

Identifying soldierflies and allies: robberflies in genus *Dioctria*

Compiled by Martin C. Harvey for the Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme

Version 2 at 31 August 2024

These guides are only possible thanks to the generosity of the brilliant photographers who have allowed their images to be used. Special mention must be given to Malcolm Storey and Steven Falk, whose photo collections form the backbone for most of the species guides:

Malcolm Storey's [BioImages website](#) – Steven Falk's [photo collections on Flickr](#)

Other photographers included in this guide are Dick Belgers, Ian Andrews, James Fowler, Jeremy Early, Martin Harvey, Rob Petley-Jones, Sue Taylor and Tim Worfolk.

Males and females are similar for most of the species in this genus, and there is one page for each species. Distribution maps are taken from the recording scheme's [provisional atlas](#) (Harvey 2017).

As far as possible, these guides show features that can be seen on live insects in the field, or are likely to be visible in photographs. For comprehensive identification keys and species accounts see:

- [British soldierflies and their allies](#), by Alan Stubbs and Martin Drake (and also the recording scheme's [additional notes](#) on these keys).
- [Field guide to flies with three pulvilli](#), by Theo Zeegers and André Schulten.

For lots more information on soldierflies and allies go to the [recording scheme website](#), [Twitter \(X\)](#) page or [Facebook](#) group.

For general information and events, and to support the study and conservation of flies, please consider joining [Dipterists Forum](#).

Records wanted!

Once you have identified your fly, please let the recording scheme have the details! Add to [iRecord](#) or send to the [recording scheme](#) so that we can share the records for conservation and research.

The Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme is part of Dipterists Forum



The Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme is supported by the UKCEH Biological Records Centre



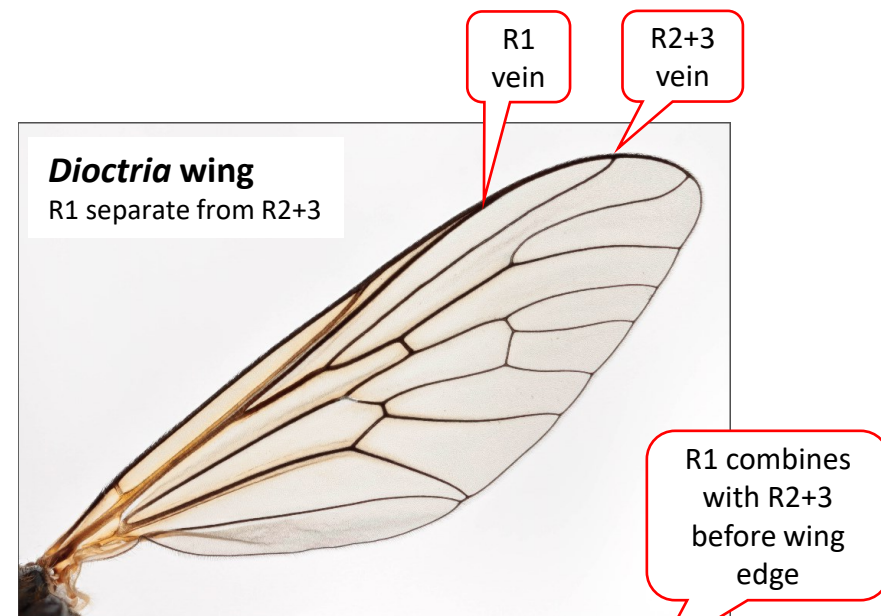
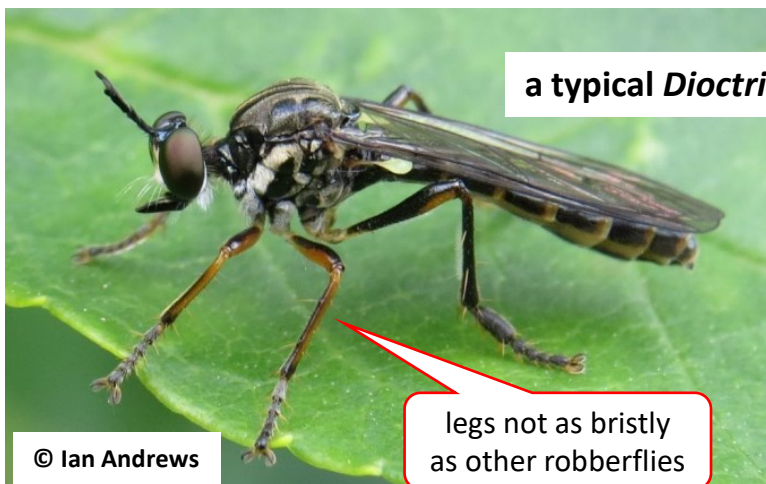
Recognising the genus: *Dioctria*

There are six UK species in genus *Dioctria*, within the robberfly family, Asilidae. They have the typical robberfly shape, with a long and narrow abdomen, narrow wings and head with large eyes and a small pointed proboscis. *Dioctria* are less hairy and bristly than many other robberflies, but there is room for confusion with some other genera such as *Choerades* and *Neoitamus*. For robberflies they are medium-sized, 8–15mm long.

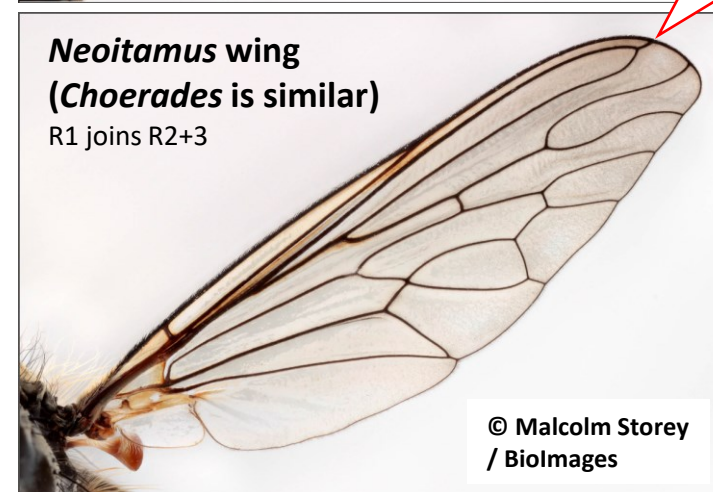
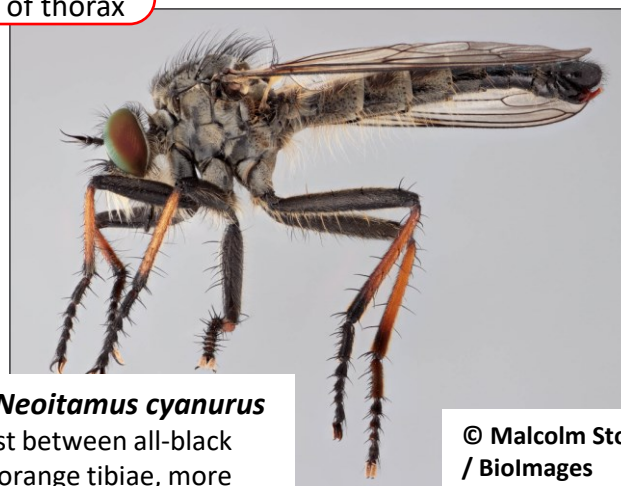
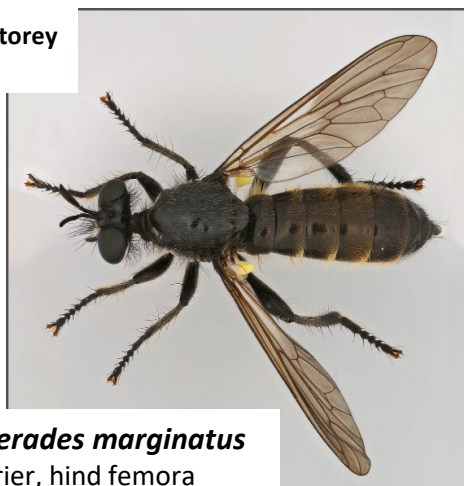
Useful features to tell the species apart include the leg colours and the extent of the 'silver strip' marking on the side of the thorax. This means that when photographing them it is very useful to have side-on views to see the legs and side of the thorax.

