



Bug of the week

The **28-spotted ladybird or Hadda beetle** (*Henosepilachna vigintioctopunctata*) is a devil in disguise. It is one of very few ladybird beetles that is a pest rather than a beneficial insect. Sixteen species of ladybirds have been recorded in the Cook Islands, but the 28-spotted ladybird / Hadda beetle is the only pest amongst them. It feeds mainly on plants of the nightshade family (Solanaceae) that include agricultural crops such as potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants and peppers. Other hosts include cucumber, melon, courgette, pumpkin and beans. The pest is native in Southeast Asia, but has been accidentally introduced into parts of Polynesia, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil and Argentina. Adults are 6-7mm long, yellowy-orange in colour and usually have 28 black spots on their hard forewings. Adult females lay elongated, yellow eggs in clusters of 5-45, usually on the underside of host plants.



The 28-spotted ladybird or Hadda beetle adult (left) and larva (right) (photos: Mike Bowie)

Eggs darken as they mature towards hatching. Larvae are also yellow to orange, grub-like in appearance, and have about 40 branched spines in rows on their back that are yellow coloured when young, but turn brown-black when older. Larvae reach 8mm in length before pupating. Pupae are spineless and yellow and are found attached to leaves or stem. The life-cycle of the Hadda beetle takes 20-50 days, depending on temperatures and has been known to undergo seven generations in one year. Both larvae and adults defoliate leaves, usually feeding on lower and upper side respectively. Leaf consumption rate of the larvae increases as they age and can result in plants with completely skeletonized leaves. In the absence of parasitic wasps and pathogenic microbes used elsewhere, neem oil is a good option for larger crops where hand removal is not practical.

