All about...

Beetles

There are a vast number of beetles in the world, with well over 300,000 unique species. Beetles are a very tough kind of insect as they are able to adapt to even the harshest environment. They can be found on land and in fresh water habitats. Beetles have what is known as an exoskeleton; this is a protective layer on the outside of their bodies rather than bones on the inside like a human has. This hard outside shell is able to separate to allow two sets of wings to be revealed. Not all beetles are capable of flying; some spend the majority of their lives underground.

All Shapes and Sizes

Some beetles are particularly large and bulky, whereas some can barely be seen. The Goliath beetle, found in the dense, moist rainforests of central Africa, in particular the Congo, can reach a length of up to 13cm long. Goliath beetles, however, look tiny in comparison to the incredible Titan beetle. These monsters grow to over 20cm long. Not all beetles are as large as the Titan beetle though. The featherwing beetle cannot be clearly seen by the naked eye. It is so small that it can only be seen in detail under a microscope.

Mind-Blowing Beetle Fact

Beetles have an impressive claim to fame. They are one of the only species in the world that live on every continent. They make their homes in the rainforests of Brazil, the deserts of Egypt and even in the snow and ice of Antarctica! They have the ability to alter their bodies so that they can survive extreme hot or cold, by generating heat or cooling quickly.

Don't Mess with the Beetles!

The majority of beetles are quite small and easy to find so they have developed the ability to defend themselves from predators. Beetles have a variety of techniques to protect themselves. Some of them are able to squirt jets of poison or blood at animals who might seek to harm them. Hunters apply poison to the tip of their arrows, by using an African beetle, like the poison dart frogs in the Amazon rainforests. This is so that they can shoot animals high in trees and the poison will kill them quickly. Amazingly, the bombardier beetle is able to shoot blistering hot, toxic liquid at anything that attacks it.

The best place and time to be a beetle was definitely in ancient Egypt. The scarab beetle was worshipped like a god by the ancient Egyptians and used as a central design for most pottery and jewellery. They gave the scarab beetle special significance, as they believed that it was a sign of new life and new beginnings. A popular myth was that the sun's path across the sky was due to it being pushed by a giant scarab beetle. The Egyptians often used animals to explain natural phenomena like storms and earthquakes. The scarab beetle is known by a different name in modern Egypt: the dung beetle. It spends its days collecting balls of poo, much bigger than itself, and rolling them through the desert to eat later.

Questions About Beetles

Answer the questions below in full sentences.

1. What is a beetle's exoskeleton?

2. In what country might you find the Goliath beetle?

3. What use are beetles to hunters?

4. What does the word unique mean?

5. Why was the scarab beetle important to the ancient Egyptians?
   Give two reasons.

6. Name one way a beetle might defend itself.

7. What does it mean if something can't be seen by the naked eye?

8. What is the most impressive fact about beetles you found?