HOVERFLY NEWSLETTER

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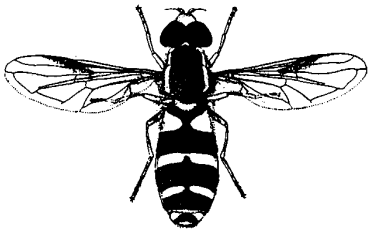

Dipterists Forum

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As Roger Morris states in his article below (Notes and Observations for 2005) many entomologists have reported that hoverflies seem to be in short supply this summer. I can recall similar comments from several collectors in both 2003 and 2004, so to date this year seems to be the third disappointing year in succession. However I have found this year to have been slightly better than either of the previous two; although hoverflies have been in short supply, the range of species I have recorded has been encouraging, though I certainly cannot claim 2005 as a highly successful year; nevertheless, at the opposite end of Gloucestershire from where I am writing, in the Forest of Dean, John Phillips has found several county rarities (see Interesting Recent Records).

Hoverflies may be scarce this year, however I can confidently predict that hoverfly experts and enthusiasts from many countries will be present in large numbers in Leiden in September, where the Third International Symposium on the Syrphidae will take place. The Symposium will probably have already taken place by the time readers receive this newsletter, and a review should appear in the next issue.

The last newsletter included a notice of a new book on the hoverflies of north-west Europe, written in English, by Mark van Veen. The book is reviewed in this issue by Martin Speight.

Copy for **Hoverfly Newsletter No. 41** (which is expected to be issued with the Spring 2006 Dipterists Forum Bulletin) should be sent to me: **David Iliff, Green Willows, Station Road, Woodmancote, Cheltenham, Glos, GL52 9HN**, (telephone 01242 674398), email: **davidiliff@talk21.com**, to reach me by 20 December.

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HOVERFLY RECORDING SCHEME WEBSITE

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The recording scheme now has a website at www.hoverfly.org.uk/portal.php which should be publicly accessible by the time you read this. It is set up as a "forum" or "bulletin board" so that users can take part in discussions, contribute photos, etc. To gain full access to the site, you need to register as a user.

1. Click the "register" link in the User box on the left-hand side of the screen.
2. Read the Registration Agreement and, providing you agree to it, click the "I Agree to these terms" link.
3. Fill in the Registration form. Only the fields in the first section are required – you can go back and edit the other details later. The important fields are:
    - Username. This can be anything you like, but it would help if you use your real name so that other recording scheme contributors can recognise your contributions.
    - Password. This should be something memorable to you, but which others are unlikely to guess.
    - Email address. This must be a valid email account to which you have access. All communications from the website and other users will be sent to this address. You need not worry about entering your

email address – it is protected and not directly displayed on the site, so it should be safe from spammers!

- Confirmation code. Type in the letters you see in the grey box. This is designed to prevent automated registration attempts by programs that attempt to collect emails in order to target spam.

Once you are happy, press the [Submit] button at the bottom of the form. A user account will be created for you, but at this stage it will be "inactive" and you will not yet be able to log in.

4. You will receive an email, sent to the email address you gave in the Registration form. This will contain an "activation link". Open the email and click on the link. This will activate your account and you will now be able to log in using the username and password you gave in the Registration form. This step is designed to ensure that the email address you gave is valid and is yours!

Some of the facilities:

- **Maps**. You can view a 10km distribution map of any species for GB, also a coverage map and a map showing gaps in coverage (squares with no records). It should be pretty obvious how to do this. Just select the species you want to view from the drop-down list and click the [Plot Map] button. What may not be immediately obvious is that you can view information about a square by hovering your mouse pointer over a symbol on the map. A "tooltip" will popup showing the 10km square name and the year of the latest record of the species in that square. You can also select the background you want and the colours used for the symbols. The 10km square summary information upon which these maps are based is generated from the copy of *Recorder 2002* where the scheme's records are stored. This summary is updated regularly as new records are received.
- **Checklist**. This is based on the list in the second edition of **British Hoverflies** (Stubbs & Falk, 2002), but with additions of synonyms from Peter Chandler's checklist and some aggregates to cover recent species splits. By default, just the current names are shown, but you can opt to view synonyms and the full taxonomic hierarchy (i.e. subfamilies, tribes, genera, etc.). Names in the list are linked to species accounts, the maps and to the relevant page on the NBN Gateway.
- **Hoverfly Newsletter**. You can view the contents of any given issues and you can search for any articles containing a word or words you type. The names of authors, titles and an index by species names, compiled by Roger Morris, are searched for the word(s) you enter. We hope to make back numbers of the newsletter available for download by registered users and those that David Iliff has kept in the form of Word documents (nos. 28 and 30 onwards) should be available by the time you read this. Earlier issues in downloadable form will be added as we are able to get them processed, but this will take some time.

