HOVERFLY NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 15

OCTOBER 1992

Hoverfly Recording Scheme *Biological Records Centre*

The very first Hoverfly Newsletter appeared in October 1982, so this is the Tenth Anniversary Issue. The ten years since the newsletter began have seen a remarkable growth in hoverfly study and recording, to which the recording scheme organisers, with records into six figures, will no doubt testify. The publication of Alan Stubbs and Steven Falk's British Hoverflies, and of Francis Gilbert's Hoverflies book in the Naturalists' Handbook series have contributed immensely to this upsurge in activity. The appearance of new hoverfly books in the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark and Germany have also provided further impetus and aid to Syrphid enthusiasts.

Graham Rotheray, who took over from Philip Entwistle as editor of the newsletter with issue no. 5 (May 1987), has relinquished the editorship, and he will in future be editing the Dipterists Digest, to which I am sure many readers already subscribe (see announcements). Graham, as readers will know, is the leading authority on hoverfly larvae, and a future edition of Dipterists Digest will be devoted to his larvae identification guide. The hoverfly larvae edition is expected to appear in time for the Spring 1993 Hoverfly Workshop (see article by Roger Morris on page 2).

I would like to express my thanks to Graham for the guidance and encouragement he has given during the handover of the editorship. He will remain a regular contributor to the newsletter by continuing to provide the list of recently published literature.

Articles on any aspect of hoverflies are welcome. Please send them to me (by 1 March 1993 if you wish to ensure that they are included in the next issue), **David Iliff, Green Willows, Station Road, Woodmancote, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL52 4HN.**

CONTENTS

HOVERFLY WORKSHOP: 5-7 MARCH 1993

Roger Morris
JNCC, Monkstone House, City Road, Peterborough, PE1 1JY

This meeting arises out of discussions between Alan Stubbs, Stuart Ball and myself, during which it was felt that there was a need to get enthusiasts together before the field season starts. The meeting will be based at Preston Montford Field Centre near Shrewsbury and places have been booked for a party of twenty. The meeting is intended to provide a forum for all levels of expertise and will include workshops on identification, taxonomic problems, larval work and photography. It may also be possible to demonstrate the database of records held by the recording scheme.

The cost of the weekend, including two nights full board will be £50 per head. Those wishing to attend should send a £10.00 deposit to Roger Morris, c/o the above address.

HOVERFLY RECORDING SCHEME: PROGRESS REPORT

Stuart Ball and Roger Morris

As reported in the recent Dipterist's bulletin, some 20,000 records have been processed from RA33's and a start has been made on checking the Gen 7's and Gen 13's already entered by BRC. We hope to have entered the recently arrived RA33's by the Dipterist's meeting in November and also hope to have made a start on entering the backlog of Gen 7's/Gen 13's.

We are also giving thought to the production of provisional maps for inspection at Dipterist's Day but it is unlikely that maps will be on general release at this stage.

As part of the programme to get the scheme moving, a winter workshop on hoverflies has been organised and is advertised in this issue. If it is a success, there is scope for further meetings. Please join us at Preston Montford.

PIPIZA LUTEITARSIS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE, 1991

David Iliff
Green Willows, Station Road, Woodmancote, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL52 4HN

In Hoverfly Newsletter No 12, in his article entitled "Territorial behaviour in *Pipiza luteitarsis* and other *Syrphidae*", Roger Morris wrote that he had never come across *P. luteitarsis* previously, but in 1990 he found it in abundance. The experiences of Gloucestershire recorders the following year was somewhat similar, if perhaps less dramatic in terms of numbers.

I remember in my early days of hoverfly recording that Philip Entwistle advised me that although hoverflies as a whole were more abundant in the later part of the season, the chances of finding an impressive range of species were better in the spring and early summer. This was amply demonstrated to me during 1991, when in the earlier part of the

season (a cold and dry May followed by a cold and wet June) hoverflies were not easy to find. Nevertheless among this sparse hoverfly population I came across several species which were new to me, and in many cases these were the first records of the species for the county.

