# P. M/ Choate

# **Notes:**

There have been many name changes within the Order Coleoptera. Numerous families have been split, and some have been combined. Familys names listed here are those used in your textbook. When a textbook revision is published in 2004 the new family names will be used. Until then, please use the names as they are presented in your text.

# Introduction to the Identification of Beetles (Coleoptera)

P. M. Choate, 2003

The order Coleoptera probably contains the largest number of described species of any insect order. Beetles are found in almost every habitat, and range in size from 1-100 mm. in length. The heaviest known insect is a scarab beetle.

The diversity of this order contributes to the complexity of writing classification keys that encompass all exceptions. Frequently generic keys that are written to cover all species become so complex and lengthy that even experts get bogged down in details. In order to introduce you to this order without adding to the difficulty of identification I have constucted a key to 50+ families of beetles that you should be able to identify (Florida). Keep in mind that there are more than 100 families of beetles, and that this key is only intended to introduce you to the terminology and morphology that you will use in other, more comprehensive keys.

The keys that follow are **dichotomous**, meaning that each couplet has 2 paragraphs of characters from which you are to pick the best match. Through process of elimination you should be able to work your way through this key to a reasonable identification choice. If you find that every couplet seems to be a difficult choice, you have likely made a mistake or the specimen you are trying to identify belongs in a family not included in the key. When you arrive at a tentative identification, look at examples of the family to see if you have a specimen that fits members of that family. Realize that some of the larger families have many different morpho-types, so be cautious here!

Terminology: Beetle identification requires you to become familiar with antennal shapes, tarsi (formulas, shapes of segments) mouthparts (labial and maxillary palpi), ventral characters (sterna, pleura, coxae), and other morphological characters. Size and color of specimens will not usually help you identify beetle families unless you are already familiar with the morphological characters that identify each family. Therefore, do not try to remember families from pictures or by size and color. There is too much variation. Learn the morphology that sets each family apart. Family names have undergone numerous changes with the publication of American Beetles (Arnett and Thomas, 2001) vols. 1 and 2. I follow traditional family names here (sensu Borror, Triplehorn, and Johnson)

### Suborder Adephaga

**Carabidae** - ground beetles, includes *Rhysodidae* and *Cicindelidae* 

Cicindelidae - tiger beetles now treated as Cara-

bidae, tribe Cicindelini

Rhysodidae - now placed in Carabidae

**Haliplidae** - aquatic **Noteridae** - aquatic **Dytiscidae** - aquatic

Gyrinidae - aquatic, surface inhabitants only

## Suborder Polyphaga

**Staphylinidae** - rove beetles, elytra reduced, exposing several abdominal tergites

Silphidae - carrion beetles

**Pselaphidae** - short-winged beetles (very small, <3mm).

**Hydrophilidae** - mostly aquatic, maxillary palpi appear as antennae when viewed from above, antennae shorter than palpi, with well developed club.

**Histeridae** - clubbed antennae, many species very convex and capable of retracting legs into grooves.

**Scirtidae** - (= **Helodidae**) small (<7mm), pubescent species, with swollen femora for jumping.

**Lucanidae**- stag beetles; antennae elbowed, large beetles (>20mm.) 3 genera in Florida, found in panhandle only.

**Passalidae** - Large shining black beetles, adults and larvae occur in colonies in rotting logs. Both sexes with horns

**Scarabaeidae** - "June", "dung", flower inhabiting beetles. One of the largest families of Coleoptera. Lamellate antennae, size quite variable.

**Buprestidae** - metallic wood borers. Closely resemble click beetles but lack clicking mechanism Many species brightly colored or at least with metallic reflection.

Callirhipidae - (= Rhipiceridae)

**Elmidae** - aquatic **Dryopidae** - aquatic

Heteroceridae - semi-aquatic

**Ptilodactylidae** - unusual antennal shapes in males of some species

Elateridae - click beetles

**Eucnemidae** - false click beetles

**Cebrionidae** - males fly when its raining, females are brachypterous.

are brachy prerous.

