



The Variable Ladybird (*Coelophora inaequalis*) or common Australian lady beetle is an extremely useful insect to have in your garden or on crops. This 5mm ladybird is orange-red with black dots on its outer wings which are variable in shape and number (reflecting its common name). The beetles have a thorax and a black line running down the centre of them where the two wings meet in the middle. Although this appears to be the dominant colour pattern in the Cook Islands, variations are seen elsewhere including Australia, New Zealand, South-east Asia and parts of South and Central America.



Adult Variable Ladybirds mating on leaves (Photos: Mike Bowie)



Variable Ladybird larva (left) and pupa or chrysalis (right) (Photos: Mike Bowie)

Adult females lay creamy yellow eggs in batches of about 10 on leaf surfaces near prey and larvae emerge from eggs after about a week. Larvae are black with yellow to orange spots and emerge to seek out aphids to eat. Adults also feed on a variety of aphid species but are also known to feed on honeydew (sticky sugary excretion from aphids, scale insects, psyllids, etc). Ladybirds’ reproduction rate is generally slower than that of aphids, as aphids don’t need to mate and are born pregnant with an embryo inside them. Having no egg stage makes aphids incredibly quick breeders. If ladybirds aren’t controlling aphids, then you can spray soapy dishwater on plants to knock them back or use selective pesticides such as D-C-Tron or Neem Oil that has minimum effect on beneficial ladybirds but kills aphids.