We hope that the new website will invigorate the recording scheme and stir new interest and enthusiasm to get out there and record and to contribute the resulting records.

AN UNUSUAL OVIPOSITION SITE FOR *CRIORHINA RANUNCULI*

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On 19 May 1999, whilst I was undertaking a bird survey on part of the North Solent National Nature Reserve near Beaulieu, Hants (SZ405964), my attention was drawn to the behaviour of a red-tailed form of the hoverfly *Criorhina ranunculi.* It was seen to fly a matter of inches above the top of a pine-wood post, used in coastal protection on the beach, before landing and then repeating this take-off-and-landing activity a number of times. On closer observation I was able to witness the specimen apparently ovipositing in the damp timber.

It is unlikely that any larvae from any egg laying would have hatched, with the timber being submerged by the sea at each high tide. The oviposition activity continued for a period of approximately ten minutes before the fly flew northwards towards an area of rank grassland with bramble scrub. There is little woodland in the vicinity of this sighting, the nearest sizeable old trees being half a mile or more away.

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF HOVERING BEHAVIOUR DURING COURTSHIP BY *ERISTALIS TENAX* AND *ANASIMYIA LINEATA*

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In **Hoverfly Newsletter No. 35** (February 2003), I described courtship hovering by *Eristalis tenax* which I had observed on two occasions and which was similar to the well-known courtship “dance” of *Eristalis interruptus*, except that in the case of *E. tenax* the male hovered alongside rather than above the female. I saw this behaviour again in my garden on two dates (23 September and 1 October) in 2004. As before the ritual resembled that of *E. interruptus*, but with the *E. tenax* male hovering alongside the female. On several occasions the female flew off to perch on a different leaf, and each time the male followed and resumed the adjacent hovering.

Whenever I have visited Leighton Moss in Lancashire I have found that *Anasimyia lineata* has been present there in large numbers. I visited this reserve on 18 June 2005, and while there I observed three separate instances of two *A.*

lineata males competing for the chance to mate with the same female. On one occasion the two males repeatedly flew at each other in an aggressive manner, each apparently attempting to chase away its rival. However on another occasion one of the males succeeded in mounting the female, at which point the other male began hovering a few centimetres away, and while hovering in the same position in the air it violently oscillated its body in the roll plane. I estimate that it rolled about 20 degrees either side of the horizontal, with each complete cycle of these oscillations lasting about a third of a second.

I had not seen such behaviour before by any species, and wondered whether others have observed *A. lineata* or indeed any other species hovering in this manner. Subsequently I discovered that in the 19th Century R. C. Bradley had described this activity by the same species. His observations are quoted by Verrall, and by Alan Stubbs in Chapter 2 of **British Hoverflies**. Mr. Bradley stated that in the "love dance" of *A. lineata* the male "hovers a little above the female with its head bent wonderfully downwards and its wings vibrating so rapidly that they are almost invisible, and at the same time the whole body shakes like a dog just out of water". I confess that I did not notice whether or not the head of the male at Leighton Moss was bent downwards, but Mr. Bradley's analogy of a dog shaking itself after emerging from water perfectly describes the hovering behaviour that I saw.

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS FROM 2005

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Heringia heringi is a remarkably widespread species, but seemingly occurs quite sporadically. Over the past three years working the area around Stamford I have come across *H. heringi* on nine occasions: once in 2003, twice in 2004 and six times in 2005. Not only is the number of records this year noteworthy, the absolute numbers observed are quite remarkable. For example a roadside verge within the woodland at Ashton Wold TL092884 yielded five males (and three females) in a matter of fifteen minutes. In all, I have taken a sample comprising twelve male *H. heringi* (and seven female *Heringia* sp.) this year. The flight period was from 30 April through to 18 May, although all bar one record were from 30 April through to 8 May, suggesting a relatively narrow peak for emergence.