In this period I found an unusually high number of *Pipiza*. Most of the examples seen were *P. noctiluca*, but I found one specimen of *P. bimaculata* in Collin Park Wood, and three examples of *P. luteitarsis*; one at Woodmancote and two, a male and a female, at Highleadon. Martin Matthews (who like me had never seen the species previously) recorded *P. luteitarsis* in his garden at Ashchurch. I can trace no previous county records for either *P. luteitarsis* or *P. bimaculata*.

THE HOVERFLY COLLECTION IN THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Nigel P. Wyatt
Department of Entomology, The Natural History Museum,
Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD

The Natural History Museum collection of hoverflies is the most comprehensive in the world. Despite this, it only contains about 2200 of the world's approximately 5000 described species. It is divided into a world collection, a separate collection of British material, and further specimens, mostly larvae, are stored in spirit (80% ethanol). The index to the collections has now been completely transferred from the old card indexes to a computerised database.

The world collection contains 230 drawers of specimens, and was recurated by myself in the mid 1980s. This involved the updating of species and generic labels in line, as far as possible, with the latest nomenclature; ensuring that type specimens were correctly labelled, and correcting any misidentifications. The South American fauna is probably the least well represented, while the best is not surprisingly the western Palaearctic (much more so than the eastern!). The considerable amount of type material here is of major importance to taxonomic research, most notable being the presence of most of Walker's type specimens. A considerable variety of forms are included, from diminutive, insignificant-looking "little black jobs" such as *Triglyphus* or *Paragus* to the spectacularly huge species of *Milesia* from south-east Asia (up to an inch and a half long). A few thousand specimens of unidentified accessions still await incorporation, more especially South American, and also material of difficult genera such as *Sphaerophoria*, *Paragus* and *Cheilosia*, many of which can only be identified by dissection of male genitalia.

There are 81 drawers of British material, which includes all the described species included by Stubbs & Falk in "British Hoverflies". Since then, of course, more species have been added to the British list, and unfortunately we do not have material of some of these, such as *Epistrophe melanostoma* or *Sphaerophoria bankowskae* which are probably very rare. Much of the British collection is material originating from a few prolific collectors whose collections were subsequently presented to the museum: C.J. Wainwright, L. Parmenter, E.A. Fonseca, J. Cowley, C.H. Andrewes, C.N. Colyer, A. Thornley and O.W. Richards. Identifications have recently been checked by myself, and also by Alan Stubbs while he was preparing "British Hoverflies".

There is also the spirit collection, mostly containing larvae for which this remains the best method of preservation. Unfortunately at present barely 10% of the British fauna are represented here, although somewhat perversely this does include rarities such as *Callicera rufa* and *Pocota personata*.

Fortunately, at least for the 13 years that I have worked at the Museum, the Diptera collections have remained mercifully free of pest damage, even though small numbers of *Anthrenus* have been consistently present in the Entomology Department, with occasional more widespread outbreaks. It seems that housing the specimens in drawers with tight-fitting lids, especially if additionally protected inside a locked cabinet, goes a long way to preventing pest infestations. Use of insecticidal chemicals in the collection drawers is considerably restricted for health and safety reasons.

It is possible for anybody to visit and study the collections, but preferably they should arrange this beforehand through myself (telephone 071 938 8904) or Brian Pitkin (071 938 9443). Loaning out of specimens is mainly restricted to entomologists working at scientific institutions, but it can be arranged for amateur entomologists at private addresses to borrow non-type material providing they can nominate a Trustee employed at a scientific institution, who will then take responsibility for the safety and return of the loan.