Most *Dioctria* are species of woodland and scrub edges, plus *D. atricapilla* which is more often found in open grassland. The adults are predators of a wide range of other insects, and their larvae are also thought to be predators, developing in the soil, although little seems to be known about their exact preferences.

Four of the six species are fairly common and widespread in the southern half of the UK, with *D. rufipes* ranging further north into Scotland. *D. cothurnatus* and *D. oelandica* have rather puzzling distributions – they are rare in most places but found at widely scattered locations across the UK, most often on the western side of the country.



© Malcolm Storey / BiolImages





♂

legs almost entirely black

male: eyes usually distinctly blue

mystax hairs black or brown (can be pale brown, not usually white)

Typically (not always!) found among low vegetation in grassland

[Steven Falk link](#)

Dioctria atricapilla (Violet Black-legged Robberfly)

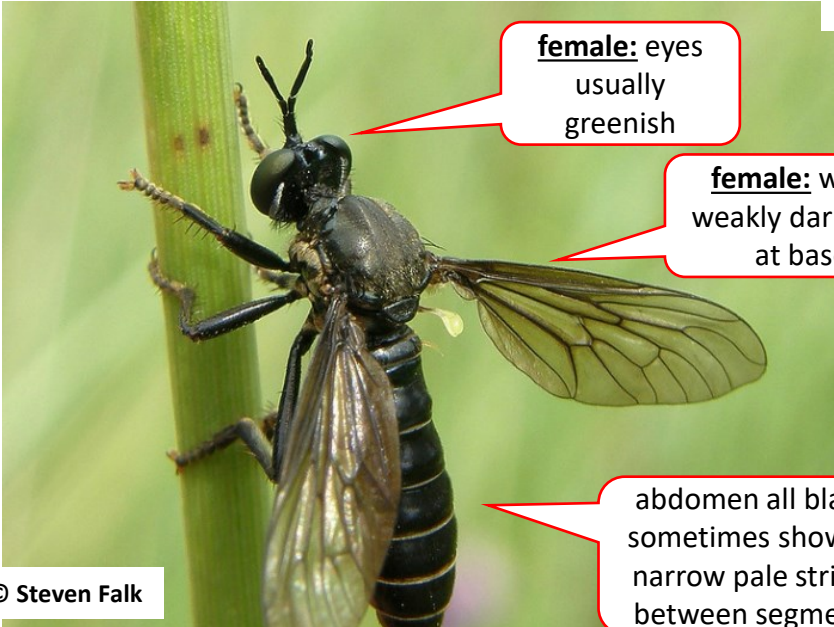
♂



male: wings strongly darkened at base

© Steven Falk

- ID difficulty: 2
- Flight period: mid May to mid Sep, peak Jun to mid Jul
- GB threat: Least Concern
- mainly England
- open grassland, woodland rides