The woodlands around Stamford are seemingly very rich in *Criorhina*. Almost all, it seems, support *Criorhina ranunculi* and I suspect most will ultimately be found to support the others. Both 2004 and 2005 proved to be good years for *C. ranunculi* with six records in 2004 and seven in 2005. In all, nine woods that I regularly visit have been found to support *C. ranunculi*. Both *C. asilica* and *C. floccosa* appear to have occurred at similar frequencies to previous years, but surprisingly I have not seen *C. berberina* on a single occasion this year. In 2003

I noted it on eleven separate occasions and in 2004 I noted it four times. *C. berberina* emerges a little later than the other three and may therefore have been missed because of my trip to Scotland, but this seems a little unlikely as I was actively recording throughout late May and June. Has anyone else noted similar absences this year?

Is *Parasyrphus punctulatus* going through a favourable period? This is a widely distributed species, but one that I saw relatively sporadically in Surrey. Here in the East Midlands, it would appear to be widespread and perhaps even common. In 2003 I noted it on five separate occasions, whereas it was noted on twelve occasions in 2005 (excluding two further records from Scotland). A passing thought is that *P. punctulatus* is becoming commoner; is this the case elsewhere?

At the time of writing this note (mid-July) the hedgerows are filled with hogweed but barely a fly to be seen. Why is this? The same question is asked on the hoverfly e-group. Is the answer something to do with drought affecting the nectaries of the flowers or is it a more deep-seated problem with hoverfly numbers? When we were in Wales last August the hogweed and angelica were pretty well covered in flies as I recall from fieldwork in the 1980s; Wales can be pretty wet even in periods of general drought. It would be interesting to see whether regional variation in usage of umbellifers can be detected. Maybe this is something that we could coordinate as a broad-scale effort by recorders through the website and recording scheme? A further thought is that flies are visiting flowers much earlier in the day during hot weather. This was something picked up by Phil Withers (Early rising. A useful strategy for hoverflies? **Hoverfly Newsletter 3**: 9-10).

CHEILOSIA PUBERA (ZETTERSTEDT) – A CONUNDRUM

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On my visit to southern Scotland (see Square Bashing in the Scottish Borders) I encountered *Cheilosia pubera* at three localities on 29 May (2005). At two there were considerable numbers of *C. pubera* and I was able to poot specimens freely from flowers. The flowers visited were marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* (2 sites) but at the third site *Caltha* was absent and *C. pubera* was taken in numbers from buttercup *Ranunculus* sp. flowers. The localities also differed somewhat in the nature of the vegetation. Two (with *Caltha*) were upland conifer plantations with wide verges and acid boggy grassland typical of much of the Craik Forest. The third locality was again an upland site, adjacent to a small stream and a conifer plantation. At this site, however, the vegetation appeared to be more typical of richer soils and comprised a mixture of buttercup *Ranunculus* sp., water avens *Geum rivale* and butterbur *Petasites hybridus*.

These observations present a conundrum in determining the preferred larval foodplant. Stubbs & Falk (2002) note that *Geum rivale* is reported as the larval foodplant on the continent. This would seem to be consistent with the vegetation at one of the three localities, but from recollection *Geum rivale* did not occur at the other two localities. This casual observation suggests that *C. pubera* is potentially associated with more than one larval foodplant. Perhaps more assiduous noting of the vegetation can solve this problem? Clearly there is potential for useful follow-up studies of the localities for *C. pubera* in Scotland.

DIARY OF A SQUARE-BASHER: THE SCOTTISH BORDERS IN LATE MAY 2005

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Following the successful expedition to Radnorshire last summer I thought there was a need to look seriously at the possibility of filling in some of the Scottish gaps by flying visits over weekends. The question was when? Looking at weather charts – other than the dreadful new BBC weather maps – I felt there was a reasonable chance of favourable weather at May Bank Holiday and therefore booked a room at The Whiteleaf Hotel at Langholm – a little way east of Lockerbie. Lo and behold, the forecast promptly changed and indicated that the Saturday would be wet and the Sunday changeable. No chance of turning back now however.