POCOTA PERSONATA AT BLENHEIM PARK, OXON, IN 1992

R K A Morris
241 Commonside East, Mitcham, Surrey

Whilst examining a clump of beech trees on 20 May 1992 in the more managed area of Blenheim park, I spotted a single bee-like hoverfly with lemon yellow banding flying close to the ground around the tree's roots. This individual quickly escaped as I approached, only to reappear at shoulder height, hovering in dappled shade. Upon capture, the specimen proved to be a male *Pocota personata*. Finding nothing else of interest in the vicinity, I moved on, but returned to the spot some ten minutes later and was alerted to the presence of a bee or bee mimic by a buzzing sound coming from among the dry leaves around a tree root. Upon examination, this proved to emanate from a pair of *Pocota personata* in copula. The pair were most reluctant to fly and the male gripped the female quite strongly, preventing any wing movement. I was able to observe this union for some few minutes before they eventually flew off and subsequently parted. Given this second observation, it would seem likely that the original male was searching for the same female.

This is apparently only the second record of *Pocota personata* from Oxfordshire and one of a very few outside Windsor Great Park and the New Forest. It suggests that the ancient beeches within the landscaped and managed grounds are suitable for this species and raises questions about other species that might occur at Blenheim Park.

The original male was retained for photographing but died before it was returned to me. I would like to thank Blenheim Estate Office for permission to visit this most interesting site.

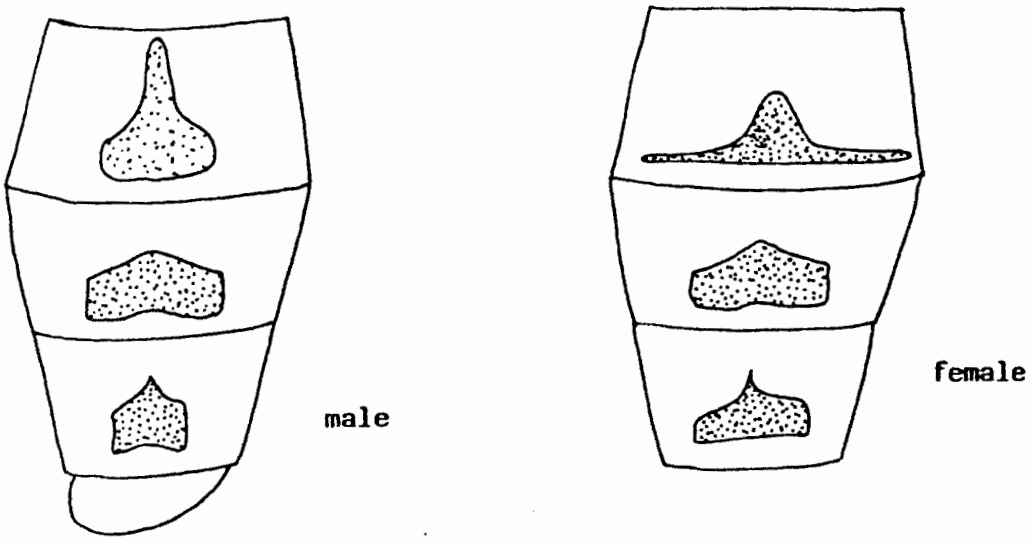
A SIMPLE AND RELIABLE WAY TO SEPARATE *MELANGYNA LASIOPHTHALMA* FROM *PARASYRPHUS PUNCTULATUS* IN THE FIELD

Colin W Plant
Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, Stratford, London, E15 4LZ

