

Empid and Dolichopodid Study Group Newsheet No 2

Editorial

The response to the first issue of the Newsletter was very satisfactory, providing strong evidence of widespread interest in these two groups. Your 'editors' are encouraged and somewhat daunted by the general reaction. Several readers offered help in identification, others gave useful pointers in dealing with material in the difficult groups, while some described their experiences in the field. Letters came from seasoned collectors and inexperienced beginners alike. There were also offers of help with the Group in due course, which will be followed up as the need arises.

Jonathan Cole (for address see Recording Scheme Address List) will be pleased to help with identifications and difficulties for anyone who sends pinned material in good condition. Dr P Grootaert at the Belgian Natural Sciences Institute, Brussels offers help in particular with Platypalpus; he is studying the Belgian members of the genus and has redescribed over a hundred species. He has sent reprints of three of his papers (Description of three new Platypalpus species from Belgium; A note on Platypalpus Macquart from Auvergne, France; Notes on the occurrence of the genus Platypalpus Macquart in Belgium).

Ken Smith has sent multiple copies of reprints of papers by Dr Hobby and himself which I am ready to pass on to interested members, particularly those with an interest in life histories; the titles are as follows:

- Chersodromia cursitans Zett. reinstated as a British species.
- The Conopidae and Empididae of Moses Harris, 1776-1780.
- The bionomics of Empis tessellata F.
- The immature stages of Rhamphomyia anomalipennis Mg.
- The bionomics of Empis opaca Mg.
- Rhamphomyia (Pararhamphomyia) albidiventris Strobl new to Britain.
- The larva of the viviparous fly Ocydromia glabricula Fln.
- Adult Empididae occurring in numbers indoors.

(Mainly from Ent.Mon.Mag. in the early '60s. I shall have copies of these and the papers by Dr Grootaert available at the Dipterists' meeting in November.)

Dr Smith has also sent me Sir Christopher Andrew's copy of Collin (paperback in three volumes, well used but in sound condition). The instruction is 'to pass it on to a keen but impoverished amateur'. If there are many of you out there the selection process may present some difficulty; ideas, please, on fair disposal.

I am sure you will join me in passing our thanks to Peter Chandler for his noble work in producing an appendix which updates keys and other information on the empids.

Anthony Bainbridge (166 Farnborough Road, Farnborough, Hants GU14 7TJ)

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Collecting Dolies and Empids on the River Monnow

A quick glance through British Flies vol 6, Empididae, J.E. Collin, will reveal numerous references to the River Monnow in Herefordshire. Most of these records refer to those made by Dr J H Wood, who lived at Tarrington near Hereford at the beginning of this century, and who collected widely in the county. As a lot of the species mentioned represented gaps in my collection, I decided to pay a visit to the Monnow for a week in July 1985.

The character of the river changes quite dramatically on its passage from the Black Mountains down towards the coast. In most places it is narrow, very fast flowing with exposed rocks and alder lined banks, but for quite a long stretch it meanders with ox bows and with sand and shingle banks. I am sure it is this variety which is responsible for the diversity of species that can be found on this one river.

I was pleased to find many of Wood's original species as well as several surprising additions. As might be expected *Hilara* were much in evidence, there being about 25 species in all including:- *H. apta*, *H. albiventris*, *H. cingulata*, *H. discoidalis*, *H. morata*, *H. woodi* and surprisingly at several sites - *H. barbipes* which I believe has previously only been found in Scotland. Sweeping alders and willows proved to be the most profitable form of collecting and producing many species including:- *Tachydromia costalis*, *Platypalpus albifacies*, *P. melancholicus*, *Hemerodromia unilineata*, *H. laudatoria* and *Chelifera aperticauda*. By sweeping ground vegetation I found *Platypalpus luteolus*, *Tachydromia woodi* and *Empis limata* and on an exposed shingle bank there was *Rhaphium fractum* and *Tachydromia halidayi*. Sweeping the margins of the river, especially wet shingle, produced *Hydrodromia wesmaelii* and a number of interesting Dolichopodidae including:- *Rhaphium pencillatum*, *R. riparium*, *Argyra atriceps*, *Campsicnemus marginatus* and *Syntormon macula*.

I hope this short account helps to show the importance of the River Monnow as a wildlife habitat; I certainly look forward to paying a return visit to see what other "goodies" it holds. Roy Crossley has shown that a number of the "Monnow specialities" occur on the River Wharfe in Yorkshire, and it may be that if other upland rivers in Britain were surveyed, many of the species mentioned above would prove to be more widespread.

Ivan Perry (27 Mill Road, Lode, Cambridge CB5 9EN)

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Empids and dolies in the far north!