On Friday 27 May I was in London in the morning – a nice stroll through from Green Park to our London Office in Westminster in searing heat. Even at 10 am St James' Park was full of sunbathers. *Merodon equestris* was patrolling the flowerbeds, and I was off to a stuffy office! This was to be the extreme of the sublime to the ridiculous! By 3 pm I was back in Peterborough and about to set off on an epic journey. Little did I know that the A1 between Wakefield and Wetherby was jammed solid (Routefinder does not tell you such things) and that I was about to sample 3 hours at about 5 miles an hour! Thus, I finally arrived at my hotel at 9.30 pm hungry and tired – but no supper to be found unless I fancied fish and chips on the street. First lesson learned – leave early enough to take account of roadworks and don't expect towns in the Scottish borders to have an Indian restaurant.

As predicted, Saturday was not great – in fact it got worse as the day progressed, turning windy and wet. Not much for it but general prospecting for sites. By the time I got to the Daer Reservoir the conditions were terrible: waves that would not disgrace the Bay of Biscay in a force 8. A casual observer can usually tell from my collecting record whether the conditions were good: lots of hoverflies and few others means good collecting for hoverflies; few hovers and lots of craneflies and empids means poor conditions. The latter prevailed and I

now have a big sample of empids – at least Adrian Plant won't have the same gaps on his maps as the hoverfly scheme, and there will be records of common craneflies for Alan Stubbs. Despite these miserable conditions I did manage to get two new squares for *Portevinia maculata*.

Having been undecided whether to book for a third night, I decided that I would gradually travel south late on Sunday afternoon. However, sunny spells suggested that a series of site visits in the Borders would be worthwhile, and maybe I could fill in some gaps in NW Yorkshire the following day. My first stop was a roadside verge with lots of *Anthriscus sylvestris*, buttercups and a fringe of mature trees that was an impulse stop because there was sunshine. The cows in the adjacent shed obviously appreciated the sunshine judging by their noise (or maybe it was milking time). The air was humming with insects and it was not long before my pooter was full. Five species of *Cheilosia* and the usual suite of commoner species contributed to a list of 17 species noted before 10 am. On I went, concentrating on Craik Forest where I noted lots of *Sphegina* including a couple almost pure orange in colour – could I have *Sphegina siberica*? Indeed I did, together with large numbers of *S. clunipes*. Interestingly, *S. clunipes* was abundant even in upland conifer plantations where deciduous timber was noticeably absent.

In places, upland willow bushes were still in flower; I'm not sure which species (there are several highland willows), but they are certainly a jolly good lure for hoverflies and thankfully were sufficiently low-growing to make collecting possible. Apart from *Sphegina*, I noted *Parasyrphus punctulatus*, *Melangyna lasiophthalma* and plenty of *Eristalis*. Elsewhere, the forest verges were rich in marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* and offered a real possibility of *Cheilosia pubera*. Every *Cheilosia* in sight was hoovered up in my search for this species. Lots of brassy looking specimens found their way into the pooter and subsequently proved to be *C. pubera*. In addition, a small number of specimens of *Orthonevra geniculata* turned up, as did *Melangyna arctica*.

Overall, I managed to visit 13 squares in the two days and generated over 160 records, so not so bad a trip. However, the epic had not finished. As I headed south in the evening, I settled on staying in Appleby – that was a mistake as I had forgotten Appleby Horse Fair – the place was heaving with visitors in various states of disrepair, so perhaps thankfully in the absence of vacant rooms I headed south through the dales. Every inn was full or vastly expensive, so I ultimately ended up in Harrogate around 9.30pm. This was not before I had spotted a patch of ramsons at 7.45pm and upon stopping found *Portevinia maculata* in less than a minute: thank goodness for GPS as I did not have a clue where I was.

By the time I reached Harrogate I had given up on the idea of staying overnight and headed home, arriving in Stamford just before midnight. Utterly exhausted, I

settled for the only available fare – fish and chips – but at least in the comfort of my own home.

