

YZC Animal of the Month, March 2010

Jewel Beetle

Megaloxantha bicolor



This insect belongs to the Buprestidae family of beetles. These are the jewel beetles, sometimes also called metallic wood-boring beetles. The specimen on display has faded a little, but you should be able to see its iridescent colours that give the group its name. Some other members of the family are bright emerald green, and some have stripes or bristles.

When you are painting or colouring something in you are using pigments to make the colours. However, the iridescent colour of jewel beetles is

In the insect display near the top of the stairs in the upper gallery of the museum you can find this wonderful beetle. Look at its wing cases – the hard ‘shell’ covering its body. What colour are they? Do they look different when you look at it from a slightly different angle?

not produced by pigments but by microscopic structures in the wing cases. The way the light is reflected off these structures in the causes the iridescence. The same way of making colours is seen in iridescent butterfly wings and bird feathers.