Lycidae - net winged beetles

**Phengodiae** - glow worms; males fly, female larviform

**Lampyridae** - fireflies

**Cantharidae** - soldier beetles **Dermestidae** - skin beetles

**Bostrichidae** 

**Anobiidae** - death watch beetles

Lyctidae Cleridae Trogossitidae Nitidulidae

**Cucujidae** - flat bark beetles **Languriidae** - lizard beetles **Coccinellidae** - lady bugs

**Endomychidae** - pleasing fungus beetles **Melandryidae** - false darkling beetles **Anthicidae** - ant-like flower beetles

**Tenebrionidae** - darkling beetles, frequently misidentified as ground beetles by beginning students.

Mordellidae - Tumbling flower beetles

Meloidae - blister beetles

Rhipiphoridae -

Lagriidae -

Cerambycidae - "long horned beetles"

**Bruchidae** - seed weevils

**Chrysomelidae** - leaf beetles, with 4 distinctly different body shapes.

Curculionidae - "weevils"

Anthribidae Brentidae Platypodidae

Scolytidae - bark beetles

In order to identify these families you must first be able to separate them into 2 major suborders (**Adephaga** and **Polyphaga**). Beetle family keys and checklists are numerous, frequently regional, and rarely comprehensive. A few of the more comprehensive are:

### References

**Arnett, R. H.**, Jr. 1960 - 1963. The beetles of the United States. Washington, DC. Catholic University Press. xii + 1110p.(includes keys to all of the genera for all families in USA)

**Arnett, R. H., Jr., and M. C. Thomas**. 2001. American Beetles. vol. 1. Archostemata, Myxophaga, Adephaga, Polyphaga: Staphyliniformia. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL.443p.

**Blatchley, W. S.** 1910. An illustrated Descriptive Catalogue of the Coleoptera or beetles known to occur in Indiana. Indianapolis. 1386p.

**Downie, N. M., and R. H. Arnett**.1996. The beetles of Northeastern North America. Vol. 1: Introduction; Suborders Archostemata, Adephaga, and Polyphaga, thru superfamily Cantharoidea. The Sand Hill Crane Press, Gainesville, Florida.880p.(*includes species keys for all families*).

Edwards, J. G.1949. Coleoptera or Beetles East of the

Great Plains. Edwards Brothers, Inc. Ann Arbor, Michigan. 181p.

Peck, S. B., and M.C. Thomas. A distributional checklist of the beetles (Coleoptera) of Florida. Arthropods of Florida and neighboring land areas. Vol. 16. Entomology Contribution no. 862. Florida Dept. Agric. and Consumer Services, Gainesville, FL. 180pp.

**Young, F. N.** 1954. The water beetles of Florida. University of Florida Press, Gainesville. 238p.

# **Coleoptera:** sub-order **Adephaga** or **Polyphaga?**

These 2 sub-orders are based on the positions of the hind coxal cavities in relation to the 1st visible sternite. If the hind coxae are fused to, and divide the 1st visible abdominal sternite (**Figs. 1, 4**), the specimen belongs in **Adephaga.** If hind coxae are on a flexible plate and do not completely divide the 1st visible sternite (**Fig. 2**), the specimen belongs in **Polyphaga**.

Once you are satisfied that you have correctly placed the specimen into its correct sub-order, proceed to the next level of keys (to family).

1st visible sternite

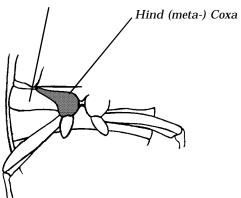
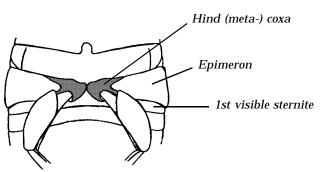
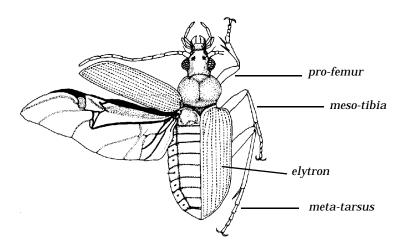