Recently I have been collecting in Orkney and Shetland, with one trip to the Outer Hebrides. It was a surprise to find *Hybos femoratus* in the most northerly island of Shetland, Unst, on foliage by a small stream; and the same species was found on the rocks forming a cairn at Barpa Langass, Uist, Outer Hebrides (a very exposed site). *Xanthempis punctata* is common in the Orkney islands on the flowers of *Heracleum* and *Ranunculus* on Mainland and Westray; but I have not found this species in Shetland. Other species of empids are present in the Northern Isles and there are plenty of dolichopodids, especially in Shetland.

Dr Brian R Lawrence (2 The Loke, Dereham Road, Norwich)

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Some thoughts on identification

For *Platypalpus* you must use Chvala's *Fauna ent. Scand.* volume on Tachydromiine empids. This is a simpler key than Collin's, and rarely fails to give the right answer. The only problem is with wet specimens, as the extent of sternopleural shining may be altered if they get wet. Stemming immediately from this is that there are a lot more species in the key than Collin allows for, and some of these assuredly do occur in GB. I have three somewhat sub-judice specimens at the moment. The key is also useful for the other Tachydromiines, such as *Tachypeza*, *Tachydromia*, *Stilpon*, etc. With

Platypalpus I found the more you do the easier it gets, as you gain familiarity with the key. My method was to do a lot at once, flogging them through and laying aside for another attempt any that don't work at first sight.

Most, if not all, other empids run very successfully through Collin, though it's a bit weighty to lay on your knee while you're doing it. There are a (very) few additions since its publication, a measure of how fine a monograph it is.

Hilara require, I find, genitalia to be teased out during setting for accurate confirmation, and careful reading of the key - it is more idiosyncratic than usual even for Collin. Anything you want a second opinion on I would be happy to look at.

My own particular favourite grouping are the Wiedemanniine empids, which all look as though they have gas-masks on. I have a quantity of certain species which you are welcome to for reference collection purposes.

Dolichopodids: generally Fonseca's key is first class; he does admit to a little woolliness in Medetera, however, and it is not always easy to progress very far if you have a female. I have had recent communication with Jonathan Cole, who is working on a revision of Chrysotus. He suggests that a number of species are synonyms of each other.

Phil Withers (27 Beech Way, Dickleburgh, Diss, Norfolk IP21 4NZ)

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Sources of Information

Whilst the national entomological journals are the main vehicles for the dissemination of information, regional publications often contain important items which may be overlooked by workers in other parts of the country.

In the north of England 'The Naturalist' which is the journal of the Yorkshire Naturalists' Union carries occasional papers on Diptera, including the published records for Yorkshire. The latest Diptera report, compiled by Peter Skidmore, covering the years 1977-84 was published in vol 110 (July-Sept 1985) and the species list, which includes several Dolichopodid references, is preceded by a stimulating introductory essay.

The 'Irish Naturalists' Journal' is not as well known as it deserves to be and recent notes have been published on Dolichopodids new to Ireland.

A valuable source of information on distribution is 'The Diptera of Lancashire and Cheshire' part 1, published by the Lancs and Cheshire Fauna Committee in 1959 with a short supplement in 1964. The list covers Nematocera, Brachycera and some families in the Series Aschiza.

There are doubtless other regional publications and journals containing items of interest to dipterists and we shall be pleased to have details for future Empid and Dolie newsheets!

Roy Crossley (46 St David's Road, Otley, West Yorkshire LS21 2AW)

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And now for something rather different - pond netting for Empids

It all began a couple of years ago on one of Henry Disney's Diptera courses at Malham. Phil Withers offered to give me a demonstration of Wiedemannia catching on Gordale Beck, and for several hours during that week we stalked our specimens, pooting them directly from moss and algae mats on the streamside, getting our knees and elbows wet through in the process and occasionally sucking up a tube full of water by mistake. The following year Bill Ely introduced me to another technique. We were collecting on the Ure at Aysgarth Falls and Bill had discovered some time earlier that he had unexpectedly picked up Wiedemannia specimens in his pond net when dipping for water beetles. By brushing the net up the wet moss on rocks projecting from the water, numerous examples of W. bistigma were collected at Aysgarth and they could easily be pooted as they flicked around inside the dripping net.

Spurred on by this discovery I got out the pond net that I had not used since my water bug days, and this season it has become a regular piece of my equipment for collecting on streams and rivers. The net is pushed fairly quickly against the current, with the leading edge just below the surface, and brushed along the face of projecting moss covered boulders and also amongst emergent vegetation. In this way I have found a variety of Hemerodromins especially Wiedemannia and Hydrodromia species, and also several kinds of Hilara's; they all seem to be able to withstand a certain amount of wetting without damage.

This method of collecting has proved to be very successful and can be commended. However, with all the warnings there have been recently about the health risks of direct pooting, perhaps some medic can advise if there are hazards in pooting from a wet pond net!

Roy Crossley

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And finally

Please send contributions for Empid and Dolichopodid Study Group newsheet number 3 to Anthony Bainbridge or Roy Crossley before the end of January next.