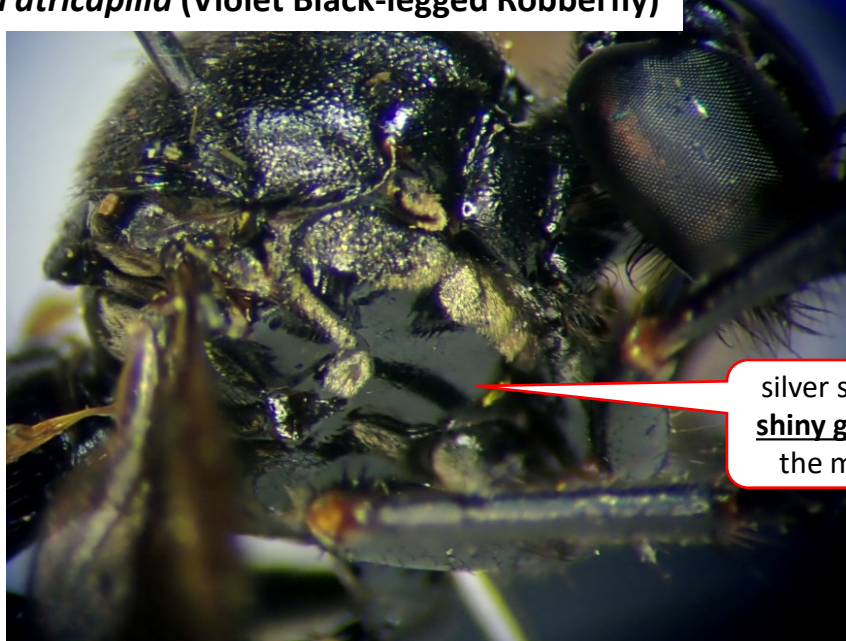


♀

female: eyes usually greenish

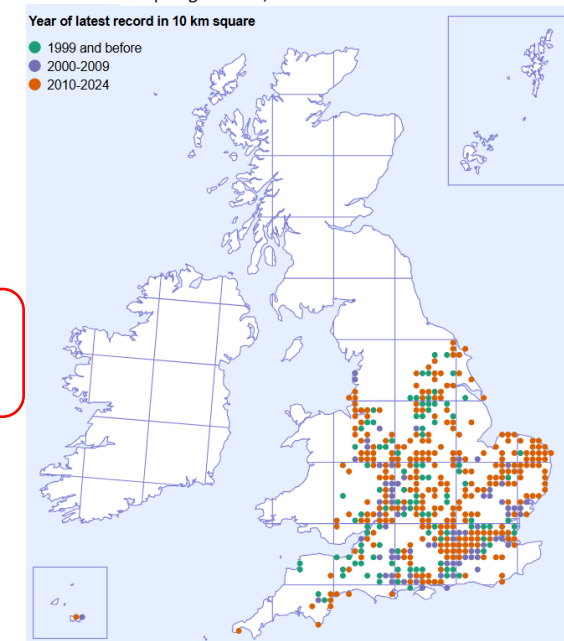
female: wings weakly darkened at base

abdomen all black, sometimes showing narrow pale stripes between segments



silver strip **with shiny gap** above the mid coxa

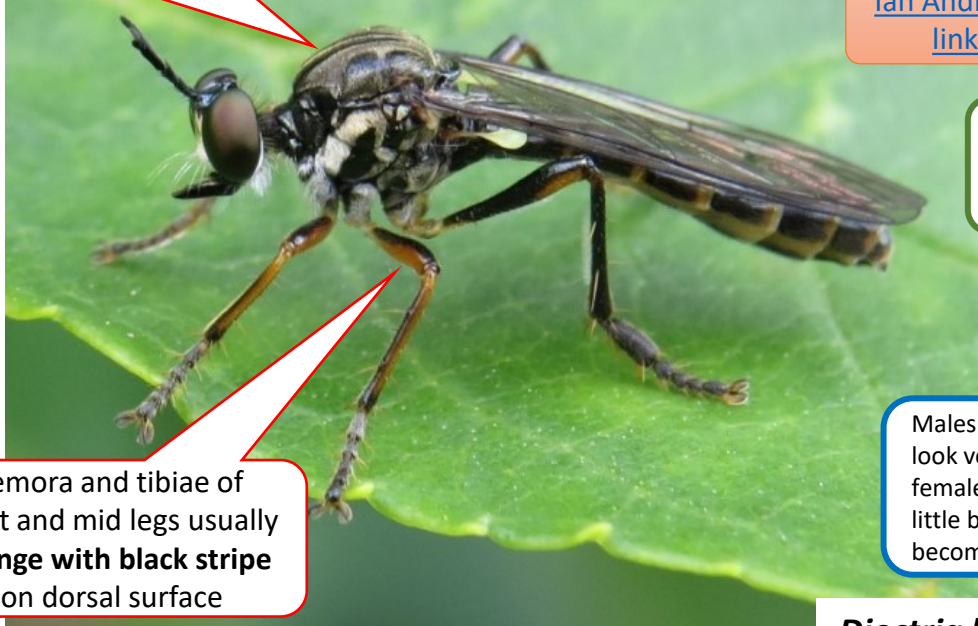
© Martin Harvey



thorax mostly dusted, with obvious shiny stripes

© Ian Andrews

[Ian Andrews link](#)

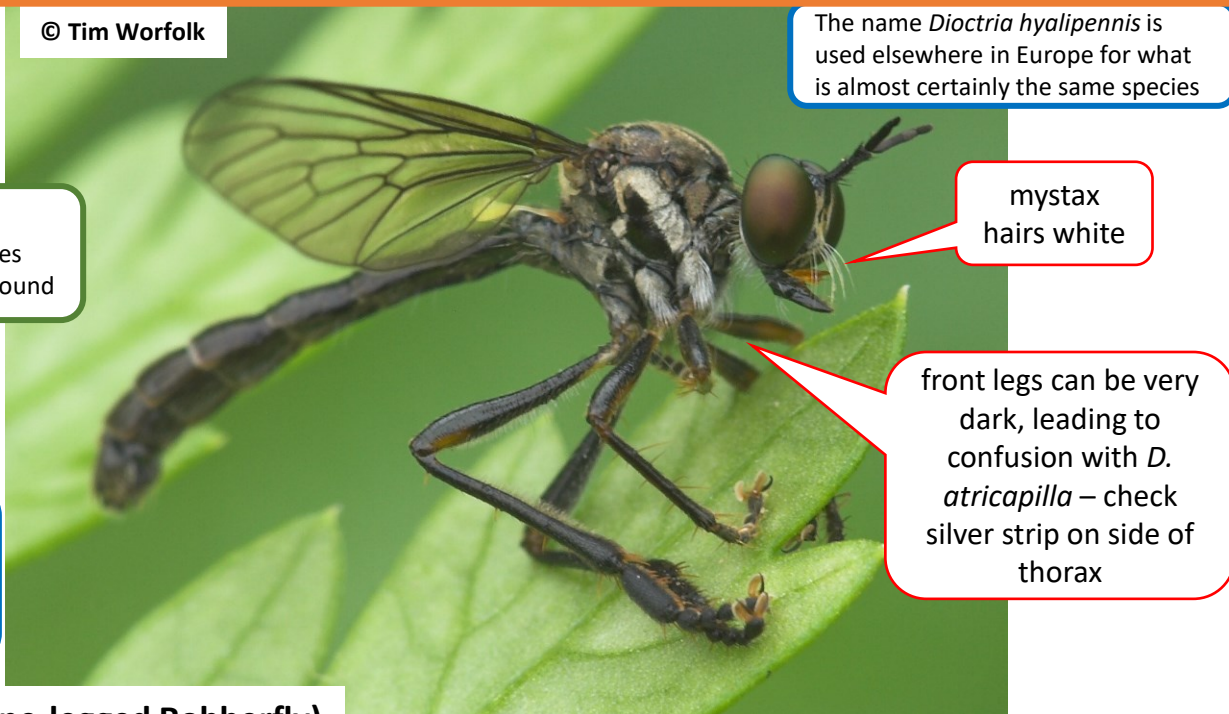


Typically (not always!) found in scrub and trees around 1.5m above ground

Males and females can look very similar – the female's abdomen is a little broader and can become swollen with eggs

femora and tibiae of front and mid legs usually orange with black stripe on dorsal surface

© Tim Worfolk



The name *Dioctria hyalipennis* is used elsewhere in Europe for what is almost certainly the same species

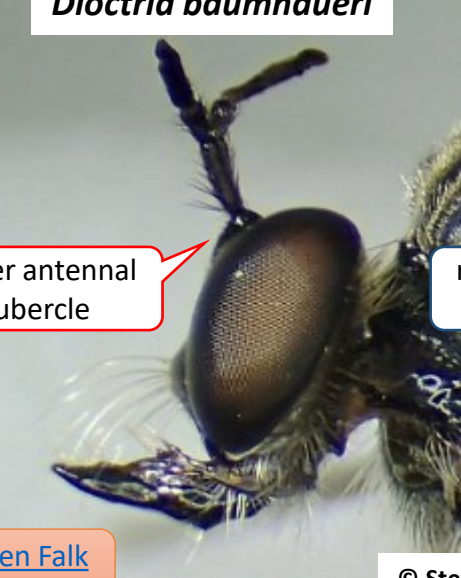
mystax hairs white

front legs can be very dark, leading to confusion with *D. atricapilla* – check silver strip on side of thorax

