

Museum objects are irreplaceable evidence of our history and heritage and can really bring your lessons to life. Each of these downloadable resources explores one of the objects in our collection.

For even more ideas, discover our loan boxes at <http://schoolloans.readingmuseum.org.uk/> and search our amazing online database at <http://collections.readingmuseum.org.uk/>

## Stag Beetle (male)



Follow this [link to online database](#) to see the object's full record

### DESCRIPTION

**Object:** Stag beetle

**Museum object number:** REDMG : 1998.186.4

**Length:** 60mm      **Width:** 35mm

**Habitat:** European woodland, mainly dead trees

**Scientific classification:** Coleoptera, family Lucanidae, *Lucanus cervus*

Stag beetles are the largest beetles in the UK, living mainly in southern England. They are invertebrates, meaning that they don't have a spine but a hard outer 'skin' called an **exoskeleton** instead. Stag beetles are insects: they have a head, a middle body called thorax, six legs and an abdomen. The males have black head, thorax and legs, while their wing cases and mandibles are dark red. Beetles' life has four stage. They begin life as an **egg**; become **larvae** when they hatch (blind, with a soft white body and an orange head); change into a **pupa** (sealed within a hard cocoon); and finally emerge as an **adult beetle**. This process takes from three to seven years. Stag beetles spend most of their life underground, emerging only in early Summer.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This is a male stag beetle, the largest can be 75mm, while the smallest are 35mm. Females are smaller and range from 30-50mm. Males can be identified by their large ‘antlers’, which look like the antlers of deer stags. These ‘antlers’ are actually the stag beetles’ jaws, called **mandibles**. They come in a variety of shapes and sizes, a smaller species called the **lesser stag beetle** have short pincer-like mandibles and dull black bodies. Female stag beetles are nearly identical to males, but they have small jaws. Antlers are used by males in courtship displays and in **wrestling matches** with other males to win the attention of a female. They also threaten any animals (and humans) they think are threatening them!

Stag beetles have **wings**, but they don’t fly very well (the larger the antlers, the worse they fly, because of the weight). They can be seen in summer flying to find a mate, usually at dusk. Female stag beetle lay their eggs in rotting wood, which the larvae eat to keep them strong for the pupa stage. Some adult stag beetles eat tree sap, but many don’t eat, and none survive the summer breeding season.

Stag beetles can be found in Reading, but they are rare. Stag beetles are in danger, their habitats are often destroyed, and they are extinct in some parts of Europe. They are a ‘priority species’ and they are taken to a safe habitat if they are found anywhere that might be dangerous (like a building site). Stag beetles are fascinating to watch but be careful not to touch them as the females can bite!

## LINKS TO OTHER OBJECTS

We have a vast collection of insects and animals as well as objects connected in various way with the animal world. These are a few examples.

- [Tropical beetles](#)
- [Red Deer Stag](#)
- [Elk antlers](#)
- [Long-tailed blue butterfly](#)
- [Huntley and Palmers butterfly tin](#)

See also our [Loan Boxes database](#) for related objects.

## IDEAS FOR ACTIVITIES

- **Go on a bug hunt for minibeasts near you**  
What minibeasts can you see - can you draw them?  
What are they like-how do they move?
- **Write a story about the stag beetle’s adventures**
- **Make your own magnifying glass**  
Fill a glass with no more than 10mm of water and look through it to see the details of your minibeasts
- **Draw a stag beetle or design a new insect**  
*It has to have: a head, thorax (with six legs) and an abdomen.*