

Fluoro orange the new red light symbol for randy beetles

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The misguided lovers: a species of male jewel beetle called *Julidomorpha saundersi*. Credit: DPAW Kalbarri

THE frisky male jewel beetles (*Julidomorpha saundersi*), which made headlines in the 1980s for attempting to mate with discarded beer stubbies, seem to be at it again—only this time they are targeting fluoro-coloured safety equipment.

Apparently the beetles came across the beer bottles in WA's outback and mistook the bottle's hue and bumps for that of their female counterpart, albeit, larger, harder and unmoving—a kind of enormous jewel beetle goddess.

So intent were they on wooing these apparent goddesses that they continued their attempts at mating, even while ants attacked their everted soft parts.

While such misguided attention was considered to have an impact on the species' ability to reproduce, it was not deemed a threat to their survival given the vast areas of bush without beer bottles.

But nowadays these misguided Romeos in Kalbarri National Park seem to have given up on the beer bottles, which are thin on the ground, and shifted their attention to the fluoro orange colours of vehicle indicators, witches hats and safety vests

Park rangers installing road signs in Kalbarri National Park last year observed dozens of the male beetle attempting to copulate with these equally unresponsive fluoro-coloured items, according to Department of Parks and Wildlife Mid West district manager Anthony Desmond.

"Current stubbies are presumably less attractive than the old ones as they are now mostly darker and lack the small bumps around the base," Mr Desmond says.

"There is even a rumour floating around that the Swan Brewery made this change to protect the male beetles from frustration.

"Presumably the safety vest material and vehicle indicators also reflect light in a way close to that found on females elytra [wing cases].

"With the number of fluoro clothes prevalent in the environment of WA these days it may be that there is a new threat to the mating system of *Julidomorpha saundersi*."

The Parks and Wildlife rangers are planning a study this year to determine what exactly is attracting the one-track-minded male jewel [beetles](#) to the fluoro items.

Scientists Darryl Gwynne and David Rentz's consequent paper on the beetle's mating with beer bottles proved so intriguing that they won the 2011 Ig Noble Prize in Biology, which honour achievements that make people laugh, and then think.

The prizes are intended to celebrate the unusual, honour the imaginative—and spur people's interest in science, medicine, and technology.

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