



Getting good photos of small creatures

What kind of camera is best?

In many ways, a pocket digital camera is ideally suited to taking pictures of small creatures, like ladybirds. Most will allow you to take a photo from as close as 10cm, which is a great help. Some will allow you to get even closer.


Tips for taking the photo

Built-in flash

When you get close to the object that you are photographing, you do not want the built-in flash to fire. In general, the flash will produce too much light when the camera is less than 1 metre from the subject. Look for the ability to disable the flash. Here are typical symbols for different flash modes:

 **Flash on** – Flash will always fire


 **Flash Automatic** – Flash will fire if the light level is low

 **Red-eye reduction flash** – Flash will fire before taking the photo to cause the iris in the eye to close down

 **Flash off** – Flash is disabled

Select the Flash off mode, if you can. If you cannot switch the flash off, then tape a piece of tissue paper over the flash to reduce its output.

Close-up/Macro mode

It is possible that your camera may have a close-up or macro mode. What this means is that it can be set to allow you to get even closer to your subject, sometimes as close as 2cm! This is probably too close but if your camera has this capability, you can use it to get a little closer than normal. The symbol for this mode will look like this: .

Zoom

Most pocket cameras have a zoom lens. Try zooming in on the subject to increase the apparent size of the ladybird.

Image stabilisation

Many newer cameras have what is called 'image stabilisation'. This is just a bit of clever technology in the camera that detects unintentional movement, known as 'camera shake', and compensates for it giving you sharper pictures in low light. There is no typical symbol for this but, if it is available, it is usually switched on as the default. If your camera has this capability, make sure it is switched on.

Summary

Switch the flash off, get close, zoom in and hold the camera steady. This last point is sound advice for any photo.




What can you do after the photo is taken?

If you cannot get too close, if your ladybird is out of reach or is in a patch of nettles, then do not despair. Most digital cameras will capture images that have more information than you might think.

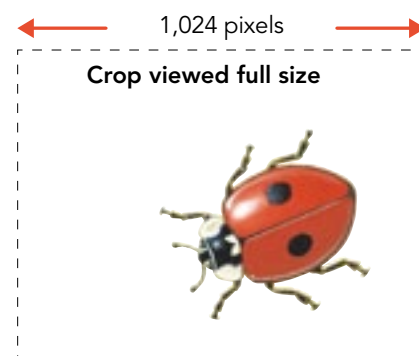
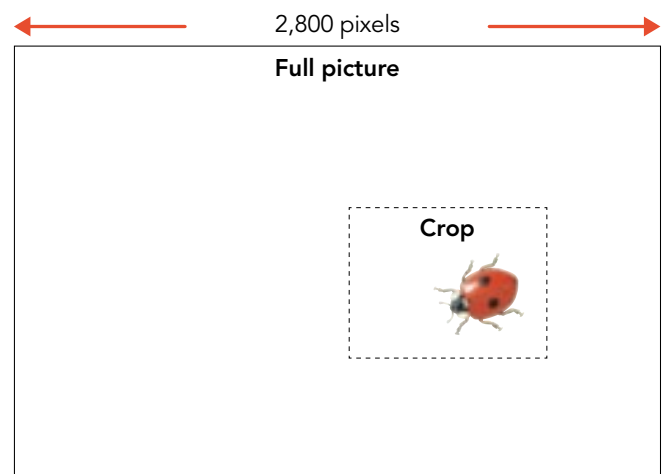
Cropping images

A typical 6 megapixel camera will take pictures with about 2,800 pixels across by 2,100 down. This is a lot of information. Even if the ladybird appears small in the full image, you may still have enough detail to allow identification. It is normal practice to crop images for creative reasons in photography but in this case cropping will allow the required detail to be extracted while creating a small file suitable for email.

The process of cropping an image involves selecting the part of an image that you want to display and deleting the rest.

To crop an image you will need a simple image-editing package, such as Photoshop Elements or software that came with the camera. There are image applications supplied with some computers, iPhoto on a Mac or Photo Editor or similar in Windows and these will generally be fine for cropping an image. The process will either require selection of an area of the photo and choosing crop from the menu or using the crop tool with this symbol, , to select and crop the area of interest.

A good size for attachment to an email is with the long side of the photo at 1,024 pixels or less. This will keep the file size down and therefore speed up transmission. You can check the size of the image, using the size, or resize, option in the edit or picture menus. This will open a dialogue box with information on the image size and resolution. If it is still too large, you can either go back and crop more closely or change the size by typing in the dialogue box. See the illustration below for how this will aid recognition.



Summary

If you follow these simple steps you will be amazed at the photos that you can take of minibeasts with a pocket camera.