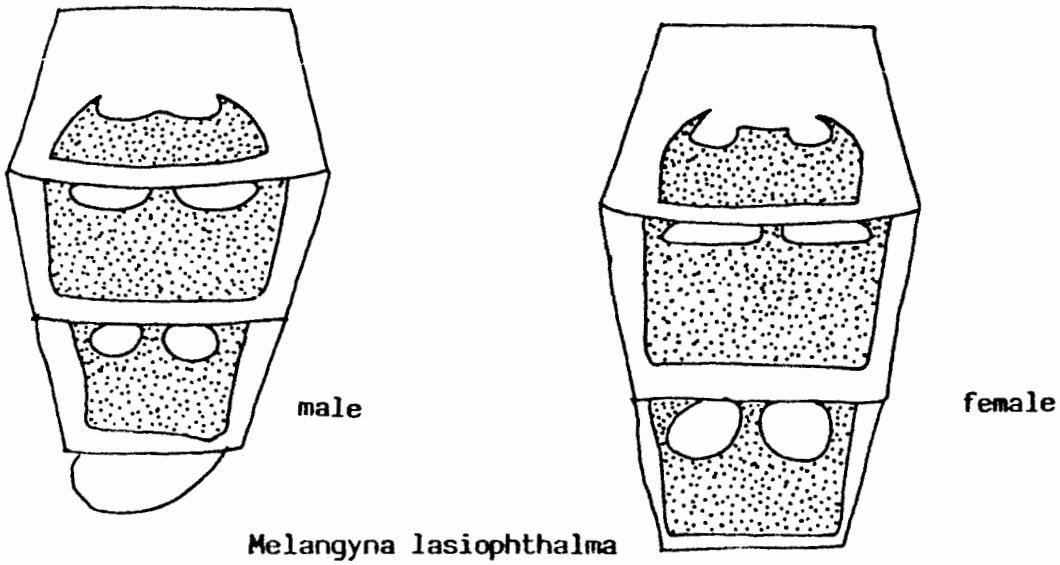
In Martin Speight's (1988) revised key to *Melangyna species* (Dipterists' Digest 1; 14-16), he comments that "*Parasyrphus* ..... are all too easy to confuse with *Melangyna* species", a sentiment with which I am in total agreement. Alan Stubbs pointed out (British Hoverflies, p 142) the similarity between *M. lasiophthalma* and *P. punctulatus* and gave a number of characters for reliable separation of suitably dead specimens under the microscope.

Indeed, back at home, separation is a relatively easy task, but out in the field it is not always so simple to distinguish the two. Having recently examined both species, I noticed an apparently hitherto unrecorded difference, and this time it is a difference that can easily be seen with a x10 hand lens or, for me at least, with the naked eye. This is a pattern of black and yellow on the sternites - the underside of the abdomen. The illustrations below make it clearer than words.

The distinctive pattern of *M. lasiophthalma* is not repeated for *M. compositarum* (= *labiatarum*), but I cannot comment on other species in the absence of sufficient material. Would other hoverfly lovers with such material care to check?



Parasyrphus punctulatus



Melangyna lasiophthalma

Undersides of abdomens of Parasyrphus punctulatus and Melangyna lasiopohthalma

NEOCNEMODON BREVIDENS NEW TO NORTH-WEST ENGLAND

Dr Jonty Denton
Stonefold, Stainton, Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 0HP

During the summer of 1990 I collected syrphids on the Ainsdale Sand Dunes NNR. The area had been well recorded by Chris Palmer among others. Many notable species were again present, including *Didea fasciata*, *Didea intermedia*, and *Triglyphus primus*. On 6 July I caught a single male *Neocnemodon brevidens* (confirmed by Alan Stubbs) on the upper surface of a sycamore leaf beside a large pond surrounded by mixed woodland. The habitat appears to have similar features to the few other records, with the water body and/or poplar trees possibly being important. Incidentally, the pond was less than 20 years old.

A LATE DATE FOR *CHRYSOGASTER VIRESCENS*, IN SURREY

Raymond Fry and Jonty Denton
8 Homefield Cottages, Thursley, Godalming, Surrey

Several *Chrysogaster* specimens were seen flying over wet boggy heath on Thursley NNR on 14 August 1989. One specimen was taken and presumed to be *C. marquarti*, which is often common on the site at this time. However the specimen, a female, keyed out to *C. virescens*, later confirmed by Alan Stubbs. This is an exceptionally late date for a species that normally peaks in early June, and may indicate a partial second generation.

SPHAEROPHORIA RUEPPELLII: FURTHER PLANT ASSOCIATIONS

John Dobson
Hutton & Rostron Environmental Investigations Ltd,
Netley House, Gomshall, Surrey, GU5 9QA

In response to the note on this species by David Iliff (**Hoverfly Newsletter No. 13 p5**), I am able to add some observations of my own in the hope that they may be a useful supplement to the above. *Sphaerophoria rueppellii* occurs at Brent Reservoir SSSI (VC 21) and may be particularly abundant in one small marshy area to the north end of the reservoir. At this site oviposition routinely occurs on Great Willow Herb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), a wetland plant. Ova are laid singly, typically beneath the tip of large horizontally lying leaves on the upper third of the plant.