Fig. 1. Adephaga - coxa divides 1st visible sternite



**Fig. 2. Polyphaga** - coxa does not divide 1st sternite; be sure not to confuse the epimeron with the coxae.



**Fig. 3.** Dorsal view of Adephaga beetle, Carabidae. Tarsal formula 5-5-5. Antennae filiform.

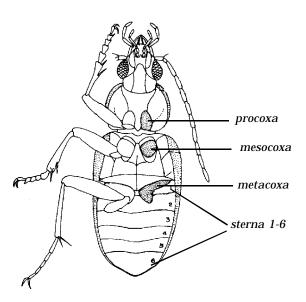


Fig. 4. Ventral view of Adephaga beetle, Carabidae.

# A few reasons why we can't generalize about beetle families:

- There are many long-horned beetles that do not have long horns.
  - There are snout beetles without snouts.
- There are beetles with snouts that are not weevils.
- There are "June beetles" that appear in August.
  - There are ground beetles that live in trees.
- There are aquatic beetles that never go near water (some Hydrophilidae live in dung).
  - There are ectoparasitic beetles.
- Many beetles have fused elytra, with flight wings reduced to small pads.
  - There are blind, eyeless subterranean beetles.
- There are beetles other than fireflies (Lampyridae) that produce light.
- $\,$  The same family may have species that range in size from 1mm to 100mm.
- The same genus may have brightly colored species as well as dull, uniformly colored species.
- The are many volumes of literature dealing with the classification of beetles, but rarely do they agree on higher classification.

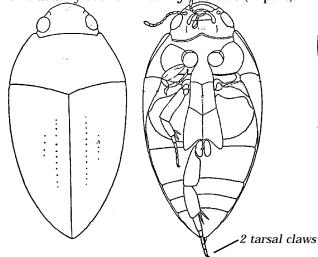
We will introduce you to the diversity of beetles, while emphasizing that this diversity will initially make it seem difficult to become familiar with these families. Once you have made a tentative identification, be sure to check your textbook for comparison. Since it is impractical to include all families here, we have chosen to create a key for the more commonly collected families. Keep this in mind when you are identifying specimens.

# Key to some Florida families of Coleoptera: s.o. Adephaga

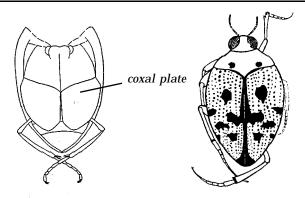
- 1. Hind coxae greatly enlarged, forming a plate that covers attachment of hind legs. Body size 3mm., pale with dark spots (**Fig. 5**) ...... **Haliplidae**

- Legs not modified for swimming. Antennae moniliform Carabidae (Figs. 3, 4) (including Cicindelidini, Rhysodini) \*keys to Florida ground beetles. http://entnemdept.ifas.ufl.edu/choate/florida\_carabidae\_new.pdf

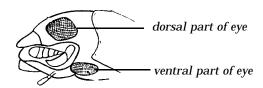
- Hind tarsi with 1 straight claw; abdomen with 6 visible sterna; front coxal cavities open behind; size usually over 5mm ... Dytiscidae (in part)



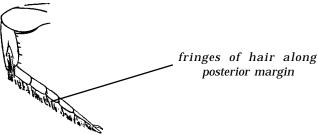
**Fig. 9.** Adult Noteridae. Note 5 visible sterna, 2 claws on hind tarsi. Superficially similar in shape to Dytiscidae, their small size (<5mm) and above characters should make them fairly easy to identify.



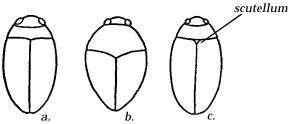
**Fig. 5.** Adult **Haliplidae**. Left - ventral aspect showing coxal plates; right - dorsal aspect.