Having taken stock of the trip, I am greatly heartened by the results. On the second day, I had managed over 140 records comprising 42 species, including several that I had not expected. In total I filled five crystal boxes. There were a few noteworthy lessons in terms of hoverfly distribution and ecology. In particular, for those of us used to more southerly recording the apparent scarcity of species such as *Cheilosia pubera* and *Orthonevra geniculata* is possibly more a function of their northerly distribution. Equally, I did not see *Epistrophe eligans* anywhere on this trip, yet turned it up two days later on a roadside verge near The Wash a couple of days later. Maybe the distribution map for *E. eligans* more accurately reflects its distribution than I had thought (I did think it was a function of lack of records).

From a recording scheme viewpoint, I secured a good range of data for the Hoverfly Scheme and will also be able to contribute to the Larger Brachycera, Empidoidea, Cranefly, Sciomyzidae, Tephritidae and the Stilt and Stalk fly schemes. Others also gained: in particular the soldier-beetle and click beetle schemes, and the Neuroptera scheme. This exercise convinces me that flying visits can rectify some of the gaps in data for Scotland for a variety of recording schemes. Anyone interested in doing the same could be richly rewarded. The trip further confirmed my feelings that upland conifer plantations can be immensely rich for hoverflies and that those with wide verges are particularly good. Given the success of this visit, a few days in Kintyre should yield rich dividends. Watch this space…..

DIARY OF A SQUARE-BASHER: THE TROSSACHS AND MULL OF KINTYRE 2005

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Having made a start on gaps in Scotland a few weeks earlier I was determined to continue to fill in the gaps that make coverage of Scotland so disappointing. So, after a brief visit to the office to clear the backlog of emails, and despite poor weather forecasts, I embarked on the eight-hour drive to Loch Lomond on the morning of Friday 17 June. The weekend forecast was that southern England would roast in temperatures exceeding 30ºC, whereas western Scotland would be cooler and wetter.

As on my last visit, the weather changed as I went north. Nice warm (even hot) weather changed to cooler and less encouraging conditions. Moreover, once I reached my first prospective landfall I discovered that I had timed my visit perfectly to coincide with a concert by the rock band REM (whose music I normally like but cursed on this occasion). Finding accommodation was less

than simple. I finally struck gold around 6 in the evening at the Claymore Hotel at Tarbet. The hotel was not greatly inspiring initially, being the port of call for many tour companies. But, on reflection, £35 for bed, breakfast and an evening meal was exceptionally good value for money. Nearby there was an excellent real ale pub, and I had nice views of the loch and mountains opposite.

The following morning was less than inspiring – cloud halfway down the hillsides and a threat of rain. Nonetheless, I got going and started the quest, having already identified a suite of unrecorded sites. Over the day I visited a range of roadside verges, upland pasture, woodlands and streamsides. Conditions improved to warm and overcast around 20ºC and I was still recording at 1730 from hemlock water dropwort beds where *Sphegina* generally abounded. Over the day I fed a huge number of midges and caught a small sample of hoverflies. However, I also retained material for other schemes (especially the Tipulidae, Larger Brachycera and Empidoidea) and even made sure that other orders were represented. Sadly, some are inclined to eat flies, so the soldier-beetle, sawfly and Neuroptera schemes did less well than they might have. Click beetles, that don't seem to be troublesome, did well.

Sphegina and *Melanostoma* dominated the few syrphids in the haul. Most material was taken by sweeping, but rowan, pignut and hemlock water dropwort and were useful for *Sericomyia* and *Sphegina*. Upon analysis at home, the list for day one was around 80 records from 14 stops (perhaps ten 10k squares). My efforts were largely confined to The Trossachs, which were delightful regardless of the records achieved. For me, the best part of the day was the views of rafts of Eider duck on Loch Fyne – absolutely wonderful!

Having been assured that I would have no problem finding accommodation further west I was taken aback to find that there were no rooms for many miles around Inverary. Eventually I settled for the Lochgair Hotel which was pricey (for me) but quite nice. An excellent meal, a cricked neck from pinning, and a sleepless night from a ferocious thunderstorm meant that I was less than fresh for the wet morning. Wet vegetation does nothing for the sweep net, especially as conditions hardly favoured active searching! I went south, but vacillated as the weather seemed to get better then worse! Eventually I headed west from Lochgilphead towards the coast at Kells. At the edge of Loch Sween I stopped adjacent to a vast stand of hemlock water dropwort in drizzly rain. Where were the voices coming from? Was I going mad? No! A party of sea kayakers went past, making me glance wistfully at the thought of good company and good paddling. Onwards – to the dropwort – nothing to be found! So, up anchors and off to the most western locality at Kells Chappel.

