

Dung Beetle Fact Sheet: 7

Onitis alexis (Bronze Dung Beetle)



Size: 13-20 mm

Characteristic features: This is a medium sized, two-toned beetle with the front half having a green sheen and the back is a bronze-copper colour. It has a dark green sheen underneath. They possess a uniformly round head pate. The female possesses a distinct knob or tubercle at the back of the head while the male has a sharp spur on the hind margin of each back leg and long slender front legs that are inward pointed at their apex. This beetle can be very abundant in cow pads in the height of summer.

Origin: Native to the Mediterranean regions and Africa south of the Sahel.

Export Distribution: Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia. Other locations likely but not recorded.

Expected distribution in New Zealand: Specific to LOW rainfall regions with dry to very low rainfall winters. Hot, wet or dry summer regions are OK.

Flight Activity: Dusk and Dawn.

Seasonal Activity: Active from spring to autumn.

Dung preferences: Adults show a preference for the dung of large herbivorous mammals like cows and horses but will also utilise sheep manure piles.

Nesting behaviour: Male-female pairs dig a dung-lined tunnel under a dung source to an average depth of 17 cm. The burrow is then stocked with a supply of dung (dung cake is approximately 150-200g), which is made into several sausage-like shapes stuck together. Up to four eggs are deposited into each dung-sausage.

Life Cycle: Development from egg to adult is approximately two months in the summer and up to 10 months if eggs are laid in Autumn. Both Adults and larvae may over-winter. There can be several generations per year in good conditions and habitat. Larvae do not suit moderate to high rainfall or "wet" winters. Cold (to 0°C) and mostly dry is however ok for larval survival.

Abundance: This species inhabits open grassland where they are most active at dusk and dawn. The number of dung beetles per farm depends on many criteria but most importantly the amount of fresh dung available, and dung quality. Chemical residues from livestock drenches can be detrimental but not critical to dung beetle population growth. Dung beetle friendly drenches are available. An integrated approach using dung beetles and drenches is recommended with an awareness of the side effects chemical residues in drenches can have on of dung beetles. For information on dung beetles and drenches please refer to the blog page of the Dung Beetle Innovations website: www.dungbeetles.co.nz/blog/