

Christmas Beetles

There is a group of creatures that is synonymous with Christmas - donkeys, reindeer, turkeys and robins. Beetles do not spring to mind when thinking of the festive season. However, there is a Christmas beetle in Australia. This Christmas it has gone missing. It used to be an indication that Christmas was on its way in the land down under. Yet, sadly, its numbers have declined rapidly. An entomologist from the University of Sydney said, "Everybody over the age of 35 remembers there being huge numbers of Christmas beetles when they were kids, but that just doesn't seem to happen any more."

The Christmas beetle is as unique to Australia as koalas. It's a shiny, harmless bug. The entomologist told the BBC that Australia has a "really unique biological event where Christmas is associated with the arrival of these beautiful, glittery, friendly beetles". She said it was "absolutely critical" to find out why there are so few around. She thinks it is because of habitat loss. In 2020, bushfires wiped out huge swathes of forests. Australia has the worst rate of mammal extinction in the world. Scientists fear the Christmas beetle may also soon die out.

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Vocabulary Matching

Paragraph 1

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| 1. entomologist | a. A time of the year relating to a happy occasion |
| 2. declined | b. A sign or piece of information that shows something |
| 3. synonymous | c. Closely associated with something |
| 4. festive season | d. Became smaller, fewer, or less |
| 5. indication | e. A person who studies insects |

Paragraph 2

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| 6. unique | h. Being crucially important to the success, failure, or existence of something |
| 7. biological | i. The state or process of all of a species dying |
| 8. glittery | j. A broad strip or area of something |
| 9. critical | k. Reflecting bright, shimmering light |
| 10. dwindling | l. Reducing gradually in size, amount, or strength |
| 11. swathe | m. Being the only one of its kind |
| 12. extinction | n. Relating to living things |

True or False

- 1 The article says that beetles aren't thought to be synonymous with Christmas.
- 2 Austria has the worst rate of mammal extinction in the world.

3 An entomologist said that bushfires contributed to the beetle's decline.

4 The Christmas beetle tells people worldwide that Christmas is coming.

Reading Comprehension

1 What nickname for Australia is mentioned in the article?

2 What did Australia's 2020 bushfires wipe out?

3 What in Australia is as unique as Christmas beetles?

4 How are the beetles synonymous with Christmas in Australia?

Class Discussion

1 Why do you think Australia has the worst rate of mammal extinction in the world?

2 Are there any animals that are unique to Japan?

3 What do you think of when you hear the word "beetle"? Does it give you a good feeling or a bad feeling?