded cockchafer and *Heteronyx elongatus* results in similar symptoms.



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Gonocephalum elderi

- Adults (6 mm long) are the damaging stage.



Adoryphorus couloni

- Larvae (5-30 mm long) are the damaging stage
- Adults (10-15 mm long)



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E. globulus seedling with protective netting