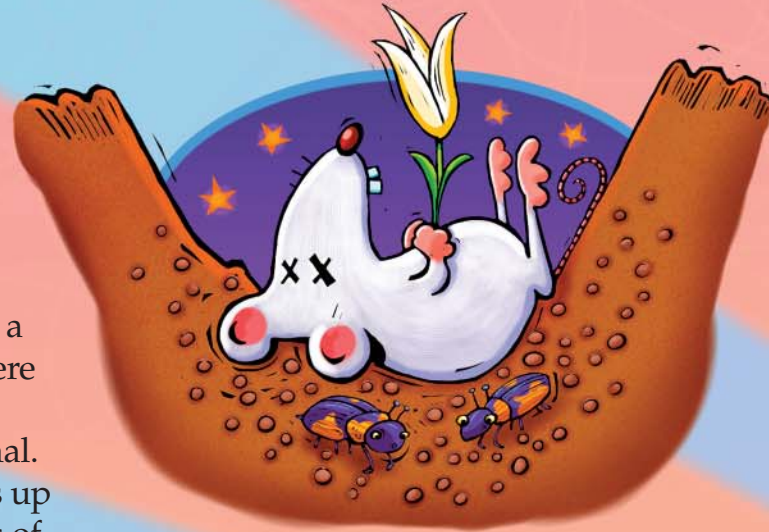


FLESH EATIN' BUGS!

by Lee Lamb

When you see or smell a *carcass*, or dead animal, in the woods, you probably avoid it. But next time pinch your nose and take a closer look. You'll probably see where *scavengers* like coyotes and ravens have munched on parts of the animal. Find a long stick and lift the carcass up or flip it over. Along with hundreds of ants and flies, you'll likely see bright yellow, red, orange or shiny black insects ½- to 1½-inches long called *carriage beetles* feasting on the rotting flesh.



LICKED CLEAN

Some carriage beetles can smell a carcass up to two miles away! They use *olfactory glands* on their antennae—similar to what we have inside our noses—to help them smell. When beetles sniff out a carcass, they fly to it and lay eggs in the soil underneath and around it. Then the adults and the newly hatched *larvae*, or wormlike young, gobble away. Carriage beetles have flat, flexible bodies that let them twist and turn through tight passages and around sharp corners. And they seem to always be hungry. Once carriage beetles have worked over a carcass, you'll find *nothing* left but bones.

NATURE'S UNDERTAKERS

Some carriage beetles are called "burying beetles." They actually hide a carcass before they eat it. A male and female pair will *excavate*, or dig out, the soil from under a small dead animal like a sparrow or mouse until it sinks into the ground. Once they've safely hidden the carcass from other scavengers, the beetles lay their eggs in the soil nearby. When the eggs hatch in about two days, the whole family feasts on the decaying animal.

A TAXIDERMIST'S BEST FRIEND

Have you ever seen the whole bright white skull and dark brown antlers of bull elk or buck deer attached to a piece of wood? That's called a European mount. Some taxidermists use carriage beetles to clean the skull before they bleach it white. They keep the beetles in Plexiglas tanks with really tight lids. When a hunter brings in an elk head, the taxidermist puts it in the tank, and the beetles chow down. On average, carriage beetles will devour every little bit of muscle, eyeball, brain, skin and hair from an elk skull in just 24 hours!

Help the carriage beetle eat its way through the elk skull.

