



by Marilyn Pease, HCMG

Where Would the World be Without Dung Beetles?

Belonging to the family “scarabaeidae”, our native Texas dung beetles may have a humble day job, but, in fact, are related to the sacred scarabs of Egyptian hieroglyphics. Most are quite attractive beetles, ½ to one inch long, with metallic blue, green or copper wing covers. Some are all black, either shiny or dull. The males have a horn on their face while the females are usually larger in size.

Here in Texas we have several species of dung beetles, including “onthophagus gazella fabricius” which was introduced here in the 1970’s by USDA scientists. According to our A&M AgriLife website, this dung beetle “removes 80% of cattle dung in some parts of Texas.” Given that cow manure creates a huge percent of the methane that contributes to global warming, the lowly dung beetle (of which there are 7,000 species) deserves a little respect.

Definitely considered beneficial, these “tumblebugs” work in pairs to roll a bit of dung into a ball and then into a trench where the female will lay a single egg. The typical c-shaped white grubs will hatch out and feed on the dung. Using their specially modified front legs, dung beetles can move more than 50 times their own weight.

Dung beetles are found everywhere in the world except Antarctica. Australia alone has 400 species. One type in Australia is often introduced into public places to help control dog poop.

So next time you see a couple of little black beetles tumbling along a little ball of poop, stop and say “thanks” because without them, we would be in deep doo-doo!