This section of the trip left me with abiding memories of banks of hemlock water dropwort, hillside flushes carpeted with yellow flag iris, and drizzle. Upon arrival at Kells Chappel, I realised there was little to be achieved by general sweeping apart from a wet net. The only solution was general searching for syrphids. Few

to be found on the Iris leaves (except for a few *Rhingia* and *Platycheirus*), but I did find a number of Sciomyzidae and Dolichopodidae that made me realise that visual searching for taxa other than syrphids can be productive. I can certainly recommend this as a course of action for others when stuck with poor collecting conditions in Scotland.

As I travelled south down Kintyre, the weather improved and relatively good samples of syrphids were secured. I even found a sunny bank with ox-eye daisy and buttercups that yielded a list of sixteen species – the best of the trip bar one site the following morning. That evening I aimed for Campbeltown where I knew Andrew Halstead and Mick Parker were based for the night. But, by the time I arrived I had trouble finding accommodation and decided that my chances of tracking Mick and Andrew down were poor. However I gained a fine view of the sunset across Islay and Jura (I also felt somewhat ripped off by my guesthouse who quoted me one price and then raised it once I had agreed to stay – I was just too tired to argue!).

Day 3 and the weather was not bad – sunny and warm. I headed further south through extensive conifer plantations where one stop yielded eighteen species, then off to the most south-easterly point of Kintyre. Here, there were splendid views of the coast of Ireland, which is just twelve miles across the water, and one could look down on a calm bay with a yacht and one of the classic Stephenson lighthouses many hundreds of feet lower down.

By the end of day three, the weather had got worse and I thought long about the next steps. A night in Tarbert was followed by a wet morning. I was told over breakfast that Scotland had not had anything but rain this year. A decision was needed and I decided to head home in search of better weather - I went east and then south. Stopping briefly in the Southern Highlands where I found a site with no syrphids but huge numbers of the RDB2 flower beetle *Oedemera virescens*, I went down towards Appleby where I stopped at various additional locations. At this point there was sunshine, but few flies. At one locality by the River Eden there were great banks of butterbur with hogweed, cow parsley and late-flowering sweet cicely, but barely any flies – I managed a list of eight common species after a long struggle. This experience seems to conform to my general impression that hogweed has either lost its attraction to hoverflies or that there are just not the numbers of flies about – I rather think the latter.

Overall, I have some clear memories of a lovely part of Scotland: The buttercup verges of the Trossachs and northern Kintyre, the wet alder woods and the upland gorges with rowan and *Salix*. But what of the flies? Well, few were noteworthy, but there were remarkable numbers of *Sphegina*, with *Melanostoma scalare* and *Melanogaster hirtella* in good numbers. Notably, the *Sphegina* records included large numbers of *S. sibirica* at a number of locations and there was one rowan that attracted literally clouds of this species. However, effective collecting from rowan does call for a very long net – I was thankful that I had

included my 4 metre handle (even this was not long enough on some occasions. From a recorder's viewpoint, the importance of rowan as a lure was very evident – it seems to me that this is the equivalent of hawthorn in southern England. Other observations include the thought that there was a total absence of craneflies of the genus *Nephrotoma* that are so abundant at this time of year further south (as I write this note, my study is heaving in *Nephrotoma flavescens* attracted to the light). Conversely, there was barely a site where I failed to note *Chrysopilus cristatus*.

Overall, I travelled around 1,200 miles and achieved around 230 records of fifty-six species. Despite the poor haul, I enjoyed my visit to Kintyre and was greatly encouraged to visit more of western Scotland. Watch this space for my next report – I aim to cover the majority of the gaps over the next three years.

INTERESTING RECENT RECORDS

Eristalinus aeneus: Stanah, near Fleetwood, on the edge of salt marsh in the Wyre Estuary, Lancashire (SD347437), probably first record for the area; Barry Brigden.