S. rueppellii is apparently one of those species which lays its eggs in the absence of nearby aphid colonies, and even where the plant seems to be quite free of aphids. I am not entirely clear as to the adaptive basis of this strategy, but it is one that is shared with some other aphidophagous hoverfly species.

On a single occasion *S. rueppellii* was seen to oviposit on the unopened bract of Cleavers (*Galium aparine*) only a few yards away from the Great Willow Herb plants. Again no

aphids were seen close to the oviposition site. Aphids from both species of plant at this site were retained for future identification, although no direct association can be inferred. Observations of *S. rueppellii* females hovering up and down the stems of *E. hirsutum* "searching for oviposition sites" were confounded when males were seen exhibiting apparently identical behaviour.

VOLUCELLA ZONARIA MOVES WEST

Anthony Bainbridge
33 Compton Avenue, Mannamead, Plymouth, Devon, PL3 5DA

On 28 August 1991 I found a fine specimen of *Volucella zonaria* on *Sedum* in my front garden in Plymouth. I had seen it (whether the same or a different individual) on several occasions during previous days on a variety of plants well known to be attractive to Syrphids. This dramatic creature was reported from Torquay by David Iliff (Hoverfly Newsletter No. 9, May 1989), and is clearly maintaining its inexorable drift westwards. The River Tamar is unlikely to be a permanent barrier to further progress; Cornwall, here it comes .....

HOVERFLY HUNTING IN ALGERIA

Francis Gilbert
Department of Life Science, Nottingham University, Nottingham, NG7 2RD

I was invited to go for a week to Algeria in July of this year, courtesy of the Dr Boudjema Samraoui of the Department of Biology, University of Annaba. The trip started and ended with unforseen problems, but the in-between part was excellent! The evening before I was to fly, I heard on the news that the President, Mohammed Boudjiaf, had been shot in, of all places, Annaba. After an anxious few days of delay waiting for the 'trouble' predicted by commentators, I eventually overcame caution and flew out to Annaba via Algiers.

I gave six lectures in all, to 3rd, 4th and MSc students of ecology. Dr Samraoui is by training a high-powered molecular biologist, used to working out the molecular structure of proteins. However, there are no facilities for this work in Algeria, and he has returned to his favourite subject of behaviour and ecology. His main interest is in dragonflies; last year Professor Philip Corbet was invited to Annaba in the same way. But, naturally enough, Dr Samraoui has become more and more interested in hoverflies, and has a very competent and enthusiastic MSc student, Sihem Djellab. She has collected by net and by systematic trapping using a large number of Malaise traps throughout the local area, and together she and Dr Samraoui are now starting the rather difficult task of identifying them all.

I was surprised to realise that the local habitats are overwhelmingly those of wetlands. The El-Kala National Park near Annaba is a large and diverse area that is designed to protect these habitats, unique in North Africa, that include large and almost impenetrable areas of alder carr! The entire area was malarial until the 1970s, and this has largely protected the area from exploitation until now. Dragonflies are extraordinarily abundant,

and include a number of relict species that occur nowhere else. While hoverfly diversity was relatively low in July, earlier in the season they were just as abundant as the dragonflies, they informed me.

The hoverflies of North Africa in general are almost unknown, and thus there could be some spectacular surprises in store, especially in view of the known dragonfly diversity. One small fresh-water lake just behind the dunes of the seashore is now the only site for a relict dragonfly species. There are no trees for some distance, and yet *Ceriana* is almost common there: quite what the larvae are feeding on is a mystery, since they are supposed to be in sap-flows.

