

American Burying Beetle



Nicrophorus americanus

Identification

The American burying beetle or carrion beetle is 1.0-1.8 in/2.5-3.5 cm long and is the largest burying beetle. It has black shiny hard-shelled wing cases with red-orange markings, an orange spot at the top of its head, and orange-tipped antennae. The markings differ from other burying beetles by having a distinct red-orange mark at the top of the back, just below the head. The American burying beetle was once found across most eastern North America and now occupies a small portion of its former range. Natural and reintroduced populations occupy isolated areas in twelve Midwestern and Eastern states. The American burying beetle is protected as a Threatened Species in the United States.



Photo credit: [Lindsay Vivian/USFWS/Flickr](#)

Observation Tips

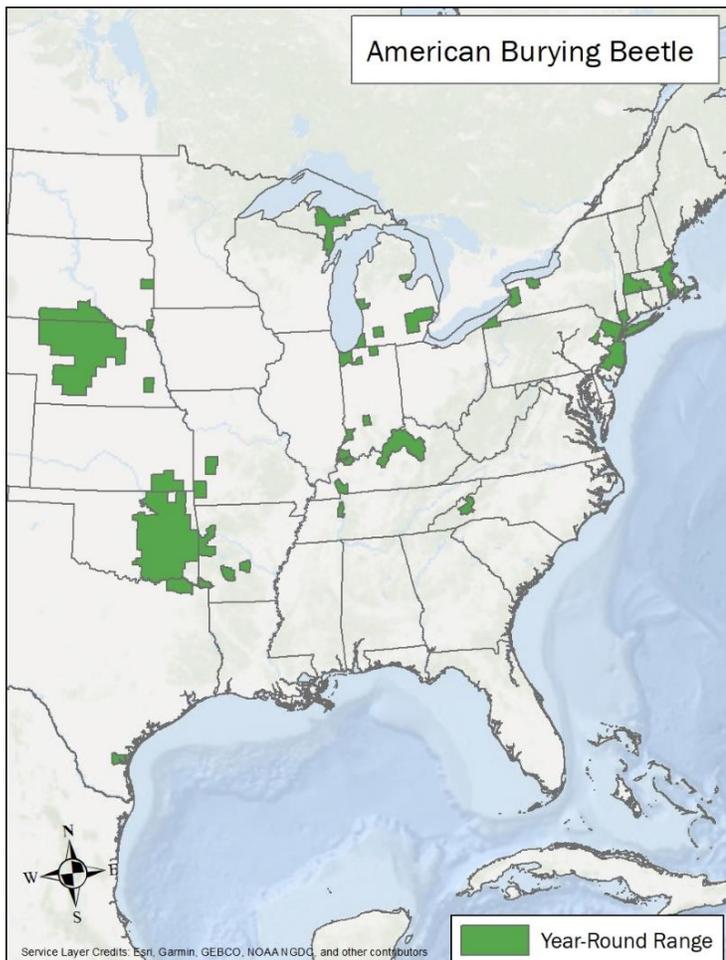
The burying beetle is most active at night. Beetles live for approximately a year and hibernate between late September to mid-May. Breeding occurs between May - June, and adults will bury carrion to feed their young and eliminate competition with flies and ants. The larger the carrion, the more numerous the offspring. Broods can be up to 30, with 15 on average. When beetles are not breeding, they feed on carrion and other live insects.

Interesting Fact

The minimum carrion size for breeding purposes is small birds or mammals. Beetles will fight over highly desirable carcasses until one dominant male and female American burying beetle remain. Together they bury the carcass using secretions to preserve it.

Ideal Habitat

Habitats can be wet meadows, shrublands, grasslands, riparian zones, and forests. Soil type and temperature are important elements for the burying beetle as the species needs moist and non-compacted soil for burying carrion. Overall, beetle abundance is higher in environments that have a higher volume of small mammals. Warmer temperatures from climate change will speed up the decay of carcasses and limit the breeding season's length.



Range map provided by NatureServe

Management Activities that Benefit Species – Best Management Practices (BMPs)

The American burying beetle does well in grazed grasslands and hay meadows that use pesticides infrequently. Maintain abundant populations of small mammals (ie, rabbits, mice and birds). Leaving available small carrion benefits the species. With climate change, extended periods of drought are likely to increase, so increasing practices that retain soil moisture will benefit burying beetles. In suitable habitats, consider the reintroduction of burying beetles.

Management Activities to Avoid

The development of natural areas that reduce the number of small birds and mammals is likely to reduce the availability of carrion to support burying beetle reproduction. Additionally, land use change and human encroachment can fragment beetle populations. Avoid the use of pesticides.

Other Species that Benefit from Similar Habitat Management

Burying beetles are efficient nutrient recyclers and can keep fly and ant populations in check. Management actions that support native birds and small mammals are likely also to benefit burying beetles. Predators of the American burying beetle include skunks, crows, raccoons, and coyotes.

Other Resources

NatureServe: 2021. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application] Version 7.1. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. [American Burying Beetle](#)

US Fish and Wildlife Service: American Burying Beetle [Fact Sheet](#)

US Fish and Wildlife Service: 2019. Species Status Assessment [report](#) for American burying beetle

US Fish and Wildlife Service: Species profile [American burying beetle](#)

St Louis Zoo: About the [American burying beetle](#)

Nebraska Game Parks: [American burying beetle](#)