Volucella inanis: Pittville Park, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire (SO953235), one female on bramble flowers; fifth county record (third for VC33); David Iliff

Volucella zonaria: Coombe Hill Meadows Nature Reserve, Gloucestershire (SO8727), 3 July 2005; second record for VC33 (East Gloucestershire); David Scott-Langley.

Sericomyia lappona: Mallard's Pike, Gloucestershire (SO9309) on wood spurge flower, 11 May 2005, second site record, but only fourth for the county; John Phillips.

Eriozona erratica: Flaxley Wood, Gloucestershire (SO6816), three on 14 May 2005 and two on 15 May 2005; fifth county record; John Phillips.

Callicera aurata: Blaisdon Wood, Gloucestershire (SO6916) on flowering dogwood, 17 June 2005; third county record; John Phillips.

Chrysotoxum elegans: 7 June 2005 Tregantle (SX3852), 7 June 2005 Penlee Point (SX4448), 21 June 2005 Penlee Battery CWT Reserve, 23 June 2005 Penlee (SX4348), all East Cornwall; Leon Truscott.

Dasysyrphus pinastri: 11 May 2005 Penlee Battery CWT Reserve (SX4249) East Cornwall; Leon Truscott.

Epistrophe diaphana: three, 8 June 2005, Seaton Valley (SX3055) East Cornwall; Leon Truscott

Epistrophe nitidicollis: 20 June 2005 Torpoint (SX4354) East Cornwall; Leon Truscott

Xanthogramma citrofasciatum: 11 May 2005 Penlee Battery CWT Reserve (SX4349) East Cornwall; Leon Truscott

BOOK REVIEW:
Hoverflies of Northwest Europe: identification keys to the Syrphidae. M.P.van Veen, 2004. 254pp. KNNV Publishing, Utrecht. ISBN 90 5011 199 8

Martin C.D.Speight, April 2005

Mark van Veen's 254 page book is, quite straightforwardly, a set of English-language keys to the syrphid fauna of Europe from Fennoscandia south to the Loire, and from Ireland east to the Polish border. It covers the adults of some 500 species, including all those known from Britain and/or Ireland. It does not incorporate any keys to larvae. After a short introductory section on morphology, larval development, habitat and syrphid collecting, the text launches straight into presentation of a generic key. This is more comprehensive than English-language keys to European syrphid genera available elsewhere, apart from the key provided in the syrphid part of the Palaearctic Manual. Keys to the species of individual syrphid genera then follow, with the genera presented in alphabetical order, which makes them very easy to find, if perhaps uncomfortable to anyone fixated on phylogenetic relationships. The keys are studded with black-and-white figures derived from a great range of published sources, and include Verlinden's attractive and accurate renderings of many features and species. Information now available on syrphid biology is also mentioned in Van Veen's volume, since the key to each genus is preceded by a paragraph providing references to information on larvae and ecology. The volume ends with a table listing the species treated, showing which are known where in various parts of Europe covered by the keys.

For someone interested solely in the syrphids of Britain this volume provides a handy alternative to existing English-language keys, supported by figures that have not previously been brought together. The keys themselves are, in the main, derived from recent revisions by various different European authors and are identified as such. In their original published form those keys were in a range of different languages and it is the first time that many of them have appeared in English. Given the geographic coverage of the book there has also been need to augment many of those keys with couplets incorporating additional species. In a few cases, e.g. *Melanogaster*, this has resulted in production of English-language keys that cover all the known European species of particular genera for the first time, though the text does not indicate which keys cover all the European species and which do not. In the case of some genera, a notable example being

Platycheirus, more European species are brought together in van Veen's keys than have been treated together in previous keys in any language. In this way van Veen's book becomes the most convenient reference work to use for identification of syrphids derived from any part of the geographical area it covers.

