African Dung Beetles

There are dung beetles all over the world. In Africa, there are several different kinds. These busy little insects play a very important part in the way nature works.

Dung beetles are found anywhere that there is dung! They are plentiful on the African plains because there are so many herd animals living there making lots of dung.

These hard-working beetles are about 2-3 cm long. Their heads are small and their bodies are large and broad. They are usually black or copper-brown in colour. They are very strong for their size. They are able to push balls of dung which are ten times bigger and heavier than they are. They do this by standing upside down and pushing with their hind legs while balancing on their front legs. Surprisingly, they can move quite quickly!

You guessed it...dung beetles eat dung! They suck up the liquid they find in the dung. This means that they prefer fresh, moist dung. They are strong fliers with a great sense of smell. They try to find dung within 20 minutes of it being dropped before it dries out.

Dung beetles may discover a mate at the dung pile! The male begins to roll a ball of dung away from the pile and the female goes with him. He sometimes has to fight off other beetles that want his dung ball and his female. The female often hitches a ride on the ball of dung.

When they reach soft earth, the male digs down and makes room to bury his dung ball. It sinks down and is covered with earth. The female lays her eggs in the dung. When they hatch, they feed off the dung all around them. They go through all the stages of growth right there in the dung. Finally, they come out as new adults.

Because they are below the ground, they are safe from enemies such as birds.

Although dung beetles work together with a mate, they do not live in communities as some other insects do.