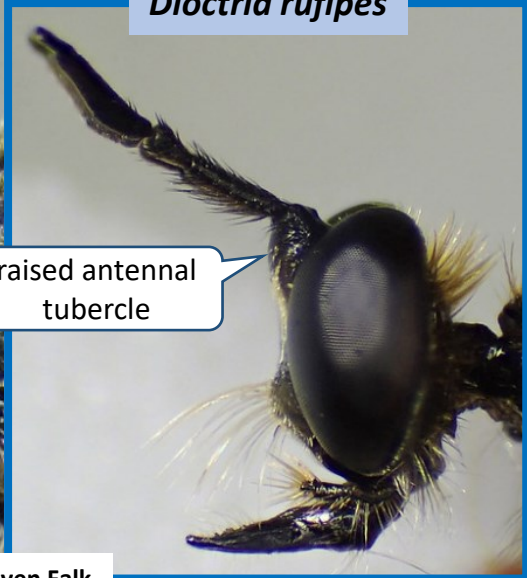
Dioctria baumhaueri (Stripe-legged Robberfly)

Dioctria baumhaueri

Dioctria rufipes



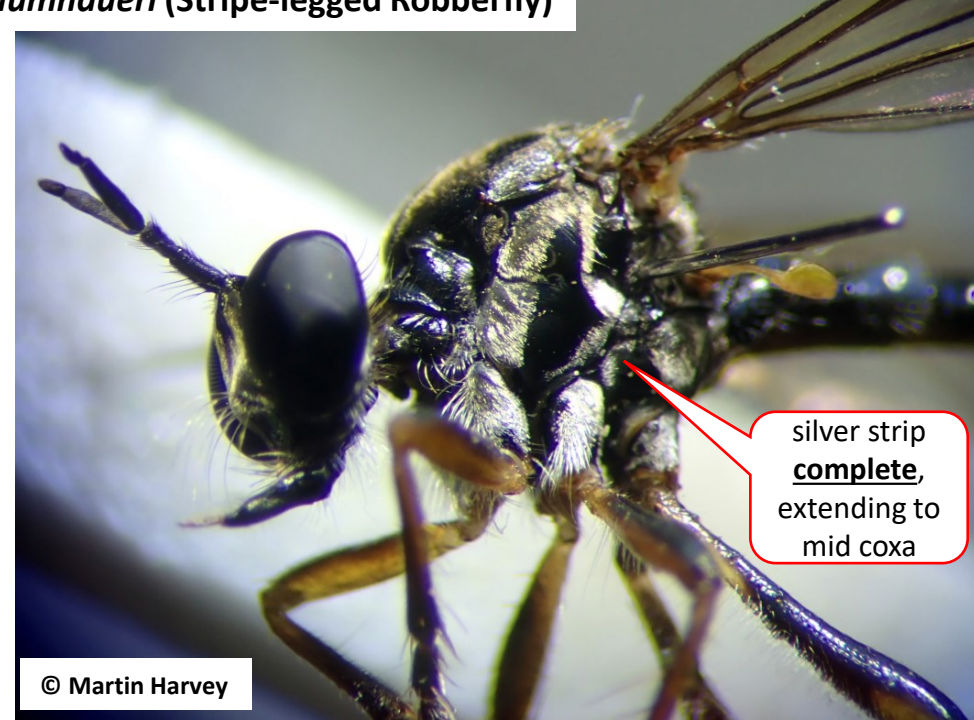
flatter antennal tubercle



raised antennal tubercle

[Steven Falk link](#)

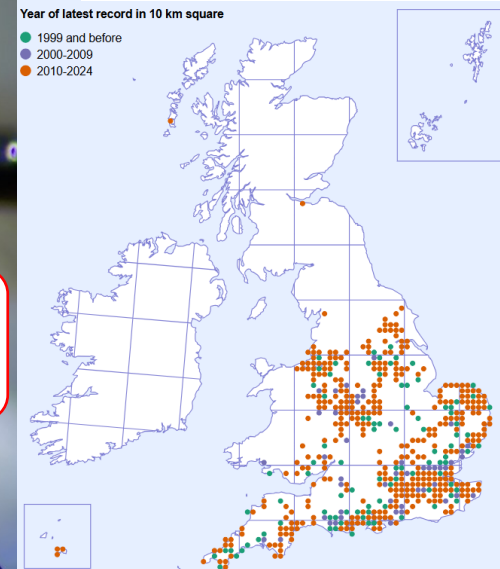
© Steven Falk

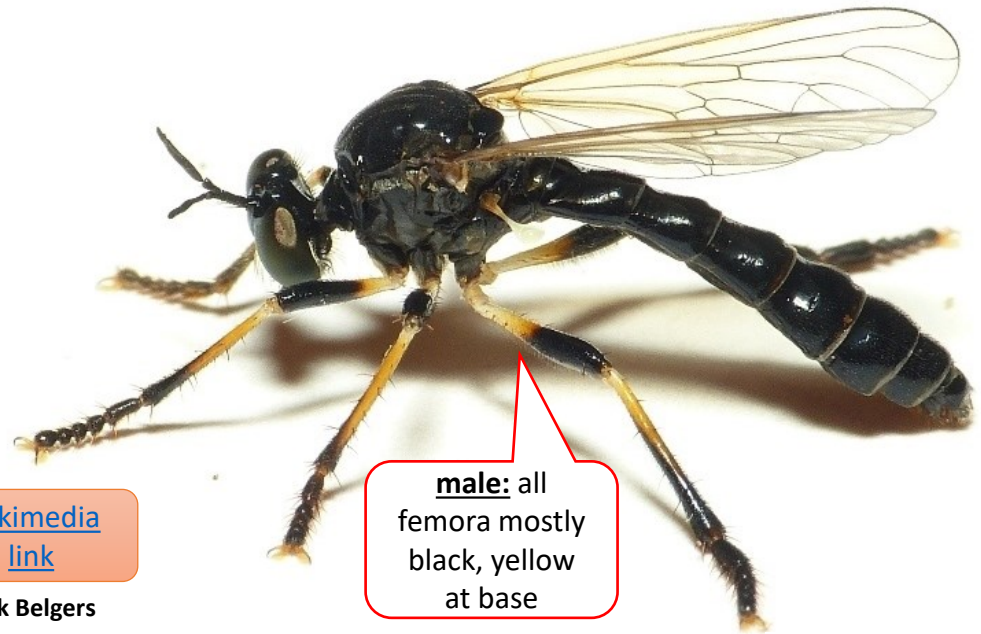


silver strip **complete**, extending to mid coxa

© Martin Harvey

- ID difficulty: 2
- Flight period: early May to Aug, peak late Jun to early Jul
- GB threat: Least Concern
- mainly England
- edges of woods and scrub





male: all femora mostly black, yellow at base

[Wikimedia link](#)