The commonest species are undoubtedly various species of *Sphaerophoria*, *Paragus*, *Eumerus* and particularly the helophilines. Dr Samraoui and Ms Djellab will be writing about the species in Hoverfly Newsletter before long, and so I will leave the goodies to them! I must write a little about one, though, which I found especially attractive. This was a species of *Volucella*, the males of which spend all their time hovering or perching while waiting for females, just as our own *V. pellucens* does. We found it in the cork-oak forests in the mountains above Annaba, at 600 m at a place called Seraidi. It is a most beautiful fly, with a black abdomen tipped with gorgeous golden orange hairs. I cannot identify it from the literature I have, but it may well be *V. liquida* (= *analis*), originally described from Algeria, and known only from there and neighbouring Morocco.

Dr Samraoui and his students have made an excellent start on a modern and reliable faunistic study of the syrphids of Algeria. They clearly have benefited enormously from having Stubbs & Falk, whose illustrations allow them to name at least to genus and often to get close to the species for most of the individuals they have collected. Now comes the specific identifications, which will not be easy in view of the large number of *Sphaerophoria*, *Paragus* and *Eumerus*. If anyone can help, I can certainly recommend the superb hospitality of Dr Samraoui and his Head of Department, Dr Borhane Djebar!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Hoverfly Workshop 5-7 March 1993 - for details see article on page 2 by Roger Morris.

Staffordshire Hoverfly Atlas - The second edition of David Emley's Staffordshire hoverfly atlas is now available. Copies can be obtained from **The Natural History Department, City Museum and Art Gallery, Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire.** The price is £1.50, including postage and packing.

Dorset Hoverflies - A new book "Dorset Hoverflies" by Ted and Dave Levy and W.F. Dean is now in print, and can be obtained from **Richard Surry, Dorset Environmental Records Centre, Colliton House Annexe, Glyde Path Road, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ.** The book is 70 pages long and features the new Dorset list (over 200 species), maps, and text which includes articles on hoverflies and past collectors. The price is £3.95, plus postage and packing.

Dipterists Digest - Details of forthcoming issues and subscriptions for **Dipterists Digest** can be obtained from **Derek Whiteley, 17 Rustlings Road, Sheffield, S11 7AA.**

RECENT LITERATURE

A A Allen, 1992. Some notable Diptera from Oxleas Wood SSSI, Shooter's Hill, N.W. Kent. *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* **104:** 265-271.

R E Blacksmith, R M Blacksmith, M C D Speight and M de Courcy Williams. 1991. A first list of Diptera from the Murrough, Co Wicklow, Ireland, including 663 species and 140 breeding records. *Bull, Ir. biogeog. Soc.* **No 14:** 185-253.

P J Chandler. 1992. 1991 Annual Exhibition Report. Diptera. *Brit. J. Ent. Nat. Hist. Soc.* **5:** 67-91.

J D Coldwell. 1992. Three flies new to Yorkshire in 1991. *Dipterist's Digest.* **No 11:** 41-42.

S J Falk. 1992. *Parasyrphus nigritarsis* (Zett.) and some other scarce flies recorded from Malham Tarn, N.W. Yorkshire in 1991. *Dipterist's Digest.* **No 11:** 40.

B O C Gardiner. 1991. *Volucella zonaria* in Cambridge. *Bull. Amat. Ent. Soc.* **50:** 285.

R S George. 1991. *Volucella zonaria* in Christchurch. *Bull. Amat. Ent. Soc.* **50:** 287.

R M Lyszkowski, I MacGowan and G E Rotheray. 1992. The Goat moth (*Cossus cossus* (L.) Lep., Cossidae) and associated insects in Scotland. *Entomologist's mon. Mag.* **128:** 24.

V Measday. 1992. *Xylota florum* Fab. (Dipt., Syrphidae) new to Kent. *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* **104:** 157.

G E Rotheray and K P Bland. 1992. *Xanthandrus comtus* (Harris) (Dipt., Syrphidae) breeding in Scotland. *Entomologist's mon. Mag.* **128:** 58.

K G V Smith. 1991. *Brachyopa insensilis* Colin (Dipt., Syrphidae) in North London (Middlesex). *Entomologist's mon. Mag* **127:** 208.