



# A STAG NIGHT IN COLCHESTER

BY MARIA FREMLIN

It was a stormy evening and just before it got dark I went to water the garden. As soon as I picked up the hose I noticed that stag beetles were cruising along the gap between our house and the next. Gosh, this was unusual.

At the same time some kids were calling at the front door. Guess what? They had also spotted the stag beetles.

From then on the excitement ran very high for all of us, kids and stags, for suddenly there were lots of beetles not just flying very low, they were now on the pavement, fences, in other words, everywhere.

So I quickly dashed for my new digital camera and started shooting. However as it got darker it became apparent that I couldn't see a thing through my camera and worse still that we



could easily step on the beetles. Toby Balcombe, who lives next door, saved the situation by fetching a torch. So he pointed the

torch at the beetles while I lay flat on the pavement with the camera really close to the action.

## WHAT PICTURES DID I TAKE?

Lots and lots. I'm going to show them here in such a way that will enable you to have an idea about how fast things were happening. For instance one photo, not shown here, was taken at 21 hours 52 minutes and 38 seconds. This is when I snapped a male stag beetle being carried head down by another male, an unusual posture but not a good picture.



However 1 minute and 13 seconds after that there was, nearby, a mating pair with an upside down male right next to them (Photo 1 - right). No doubt there was some fierce



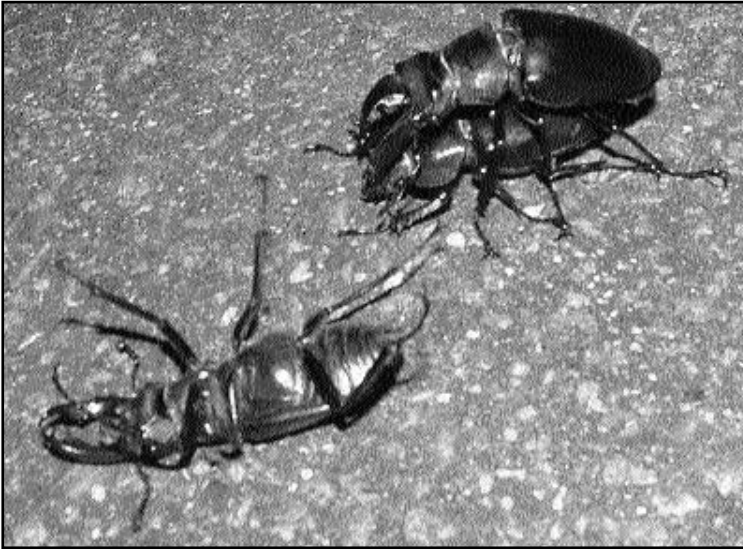


PHOTO 1

competitive mating going on.

Better still somebody had just spotted a humongous male under a car also very near the mating scene (Photo 2).



PHOTO 2



Back to the mating pair, the female was now walking away and at the same time the males had engaged on a fight; this time one was being carried, grabbed by a joint, head up (Photo 3). While they were fighting, surprise, surprise the female had now joined the big guy under the car and they were mating (Photo 4).

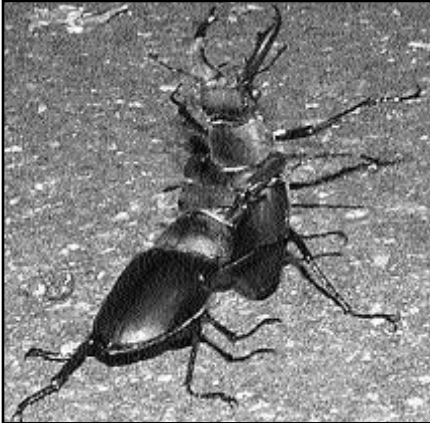


PHOTO 3

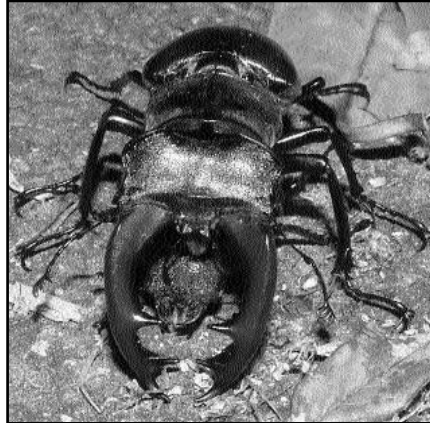


PHOTO 4

But not in peace, for soon they were being disturbed by a tiny, tiny male (Photo 5)! No problems with size and a faulty leg, he soon was in the middle of them (Photo 6) and it took no time for the trio to fall over (Photo 6).



PHOTO 5



PHOTO 6

The big stag soon left the scene and what happened to the other two I have no idea but my very last picture under the car is of yet another hopeful male.

By the way the female was a big girl and the only one I spotted behind my camera, definitely the star of the show.

The whole episode lasted 25 minutes during which the female mated with three different beetles and at least one of which was of her own choice. Interesting behaviour, wasn't it?

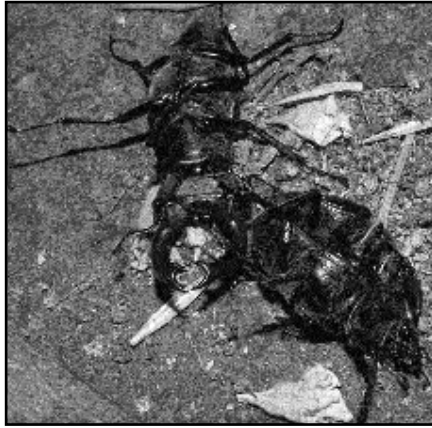


PHOTO 7

The morning after this extraordinary stag night I had a quick check outside and I'm very glad to tell you that there were absolutely no traces of any beetles in the area, no casualties. What I did discover however was that our neighbour across the road, who had missed last night's action, had heard peculiar noises in the garden in the afternoon. Guess what she saw in her fruit trees? A roost of noisy stag beetles! Were they the same crowd, I wonder? Who knows?

If you want to know more about stag beetles visit my website - STAG BEETLES FOR EVERYONE at <http://maria.fremlin.de>. There you will find a slide show of this stag night and more photos of the mighty guy who had mites on his chest, sorry prosternum. Yes I kept him for some measuring and photographing. At 53 mm (excluding the antlers) he was the biggest stag beetle that I have ever seen. After releasing him I saw him a couple more nights flying around and wished him luck.

*By Maria Fremlin*