

# *Sisyphus schaefferi* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Dung beetle

Family: Scarabeidae

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An **unmistakeable beetle** both from a morphological point of view and due to some of its peculiar habits.

Its appearance is characterised by a second pair of exceptionally long legs and a black body with a light-coloured fur, which thins out around the wing sheaths.



(Photo Duncan Noakes, Fotolia)

It prefers highly xerothermic areas and is **coprophilous**. The beetle flies even for long distances to seek out the dung of domestic or wild herbivores just after being deposited; it then forms small balls out of large fragments of dung and rolls them for long distances by pushing them with its front legs.

Precisely this behaviour led to the species' name, which refers to Sisyphus, a legendary figure who was forced, as a punishment inflicted by the gods, to push a weight up the steep sides of a mountain for eternity. The **balls of dung** are subsequently buried in the ground and used both as a food source and for laying eggs.

The balls are shaped as a sphere for two reasons: from a geometrical point of view, it makes the smallest shape with the biggest possible volume, while from a physical point of view it reduces evaporation, the main threat to the larvae.