© Dick Belgers

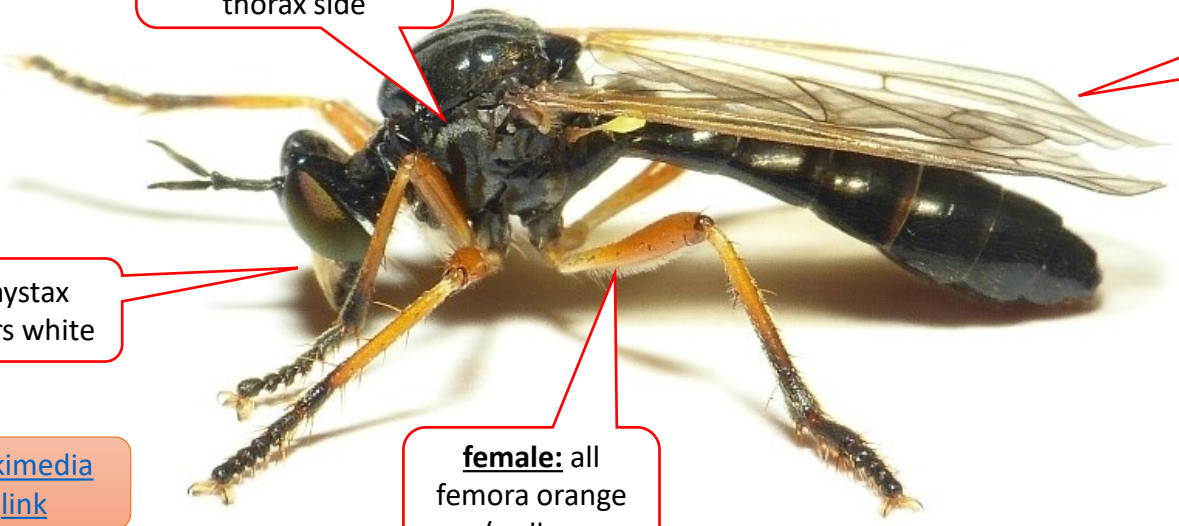
© Jeremy Early

[Jeremy Early link via Steven Falk](#)



- ID difficulty: 3
- Flight period: May to Jul
- GB threat: Least Concern • GB rarity: Nationally Scarce
- scattered
- wet woodland, river banks

***Dioctria cothurnata* (Scarce Red-legged Robberfly)**



silver strip **confined to top margin** of thorax side

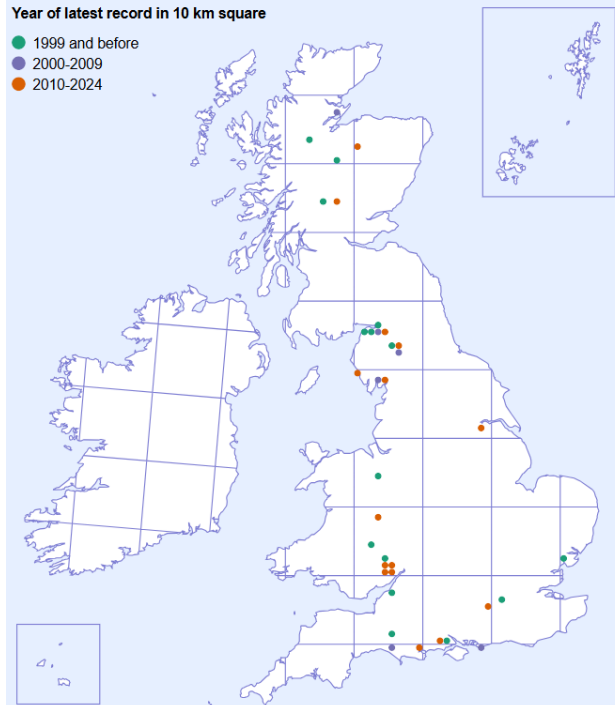
wings clear (darkened in the similar *D. oelandica*)

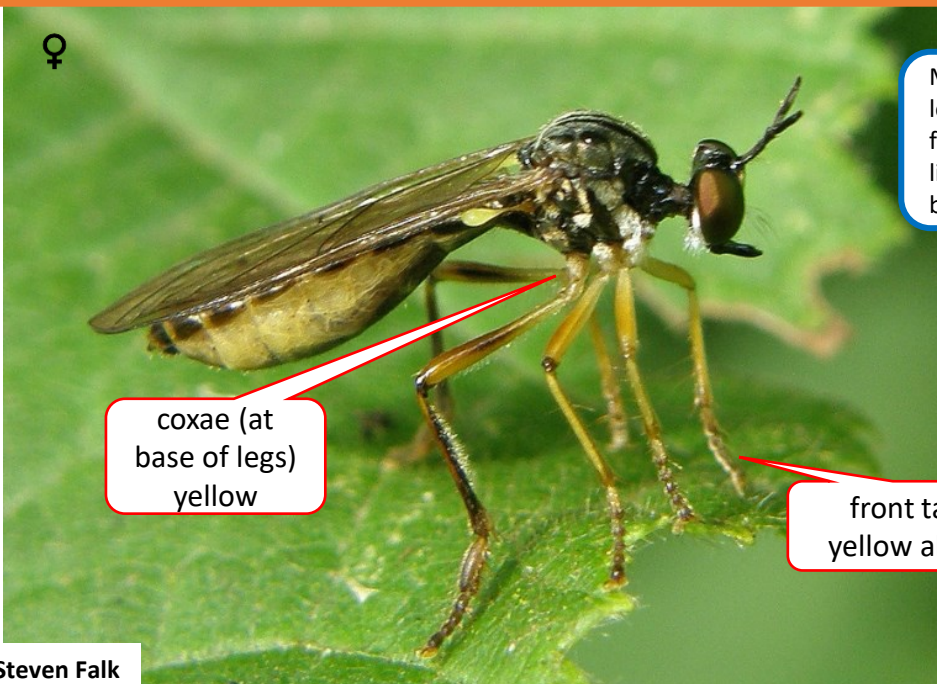
mystax hairs white

female: all femora orange / yellow

[Wikimedia link](#)

© Dick Belgers





♀

coxae (at base of legs) yellow

Males and females can look very similar – the female's abdomen is a little broader and can become swollen with eggs

relatively small and delicate robberflies

front tarsi yellow above

[Steven Falk link](#)

