

# THE SPOTTED MAIZE BEETLE

S. Louw

The spotted maize or pollen beetle (bontmieliekewer) is scientifically known as *Astylus atromaculatus* and belongs to the family Dasytidae. This beetle has a cosmopolitan distribution and possibly originates from Peru in South America.

The adult beetles are about 12 mm in length and have wings with black spots on a yellow background. They are sometimes confused with the C.M.R.\* beetle (fam. Meloidae) but can be distinguished by the long wings that completely cover the abdomen, as well as the fact that they are gregarious and occur in masses on plants. The astylus beetle also has a different life cycle in that the larval stage is non-parasitic (the larvae of C.M.R. beetles parasitize on locust eggs) and the metamorphosis simple and complete.

The life history begins when the adult beetle lays its orange-coloured eggs in clusters under dry leaves or clumps of grass. After about two weeks the hairy larvae emerge and live in the soil, primarily feeding on decomposing vegetable matter. The larvae mature within six months, then hibernate in the soil where they eventually pupate. The pupal period is about

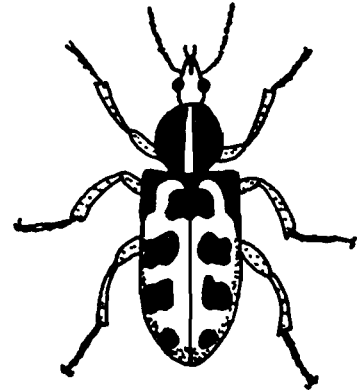
two weeks. The adults live for several months during the summer and there is only one generation a year.

The astylus beetle is not only an enemy of maize farmers, but is also a pest in the garden. Although the adult beetles are primarily pollen feeders which attack sorghum, buckwheat and maize flowers they also damage strawberry crops and the soft, young kernels of maize cobs. In addition the larvae of astylus beetles also cause stand reduction in maize by damaging the seeds just after germination.

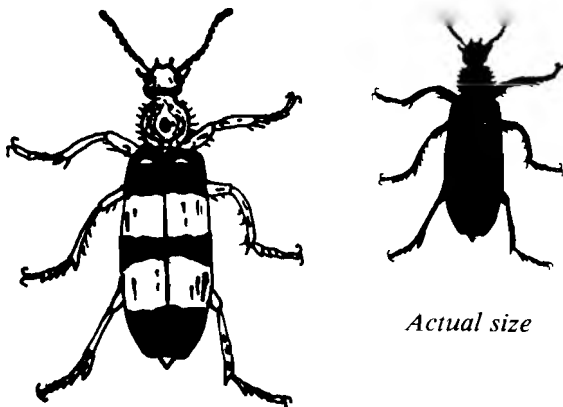
Crops and plants can be protected against adult astylus beetles by dusting the plants with a quick knock-down effect pesticide such as Lindane. To control larvae attacking germinating seeds a soil treatment of Lindane is recommended, while seedlings can be protected by dressing the seeds with a wettable pesticide powder, such as Carbaryl, before planting. ●



Actual size



The Spotted Maize beetle.



Actual size

A C.M.R. beetle.

## Reference

SMITH, B., 1964. *Insects in Southern Africa : How to control them.* Oxford University Press, Johannesburg.

\* C.M.R. is named after the colours of the flag of the Cape Mounted Rifles.