**Fig. 6.** Side view of Gyrinidae head. Eyes are split into 2 sections.



**Fig. 7.** Hind leg of Dytiscidae showing fringed posterior margin.



**Fig. 8**. Adult Dytiscidae and Noteridae. Note **scutellum** that is visible in many Dytiscidae (c.).

# Key to some Florida families of Polyphaga Coleoptera 1. Abdomen with at least 3 segments corneous (chitinous) dorsally; 1 or more segments exposed by shortened elytra (Fig. 11). Antennae variable, - Abdomen at most with 2 segments corneous dorsally; elytra completely covering abdomen ..... ......5 2. Elytra very short, dorsally exposing 4-7 abdominal segments ...... 3 -Elytra covering most of abdomen, dorsally exposing 1-2 segments ...... 4 3. Abdomen flexible, with 7 or 8 segments visible ventrally; antennae not clubbed distally ....... ..... Staphylinidae - Abdomen not flexible, only 5 or 6 ventral segments visible (**Fig. 11**); antennae with distal segments enlarged, may form a club ..... Pselaphidae, Nitidulidae with shortened elytra 4. Hind tarsi 5 segmented, antennae elbowed and clavate (Fig. 12a.) ...... Histeridae - Hind tarsi 5 segmented, middle and front tarsi 5segments; antennae not elbowed (Fig. 12b) ... ......Silphidae 5. Antennae with lamellate club (Fig. 10) .......... 6 - Antennae variable but not with lamellate club .. 6. Plates composing antennal club flattened and capable of close apposition ...... Scarabaeidae - Plates of antennal club not capable of closing, and not flattened .......7 7. Large black **shining** beetles; antennae curved; both sexes with short curved horn (Fig. 13) on head; elytra deeply striated ...... Passalidae - Large, dull beetles (>20mm); Antennae elbowed (Fig. 14); head without horns; in species with brown coloration, elytra smooth and not striated; if black species, elytra dull and unevenly carinate or shallowly striate ..... Lucanidae 8. All tarsi apparently 4 segmented; 1st 3 segments dilated and brush-like beneath; or 3rd segment - Tarsi variable; one or more pair with 3, or 5 segments; if segment bi-lobed, usually 2nd or 4th

9. Head not prolonged into beak ...... 10



Fig. 10. Lamellate antenna, scarab genus Polyphylla.

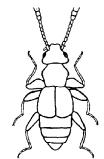


Fig. 11. Dorsal view of Pselaphidae.

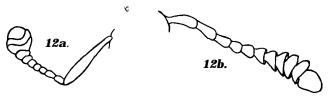


Fig. 12. a. Antenna of Histeridae; b. Silphidae

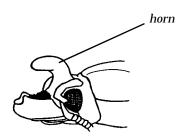


Fig. 13. Head of Passalidae.



Fig. 14. Geniculate antenna of Lucanidae

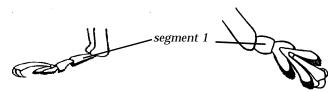


Fig. 15. Tarsus of Chrysomelidae. Apparently 4 segmented, with pads beneath each segment. Segment 3 deeply bilobed.

<ul> <li>Head prolonged into beak (Figs. 16, 17, 18) which may be short and inconspicuous</li></ul>
10. Antennae filiform or nearly so
11. Oval, compact beetles; antennae and body usual ly with scales; elytra shortened, exposing pygidi um; antennae serrate, rarely pectinate; head prolonged into broad "muzzle" <b>Bruchidae</b> – If oval, not with above combination of characters
12. Body elongate; antennae frequently longer that body, inserted on frontal prominence; pronotum unmargined; tibial spurs well developed;
10 Deal of the deal delegated and all the fall of
<ul> <li>13. Beak extremely short and broad; tibiae with series of teeth externally or front tibiae anteriorly produced forming stout curved process at apex antennae short with broad club; small, oval ocylindrical beetles</li></ul>
antennae clubbed or not15
14. First segment of anterior tarsi shorter than 2nd third, and 4th combined; eyes oval, emarginate or divided; head narrower than thorax
<ul> <li>First segment of anterior tarsi very long, longe than 2+3+4 combined; eyes round; head broade than prothorax</li></ul>
15. Antennae straight, without distinct club; beal present at least in female and pointing directly forward ( <b>Figs. 17, 18</b> ); body shape elongate and narrow
- Antennae straight or geniculate, always with a dis tinct club
16. Palpi flexible; beak short and broad; thorax with transverse raised line which is ante-basal or bas al; antennae long, with small but distinct apica club;
- Palpi rigid; beak well developed, frequently long
and downward curved; Curculionidae
17. Hind tarsi clearly 5 segmented