© Steven Falk

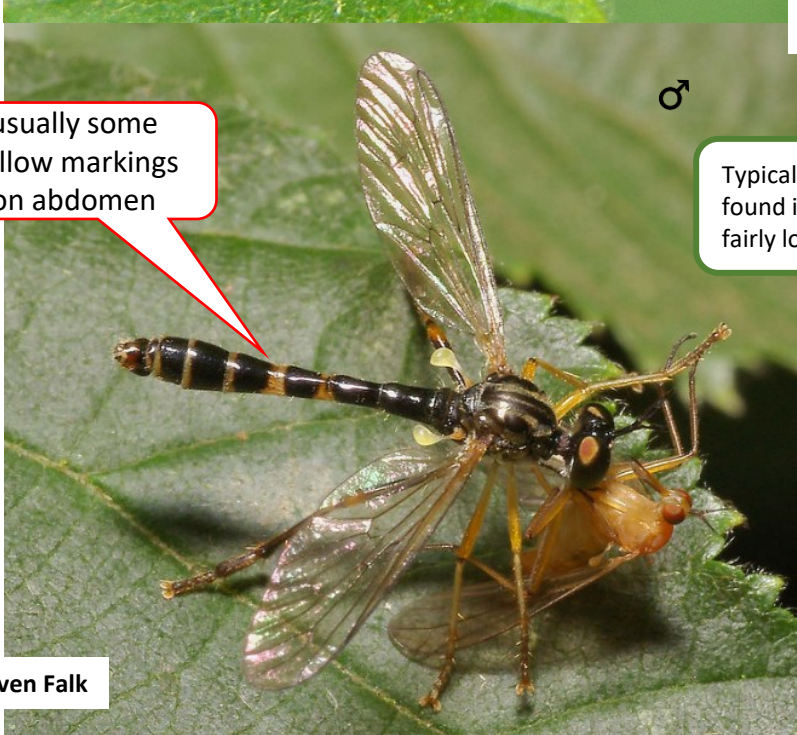


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© Steven Falk

silver strip **with shiny gap** above the mid coxa

***Dioctria linearis* (Small Yellow-legged Robberfly)**

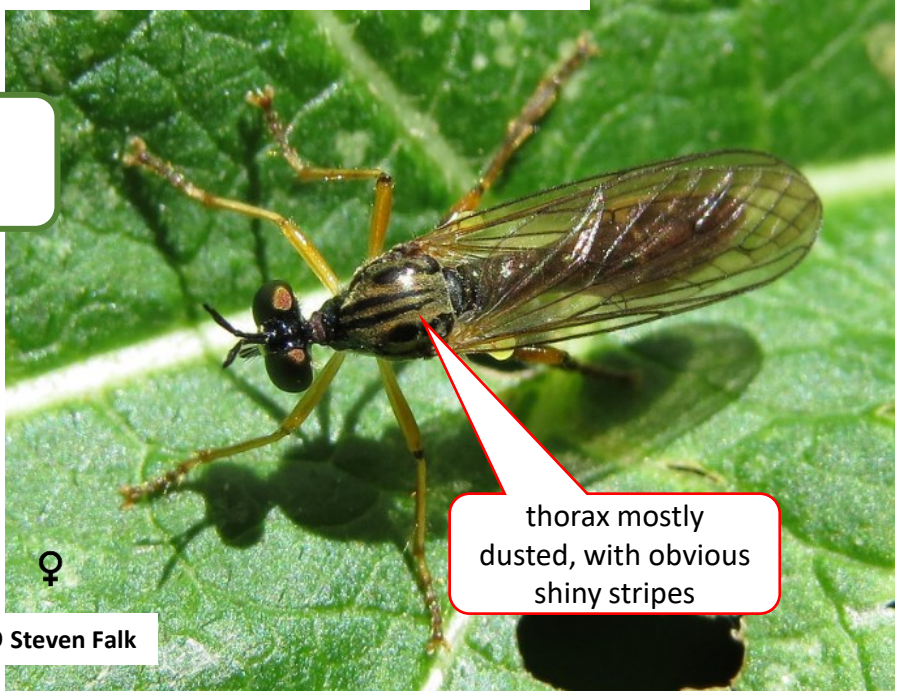


♂

usually some yellow markings on abdomen

Typically (not always!) found in scrub and trees fairly low down

© Steven Falk

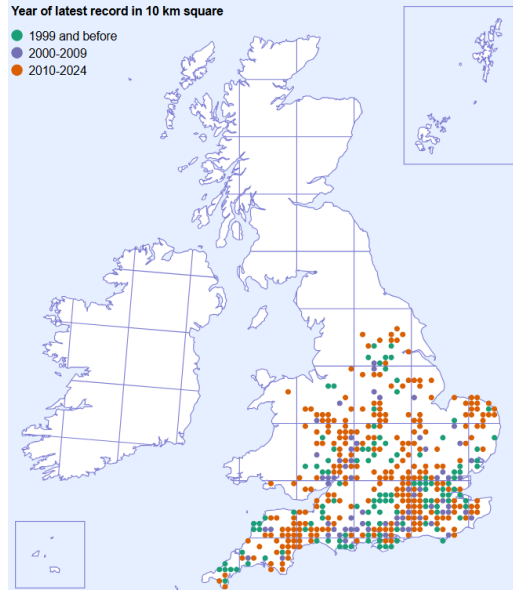


♀

© Steven Falk

thorax mostly dusted, with obvious shiny stripes

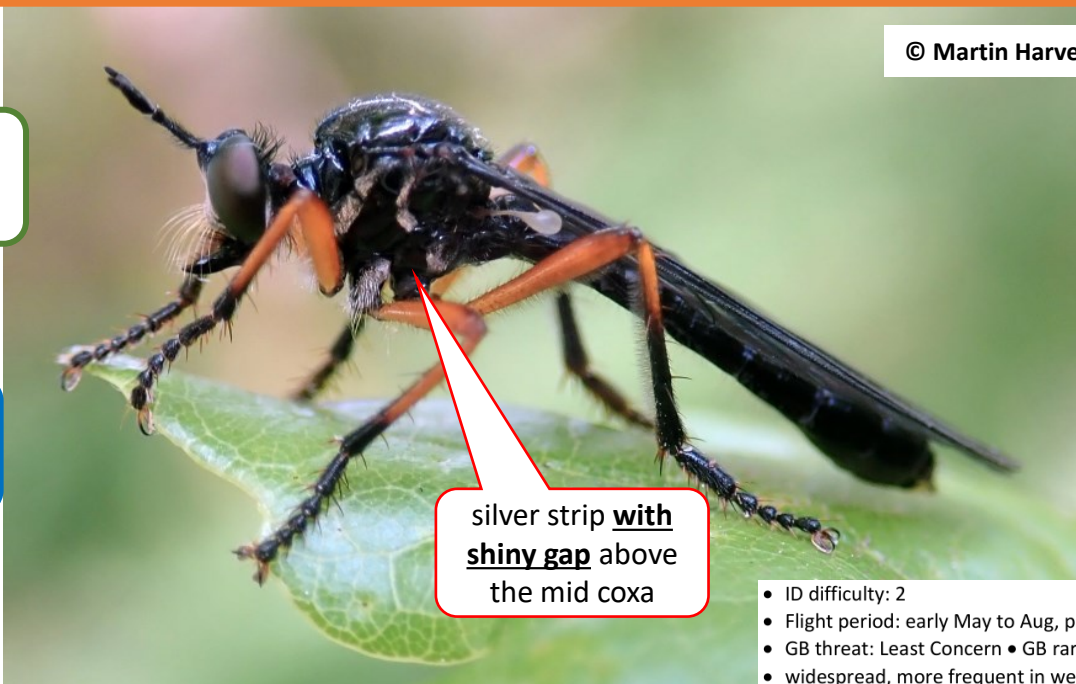
- ID difficulty: 2
- Flight period: mid May to mid Aug, peak mid Jun to mid Jul
- GB threat: Least Concern
- mainly southern England and midlands
- dappled shade in woodland





