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Dung beetle claims strongest insect title

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AFP

A new study rates a species of male dung beetle, which uses its power to be able to mate with females under animal faeces, as the world's strongest insect.

Onthophagus taurus can pull 1141 times its own body weight - the equivalent of a 70 kilogram person being able to lift 80 tonnes, the weight of six double-decker buses.

The extraordinary strength of many of the beetles is due to their unusual mating arrangements.

The UK-Australian study appears in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* (<http://rspb.royalsocietypublishing.org/>).

Even weaker members of the species have a compensating trait in evolutionary terms - huge testicles which increase their chances of fertilising a female.

"Insects are well known for being able to perform amazing feats of strength and it's all on account of their curious sex lives," says Dr Rob Knell of [Queen Mary, University of London](http://www.qmul.ac.uk/) (<http://www.qmul.ac.uk/>), who co-authored the study with Professor Leigh Simmons of the [University of Western Australia](http://www.uwa.edu.au) (<http://www.uwa.edu.au>).

"Female beetles of this species dig tunnels under a dung pat, where males mate with them.

"If a male enters a tunnel that is already occupied by a rival, they fight by locking horns and try to push each other out."

Knell says some male dung beetles are smaller and weaker, but do not have to fight for female attention due to their "substantially bigger testicles".

"This suggests they sneak behind the back of the other male, waiting until he's looking the other way for a chance to mate with the female," he says.

"Instead of growing super strength to fight for a female, they grow lots more sperm to increase their chances of fertilising her eggs and fathering the next generation."



The study confirms that dung beetles are strong for their size (*Source: Leigh W Simmons*)

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