

# Life in a DUNG heap



Dung beetles belong to the family *Scarabaeoidea* or scarab beetles. Their lives revolve around dung heaps; they are born there and die there.

There are about 4 500 species in the world of which about 800 occur in South Africa. Ecologically they can be divided into three groups. Rollers, who spread dung across a large area, dwellers, who digest and metabolise the dung where it had fallen, and tunnellers, who dig deeper into



dung by tunneling to the bottom. Their natural enemies are mice and skunks, but a hungry baboon will also feed on dung beetles.

## Rollers

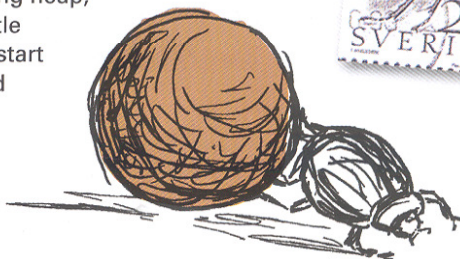
The roller family of dung beetles has a strong sense of smell, which leads them to fresh dung heaps where the male and female work together to form a dung ball. They then roll the dung ball away to a dung-free place where they bury the ball. The female lays one egg per breeding ball. Complete development from egg to adult takes place in the breeding ball, after which an adult dung beetle crawls out of the breeding ball. These dung beetles usually have hooks on their hind legs, which help them to roll the dung ball across all the obstacles along its way. A female lays a maximum of six eggs in her lifetime.



## Dwellers

Smaller dung beetles usually fall into the dweller group. They smell out a fresh dung heap and move in. They eat and lay their eggs in the dung where it has fallen. The complete

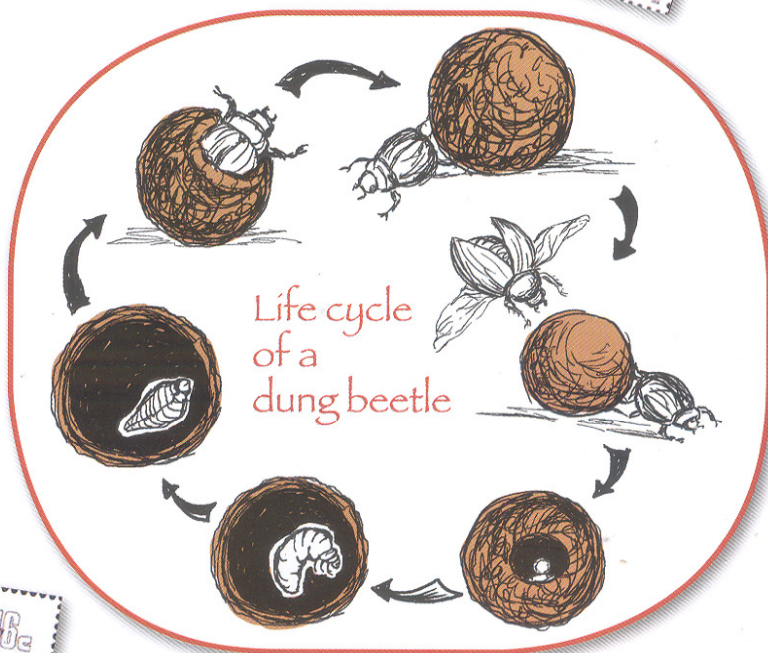
life cycle takes place in the dung heap, after which the new adult dung beetle flies to the next fresh dung heap to start a new cycle of egg, larvae, pupa and adulthood. Adult dung beetles eat only the liquid part



## Dwellers

## Rollers

## Tunnellers



Life cycle of a dung beetle

of the dung, while the larvae also consume the fibrous part. They don't need any other liquid in their diet.

## Tunnellers

Like their name indicates, these dung beetles land in a fresh dung heap and dig themselves through to the bottom of the heap. From here, they dig tunnels under the heap and carry dung into the tunnels where they lay their eggs.

Dung beetles process the dung of herbivores and omnivores. They are attracted to large dung heaps and prefer cattle dung. Apart from dung, they also eat mushrooms and rotten and decaying plants and fruit. They don't require any water since they use liquid from the dung.

By Gina Wilgenbus