Typically (not always!) found in scrub and trees at least 2m above ground

The largest of the *Dioctria* robberflies, 14–15mm long

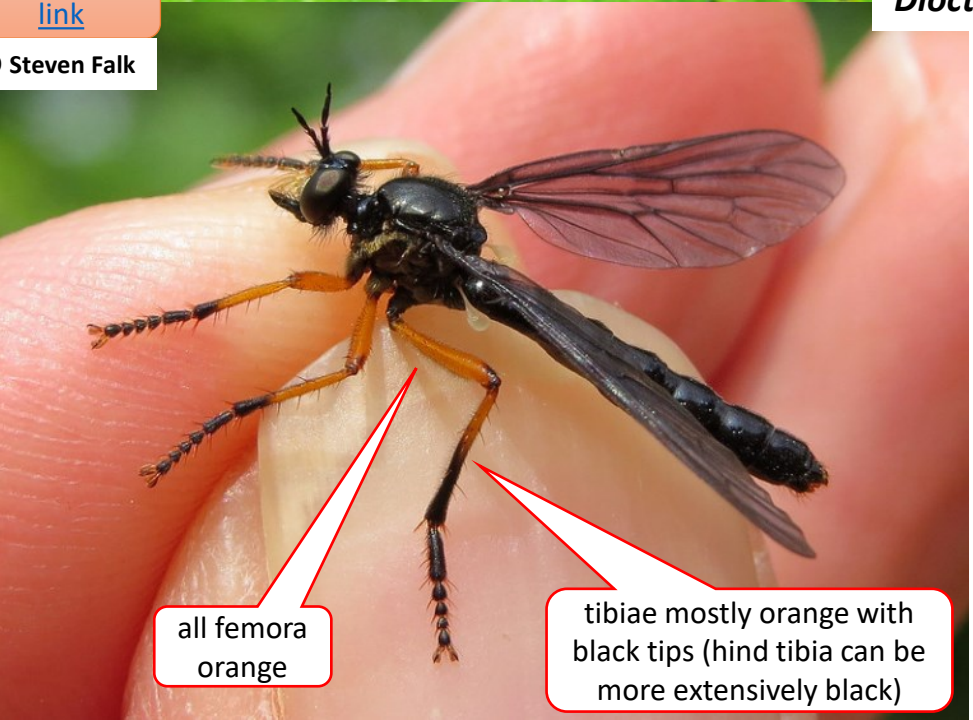


silver strip **with shiny gap** above the mid coxa

- ID difficulty: 2
- Flight period: early May to Aug, peak in Jun
- GB threat: Least Concern • GB rarity: Nationally Scarce
- widespread, more frequent in west
- oak woodland

Dioctria oelandica (Orange-legged Robberfly)

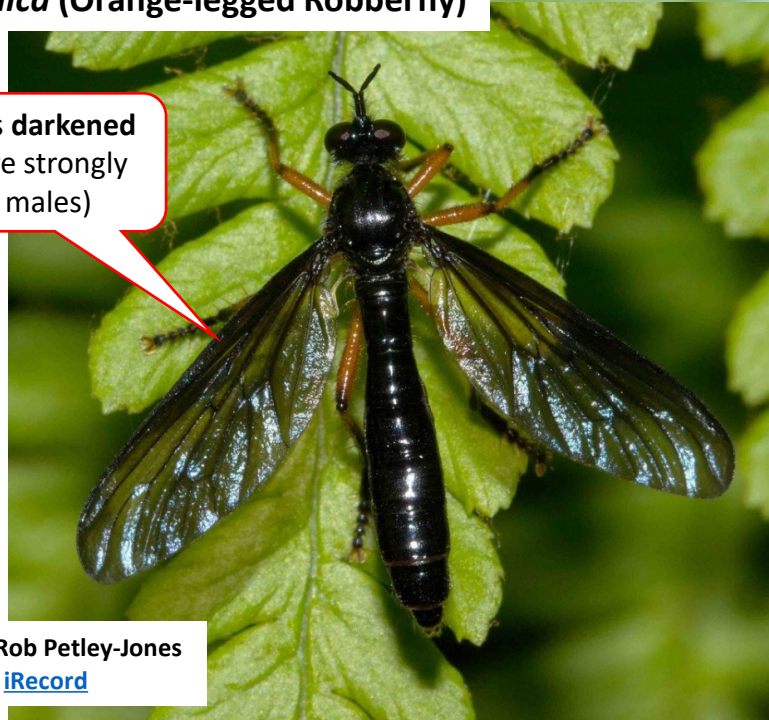
© Steven Falk
[Steven Falk link](#)



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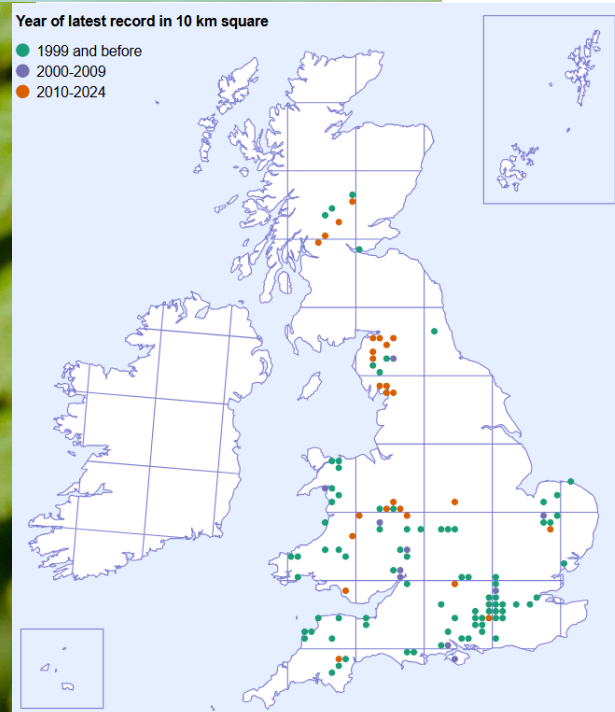
all femora orange

tibiae mostly orange with black tips (hind tibia can be more extensively black)