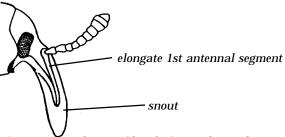


Fig. 16. Lateral view of head of typical weevil

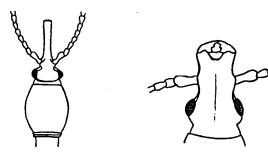


Fig. 17 Female Brentidae

Fig. 18. Male Brentidae

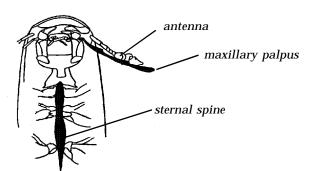


Fig. 19. Ventral view of Hydrophilidae beetle.

18. Maxillary palpi as long as or longer than antennae. (Fig. 19) Antennae with terminal 3-4 segments forming a distinct club. Many species with elongate sternal spine	
1-3 fused ventrally (Fig. 20)	nae. ( <b>Fig. 19</b> ) Antennae with terminal 3-4 segments forming a distinct club. Many species with elongate sternal spine
tin	1-3 fused ventrally ( <b>Fig. 20</b> )
Abdomen with at least 6 segments	tin <b>Dryopidae</b> – Anterior coxae rounded, lacking trochantin
Hind femur joined to side of trochanter	
24. Ventral segment 1 (sternum) more or less equal to sternum 2	
to sternum 2	
but little from coxal cavity	to sternum 2 <b>Bostrichidae</b> – Ventral segment 1 elongate, longer than segment
- Anterior coxae globular	but little from coxal cavity26 – Anterior coxae conical, projecting prominently from
er; antennae 11 segmented, terminating in a 3 segmented club	
backwards into a groove in mesosternum ( <b>Fig. 21</b> )	er; antennae 11 segmented, terminating in a 3 segmented club
sosternum, although it may be prolonged so as to meet mesosternum	backwards into a groove in mesosternum (Fig.
Buprestidae	<ul> <li>Prosternum without process received by the me- sosternum, although it may be prolonged so as</li> </ul>
	Buprestidae

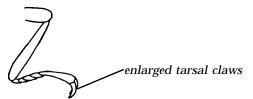


Fig. 20. Dryopidae tarsal claws

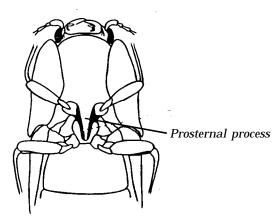


Fig. 21. Prosternal process extending back into mesosternum.

