Key Start

The first page separates the species and groups with obvious markings from those without

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Species of *Nicrophorus* with orange markings on the elytra

*Dendroxena quadrimaculata*

*Oiceoptoma thoracicum*

All others
Long golden pubescence at front of pronotum (i) or around all margins of pronotum (ii). (Look carefully, can be worn and so less obvious)

Pronotum without golden pubescence (iii) (Be aware that specimens of *Nicrophorus* are often dirty, do not mistake dirt for pubescence! (iv)
Hind tibiae curved (i)
Pronotum with long golden pubescence only at front (ii)
One of the commonest species

*Nicrophorus vespillo*

Hind tibiae straight (iv)
Pronotum with long golden pubescence around all margins (iii)
Rare species

*Nicrophorus vestigator*
Club of antenna entirely dark

*Nicrophorus vespilloides*

Club of antenna largely orange
Only last abdominal tergite with golden pubescence (ii)
Anterior orange elytral markings usually almost continuous across suture (i)
(do not rely on this, occasionally more widely separated).
_Nicrophorus investigator_

All visible abdominal tegites with golden pubescence (iv)
Anterior orange markings on elytra widely separated, often more so than posterior markings (iii)
_Nicrophorus interruptus_
Antennae with a very well-defined rounded club

Antennae may be expanded apically, but never with a rounded club
Elytral epipleura black (i)
(view from side)

A very common species

*Nicrophorus humator*

Elytral epipleura orange (ii)
(view from side)

A very rare species in the UK.

*Nicrophorus germanicus*
**Head and mandibles elongate** (i)
Front of pronotum rounded (ii)

**Head and mandibles not elongate** (iii)
Front of pronotum usually emarginate (iv) or truncate (v), (rounded in a few species)
Elytra without raised lines.

*Silpha laevigata*

Elytra with obvious raised lines

*Silpha atrata*
Antennae with terminal segments orange.

Species of distinctive appearance,

*Necrodes littoralis*

Antennae of more or less uniform colouration
At least scutellum (i) with some golden pubescence, may also be present on elytra or not.
Look very carefully at scutellum! Pubescence may be sparse, worn or matted.

Neither scutellum (ii) nor elytra with golden pubescence.
Anterior margin of pronotum rounded, not emarginate (i).

Normally more or less covered with dense golden pubescence.

*Aclypea opaca*

Anterior margin of pronotum emarginate (ii).

Generally with less dense pubescence.
Elytral intervals with raised tubercles or ridges throughout length (i)

*Thanatophilus rugosus*

Elytral intervals without raised tubercles or ridges (ii) apart from a trace of a single ridge in the apical half (iii)
Elytra with extensive pubescence (i). Shoulders of elytra rounded, without a tooth. Underside with dark golden pubescence. Rare species

*Thanatophilus dispar*

Elytra almost without pubescence, some present only at base (ii) Shoulders of elytra with a small tooth (iii). Underside with pale yellowish-gold pubescence. Commoner species, though local.

*Thanatophilus sinuatus*
Second antennal segment about twice as long as third (i)
Front of pronotum rounded (ii)
Very rare species.

*Aclypea undata*

Second and third antennal segments more nearly equal in length (iii)
Front of pronotum truncate (iv) or emarginate (v)
8th antennal segment much longer than 9th (i).

Pronotum distinctly emarginate anteriorly (ii).
Very rare species

Silpha carinata

8th antennal segment not, or very little, longer than the 9th (iii).

Pronotum more or less truncate anteriorly (iv).
All longitudinal lines on elytra strong and clearly raised.

Each elytral puncture with a tiny shining tubercle in front of it.

*Silpha tristis*

Longitudinal lines on elytra weak, and less clearly raised, especially the inner ones.

Elytral punctures without tiny shining tubercles in front.
Elytral puncturation irregular (i).
Shiny species

Silpha tyrolensis

Elytral punctuation quite regular
Dull species

Silpha obscura
Necrodes littoralis (Linnaeus, 1758)

15 - 25 mm.