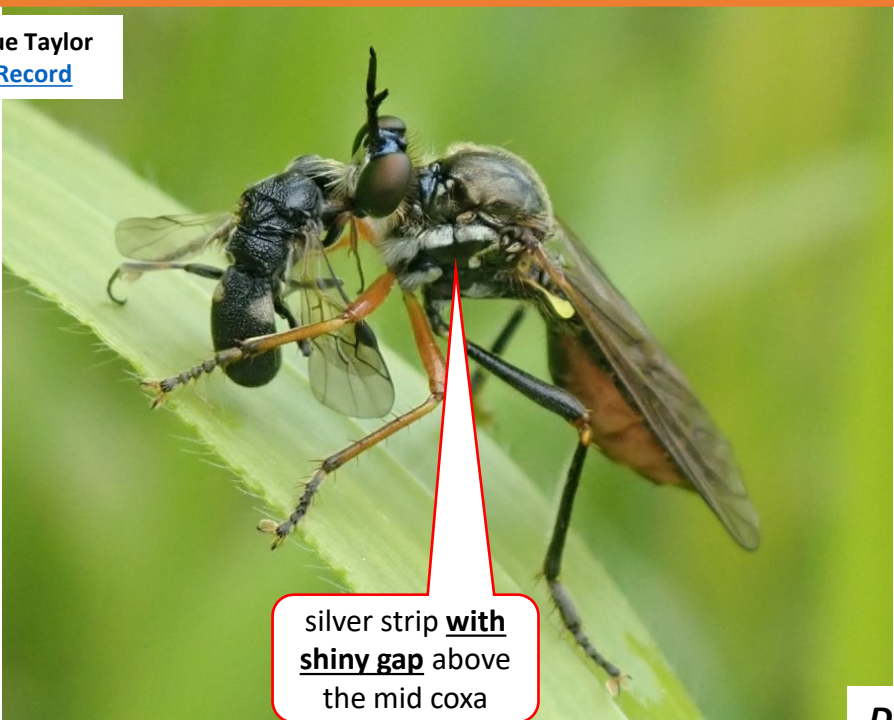


wings **darkened** (more strongly in males)

© Rob Petley-Jones via [iRecord](#)



© Sue Taylor
via [iRecord](#)



silver strip **with shiny gap** above the mid coxa

Typically (not always!) found in tall vegetation and scrub up to 1m above ground

mystax hairs white

femora and tibiae of front two pairs of legs almost entirely clear orange

Males and females can look very similar – the female's abdomen is a little broader and can become swollen with eggs



© Malcolm Storey / [Biolmages](#)

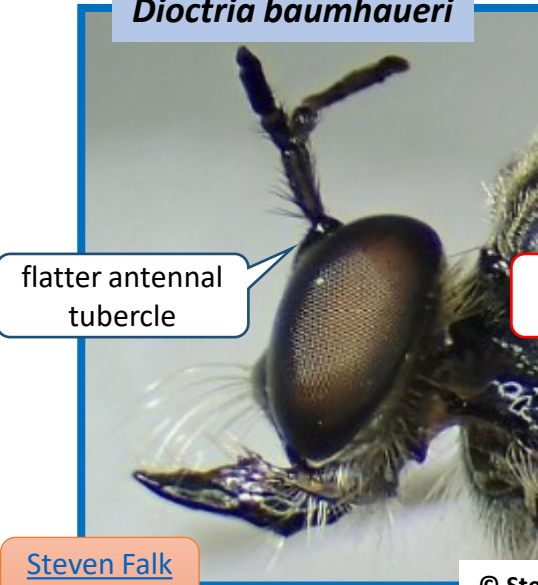
[Biolmages link](#)

Dioctria rufipes (Red-legged Robberfly)

- ID difficulty: 3
- Flight period: early May to early Aug, peak in late May and Jun
- GB threat: Least Concern
- widespread in England, local in Wales and Scotland
- grassland with scrub, woodland margins

Dioctria baumhaueri

Dioctria rufipes



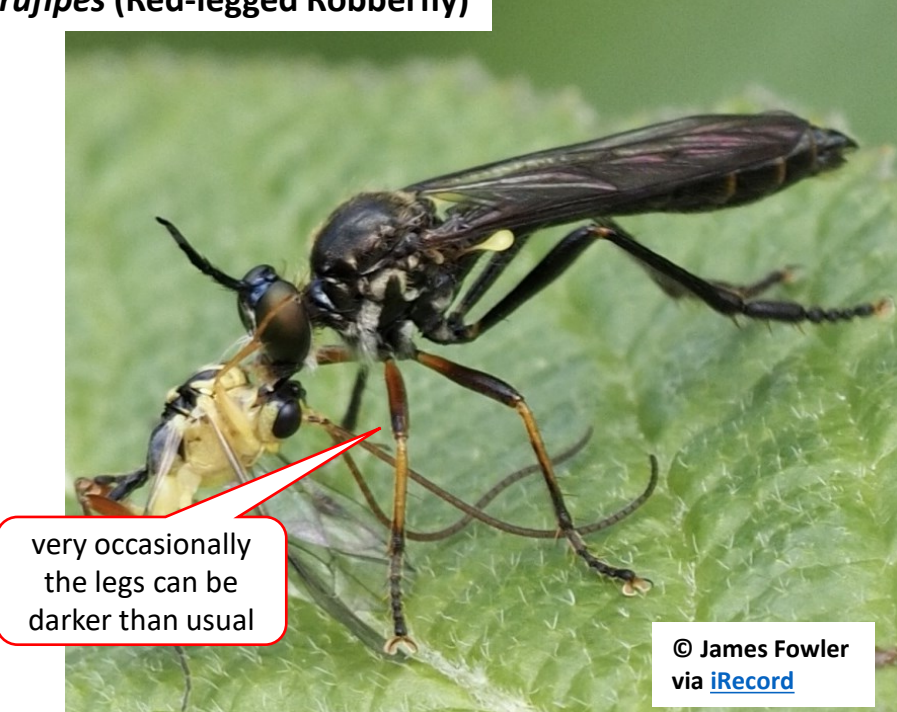
flatter antennal tubercle



raised antennal tubercle

[Steven Falk link](#)

© Steven Falk



very occasionally the legs can be darker than usual

© James Fowler via [iRecord](#)

