

KS1: Minibeasts

What is a minibeast?

MADDIE: Hello everyone!

CHILDREN: Shhh!

MADDIE: What are you doing?

CHILD: We're looking for minibeasts!

CHILD: We have to be quiet so we don't scare them away.

MADDIE: That's a fun idea but what exactly are minibeasts? All animals in the world fit into six different groups: Mammals, Birds, Reptiles, Amphibians, Fish and Invertebrates. Each group is defined by special characteristics - for example, birds lay eggs, reptiles are cold-blooded, and fish breathe underwater. Minibeasts are small invertebrates - which means they have no back-bone inside their bodies, so some can be soft and bendy - like this worm!

But not all minibeasts are like this. Their soft bodies can make them vulnerable, so lots of minibeasts have a hard outer body called an exoskeleton that covers and protects them. It's a bit like a suit of armour.

Let's meet some of these marvellous minibeasts. This is Craig, the Madagascan Hissing Cockroach, with his handler. In the wild, Madagascan Hissing Cockroaches live in Madagascar.

CHILD: His body feels very smooth!

MADDIE: That is Craig's hard exoskeleton. He has no bones inside his body, so he needs this outer shell to help protect him. He makes a hissing sound to communicate with other cockroaches.

CHILD: What about Speedy? He's an African Giant Land Snail.

MADDIE: Snails like Speedy from Eastern Africa and the garden snails you would see in the UK have a different kind of exoskeleton, they're able to protect their soft bodies by curling up inside their shells!

CHILD: So he carries his house around with him? I definitely couldn't carry my house around on my back!

CHILD: He looks very slimy!

MADDIE: Snails are covered in a slime called mucus, this helps them to move, stick to surfaces like walls, and stops them from drying out. Let's wash our hands after handling these minibeasts. Did you know that minibeasts are some of the oldest species on earth? Grasshoppers existed before the dinosaurs, more than 200 million years ago. Today Invertebrates and minibeasts are by far the largest group in the animal kingdom: 97 percent of all animals are invertebrates.

Lots of minibeasts are able to fly, like this dragonfly. They have wings to escape predators and to find shelter, and new sources of food and water. Minibeasts can look very different and can be all shapes and colours. Some live on their own and some live in large groups or colonies. They can be beautiful colours, like this butterfly, and some blend into their surroundings, like this peppered moth.

Some minibeasts are very fast like this spider, or some, like this slug, are very slow. Certain minibeasts can even live under water. The world has such a diverse variety of minibeasts! Let's hear more about minibeast characteristics from our expert!

YUSSEF: Hi, I'm Yussef and I'm a minibeast expert, and these little minibeasts are called Sun Beetles. Sun Beetles are a type of insect, and there's a few different things to look out for. First of all insects have six legs, and they also have two antennae on the top of their heads that help them to feel their way around. Sun Beetles have a hard outer shell to keep themselves protected, but under this shell is a pair of soft wings that they can use to fly. And these guys are vegetarian and they love to eat fruit, but there are some insects that will eat other insects, and there are even some insects that like to eat animal poo.

MADDIE: What are you doing?

CHILD: We're building our own minibeasts from recycled materials.

MADDIE: That looks like fun! What minibeast characteristics are you including?

CHILD: Mine has a plastic bottle as an exoskeleton.

CHILD: Look at my snail's cardboard shell!

CHILD: I've used bright colours for my butterfly.

MADDIE: Fantastic!