The degree of reliability of the keys provided by van Veen will only become apparent once they have been tried and tested for some time. It is clear that some of them are more robust than others. Van Veen has frequently adopted the pragmatic approach of using features identified by other authors as diagnostic, when incorporating additional species into existing keys. In some instances, e.g. *Dasysyrphus, Eupeodes*, where there is clear need for improved differentiation of species beyond what has been achieved in existing literature, the incorporation into the keys of poorly-differentiated species may prove more vexing than useful. There are also a number of instances e.g. *Cheilosia*, *Chrysogaster*, *Eumerus*, *Merodon*, *Orthonevra*, *Pipizella*, in which figures of the male terminalia of all species covered could usefully re-enforce the keys, but are not provided. Neither are published sources of such illustrations referenced. This failure to provide figures of male terminalia where they can confirm identity of a specimen, or to refer to published sources of such figures, is arguably the most evident shortcoming of the volume. A courageous attempt has been made to provide, for the first time, comprehensive keys to the *Cheilosia* species now known from north-west Europe. This results in a series of overlapping keys, in which some species appear a number of times. The complexity of the situation seems to have confused even the author, since at least one of the alternative keys ("*Fraterna*-subgroup": p.77) seems to have no entry point from any of the other *Cheilosia* keys. Incorporation of doubtful taxa like *C.rotundiventris* and *C.ruficollis* into the *Cheilosia* keys may lead to publication of some questionable records (as keyed out by van Veen both of these taxa could be recognised among British *Cheilosia vernalis* material, for instance), but also helps to highlight present uncertainties surrounding various species complexes. It would only be realistic to suggest the *Cheilosia* keys in this book should be used with caution. They nonetheless represent an improvement on what has until now been available and also provide a template for further improvement, which they will hopefully trigger.

One potential source of confusion/misinterpretation that can be identified in van Veen's text is the sometimes strange English. For instance, in the *Epistrophe* key (p.93) the face of certain species is said to be "in front view smaller", in contradistinction to other species where it is "very broad". It would seem reasonably clear that, in this instance, the word "smaller" effectively means "narrower". Similarly, where (p.95) *Episyrphus balteatus* is said to be "cosmopolitic" it can be recognised that what is meant is "cosmopolitan". But, for the less confident reader, the colour of "Tars 3", referred to (p.99) in couplet 3 of the *Eristalis* key, might not be quite so easy to recognise as a reference to the colour of the tarsal segments of the hind legs. There is also a significant level of inconsistency in use of terms, even within one key, with, for instance, both "surstylus" and "surstyle" used frequently for the same morphological feature,

and both "tarsi" and "tarsae" similarly referred to, in the *Sphegina* key (pages 208-211). These are mostly things that one might expect to be identified and dealt with during the editing process, and are more irritating than problematic. There is, however, one unfortunate error in the key to *Brachyopa* species, where two figures (figs. 83 and 84, p.42), presented as illustrating diagnostic differences in the pilosity of the surstyli of *B.obscura* and *B.testacea*, actually show the 9th sternite, not the surstyli.

A questionable decision taken by the author was to include a previously unpublished key to *Psilota* species offered to him by colleagues. That key seeks to differentiate two species within the taxon generally recognised as *P.anthracina*, using the name *atra* for one of them and *anthracina* for the other. Since *atra* and *anthracina* have for some time been regarded as one species and no justification is provided by van Veen, for application of the names as in the key, there can be no certainty that the names are correctly applied. The basis for assuming that the diagnostic features given in this key are meaningful is also obscure. Certainly, attempts to use the key do not give convincing results.

Significant advances have been made in knowledge of the syrphid fauna of NW Europe, during the last 25 years, and van Veen's book represents a timely collation of that knowledge in respect of species identification. The minor language imperfections, while sufficiently frequent to be noticeable, rarely materially affect use of the keys. The current rate of increase in knowledge about syrphids is more likely to limit the utility of the volume, evidenced by the fact that, in the four months following publication of Van Veen's work, at least 8 species, including a genus new to Europe, were added to the known syrphid fauna of the area covered by the book. At this rate of change any regional monograph published on paper, however well produced, becomes rapidly out-of-date and unreliable. This limitation is foreseen by van Veen, who has signalled his intention to update his keys as necessary, on his internet website at: http://home.hccnet.nl/mp.van.veen/hf_index.html.

At a price of €34.95, van Veen's volume is good value for money for anyone interested in European syrphids and represents a much more attractive proposition than trying to gather for oneself, and then translate to English, all of the papers that have been incorporated into its keys. Whatever its warts and carbuncles it is a welcome addition to European syrphid literature, is likely to be used extensively and can be expected to stimulate further interest in this family of Diptera. It may be obtained through booksellers or direct from the publishers' website, at www.knnvpublishing.nl

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Compiled by Roger Morris

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