- entirely black apart from the orange apical antennal segments
- elytra truncate apically
- antennae slightly expanded apically but without a well-defined club

The males have enlarged hind femora, as shown here.

The name *littoralis* suggests, it is perhaps more common near the coast, but there appears to be little evidence for this and it is by no means infrequent inland

Recorded through much of the country but apparently commoner in the south.
Thanatophilus dispar (Herbst, 1793)

7 - 12 mm.

- front margin of pronotum emarginate
- elytra with raised ridges
- elytra with extensive pubescence
- elytral intervals smooth, without tubercles
- shoulders of elytra rounded, without a tooth
- underside with darker golden pubescence

A rare species. Very few records in total, widely scattered.

UK Status: Provisional RDB1 Endangered.
**Thanatophilus rugosus** (Linnaeus, 1758)

8 - 12 mm.

- front margin of pronotum emarginate
- elytra with raised ridges
- raised tubercles on the elytral intervals, between the ridges, throughout (i)

Probably the commonest species in the genus.

Apparently widespread through most of the country, but perhaps scarcer in the south.
Thanatophilus sinuatus (Fabricius, 1775)

9 - 12 mm.

- front margin of pronotum emarginate
- elytra with raised ridges
- elytral intervals without tubercles or ridges, apart from a partial ridge in apical half (i)
- elytra almost without pubescence, only at base. Amount of pubescence on pronotum variable
- shoulder of elytra with a tiny tooth (ii) (may be difficult to see)
- elytral apex different shape in male (iii) and female (iv)

Widespread and locally common at least in England and Wales,
Oiceoptoma thoracicum (Linnaeus, 1758)

11 - 16 mm.

Very easy to recognise from the colour pattern, as shown.

(Be aware that some other Silphidae which are normally black can have reddish forms, while teneral specimens may also be reddish. However, the combination of orange pronotum and dark elytra is only found in this species).

Found on carrion, dung and fungi. Said to have a particular association with the stinkhorn fungus Phallus impudicus.

Recorded throughout Britain.

Apparently common in some areas, but very local in others.
Aclypea opaca (Linnaeus, 1758)

9 - 12 mm.

Distinguished by:

- more or less dense golden pubescence all over
- smooth elytral intervals
- pronotum smoothly rounded in front
- second antennal segment only slightly longer than third

Apparently a vegetarian species which has been a pest of beet crops in the past, but appears scarce at present.

UK Status: Nationally Scarce "A"
*Aclypea undata* (Müller, O.F., 1776)

11 - 15 mm.

- clypeus with a deep triangular emargination
- second antennal segment twice as long as third
- only sparse, dark pubescence, denser on the head
- antennae very gradually expanded apically

A very rare species, with very few British records.

UK Status: Provisional RDB1 Endangered
*Dendroxena quadrimaculata* (Scopoli, 1772)

12 - 14 mm.

A very distinctive beetle which could not easily be mistaken for any other British species.

Unlike other members of the family, this species is normally found on trees, especially oak, where it hunts caterpillars.

Throughout England and Wales.

Mainly in woodland.

UK Status: Nationally Scarce "B".

Appears to have declined in some areas.
Silpha atrata Linnaeus, 1758

10 - 15 mm.

- upperside completely glabrous, without pubescence, even on the scutellum
- elongate head and mandibles
- front of pronotum rounded
- elytra each with three raised keels

While the black variety is commoner, the red type v. brunnea is by no means scarce.

There is also a variety subrotundata with the explanate sides of the elytra deeper and wider. This variety is found in western areas and was at one time considered a separate species.

This species is a specialised predator of snails. The elongate head and mandibles are an adaptation to reach inside the shells of snails.

Widespread throughout. Often common, especially in wooded areas.
Silpha carinata Herbst, 1783

11 - 20 mm.

- head and mandibles not elongate
- upperside completely glabrous, without pubescence, even on the scutellum
- eighth antennal segment (i) much longer than ninth
- pronotum distinctly emarginate in front (ii)

Extremely few British records, from Hampshire and Wiltshire only.