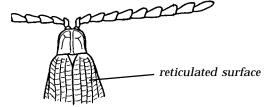
30. Prothorax loosely joined to mesothorax; front coxal cavities ending in prosternum; antennae inserted distant from eyes, insertion narrowing the front Eucnemidae  - Prothorax firmly joined to mesothorax; antennae inserted under margin of front Elateridae
<ul> <li>31. Body flattened, depressed (size generally small, less than 5mm for most species); middle coxal cavities not closed externally by a meeting of mesosternum and metasternum Cucujidae</li> <li>Body convex; middle coxal cavities entirely surrounded by sterna</li></ul>
<ul> <li>32. Posterior coxae dilated into plates partly protecting femora, at least at their sides</li></ul>
33. Antennae serrate or flabellate ( <b>Fig. 22</b> )
34. Anterior coxae globular; tibial spines well developed
35. Middle coxae contiguous; epipleura distinct 36  – Middle coxae distant; epipleurae lacking; elytra reticulated ( <b>Fig. 23</b> ) <b>Lycidae</b>
<ul> <li>36. Episterna of metathorax not sinuate on inner side; epipleura usually wide at base</li></ul>
37. Head more or less covered by pronotum when viewed from above; antennae approximate or moderately distant (they almost touch at base);metathorax epimeron long; many species with glowing organ
38. Hind tarsi clearly with 3 segments; or 4 segmented, with 3rd segment small and concealed in a notch at end of 2nd segment ( <b>Fig. 15</b> ); <i>or</i> <b>all</b> tarsi with 4 segments ( <b>Fig. 25</b> )



Fig. 22. Antenna of Zenoa picea, Callirhipidae.



Fig. 23. Lycidae, showing reticulated elytral sculpturing.



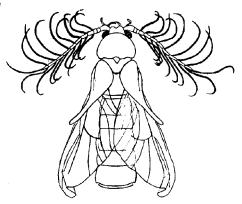


Fig. 24. Phengodidae male showing fimbriate antennae.



Fig. 25. Hind tarsus of Heteroceridae.

39. All tarsi clearly 4 segmented ( <b>Fig. 25</b> ) 40 – Hind tarsi appearing to have 3 segments 43
40. First 4 abdominal segments fused on venter; tib- iae dilated, armed with rows of spines, fitted for digging ( <b>Fig. 26</b> )
41. Tarsi slender; tibiae not armed with rows of spines
42. Frontal coxal cavities closed behind by epimeron ( <b>Fig. 27</b> ); pronotum with or without moderate prebasal impressions; body elongate oval <b>Erotylidae</b>
<ul> <li>Frontal coxal cavities open behind; pronotum without distinct, paired prebasal impressions; body elongate, slender</li></ul>
43.Tarsi with 2nd segment dilated
44. Tarsal claws toothed or appendiculate ( <b>Fig. 28</b> ) first ventral segment with distinct curved coxal lines
45.Anterior coxal cavities closed behind ( <b>Fig. 27</b> ).
- Anterior coxal cavities open behind ( <b>Fig. 27</b> ) . 47
46. Tarsal claws simple; front of head with protruding rim extending from eye to eye, hiding antennal insertion when viewed from above
47. Head not suddenly and strongly constricted at
base
48. Middle coxae very prominent <b>Oedemeridae</b> – Middle coxae not very prominent
49. Metasternum long; epimera of metathorax visible
50.Prothorax with side pieces not separated from pronotum by a suture

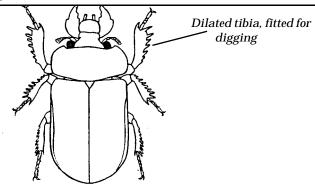


Fig. 26. Dorsal view of Heteroceridae.

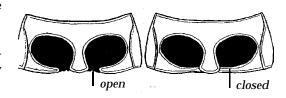


Fig. 27. Open behind and closed behind anterior coxal cavities.



Fig. 28. Toothed tarsal claw, Coccinellidae.



Fig. 29 Tarsal claw, Alleculidae.

- Lateral suture of prothorax distinct; base of pro-
thorax as wide as elytra56
51. Prothorax at base as wide as elytra
- Prothorax at base narrower than elytra 52
52. Hind coxae not prominent
53. Anterior coxae globular, not prominent
<ul> <li>54. Abdomen consisting of 5 free segments, tarsi with penultimate segment lobed beneath</li></ul>
<ul><li>55. Eyes large, oval, finely faceted Pedilidae</li><li>– Eyes small, coarsely faceted Anthicidae</li></ul>
56. Antennae filiform
57. Hind coxae plate-like <b>Mordellidae</b> –Hind coxae not plate-like <b>Melandryidae</b>