UK Status: RDB1 Endangered
*Silpha laevigata* Fabricius, 1775
12 - 18 mm.

- upperside completely glabrous, without pubescence, even on the scutellum
- elytra without any trace of raised lines (i)
- head elongate (ii)
- pronotum strongly contracted and rounded in front (iii)

Usually on sandy soil, sometimes abundant in coastal regions. Feeds on snails, like *S.atrata*.

Mainly in England south of the Severn - Wash line.
*Silpha obscura* Linnaeus, 1758

13 - 17 mm.

- very indistinctly raised lines on the elytra (i)
- interstices fairly evenly punctured (ii) (much more so than *S. tyrolensis*)
- dull, not shining
- pronotum wide and evenly rounded

UK Status: Provisional RDB2 Vulnerable
*Silpha tristis* Illiger, 1798

13 - 17 mm

- upperside completely glabrous, without pubescence, even on the scutellum (i)
- antennae with second segment only slightly longer than third (ii)
- elytra with three strongly raised smooth keels on each (iii)
- interstices very closely and rather coarsely punctured, each puncture with a tiny shining tubercle in front of it (high magnification) (iv)
- pronotum transverse, with anterior margin truncate

Largely coastal or on sandy soils inland.

Widespread but local, mainly England and Wales.
Silpha tyroliensis Laicharting, 1781

12 - 16 mm

- interstices coarsely, unevenly and rugosely punctured (i)
- shining species (*S.obscura* is much duller)
- elytra usually with the inner two lines very indistinctly raised, and the third (ii) only moderately raised, sometimes with no raised lines

Scattered records, apparently commoner in the north and west of England and Wales.

UK Status: Nationally Scarce "B"
*Nicrophorus germanicus* (Linnaeus, 1758)

The only species that is entirely black apart from the orange elytral epipleura (i) (view from side)

A very rare species, probably only an occasional immigrant and not established as a resident.
*Nicrophorus humator* (Gleditsch, 1767)

18 - 26 mm.

The only resident British species with entirely black elytra, including epipleura.

One of the commonest species, recorded throughout Britain.
**Nicrophorus interruptus** Stephens, 1830

12 - 20 mm.

- antennal club with three yellow segments
- pronotum without golden pubescence
- hind tibiae straight
- **all** visible abdominal tergites with fine golden-yellow pubescence (iii)
- distance between anterior orange markings (i) large, often greater than between posterior markings (ii)

One of the scarcer species, scattered records from the southern half of England and from Wales.

UK Status: Nationally Scarce "B"
*Nicrophorus investigator* Zetterstedt, 1824

12 - 22 mm.

- antennal club with three yellow segments
- pronotum without golden pubescence
- hind tibiae straight
- only last abdominal tergite with golden-yellow pubescence (i) others with dark pubescence (ii)
- anterior orange markings on elytra *usually* more or less continuous across the suture (iii) (but not always)

One of the commonest members of the genus, apparently widespread throughout.
*Nicrophorus vespillo* (Linnaeus, 1758)

12 - 22 mm.

Distinguished from all other species by the:

- curved hind tibiae (i)

It also has:

- golden pubescence on the front of the pronotum only (ii), not on the rear (iii)
- club of the antenna mainly yellow

A common species in England and Wales, becoming scarcer further north and apparently uncommon in Scotland.
**Nicrophorus vespilloides** Herbst, 1783

10 - 18 mm.

Distinguished from other British species by:

- club of antenna entirely black (i), mainly yellowish in all other species

Also:

- pronotum glabrous, without golden pubescence
- hind tibiae straight
- abdomen with dark pubescence, except for a tuft of yellowish hairs at the apex

One of the commonest of the orange-marked species.

Widespread throughout the country.
*Nicrophorus vestigator* Herschel, 1807

12 - 22 mm.

Distinguished from all other species by the :

- golden pubescence around **all** margins of the pronotum (i)

The rarest species of the genus in the UK.

Appears confined to sandy habitats.

Perhaps commonest in the Breckland of East Anglia, otherwise very scattered records from the coast of England and Wales.

UK Status: Nationally Scarce "A"