Hoverfly Newsletter

Number 46
Spring 2009

ISSN 1358-5029

A year ago the first electronic issue of this newsletter (no. 44) appeared, thanks to the initiative of Darwyn Sumner. This change means that colour illustrations can now be incorporated into these newsletters, and though the copy attached to the Bulletin of the Dipterists Forum that is mailed to members will still be in monochrome, the full colour version should be available online for downloading. I understand, however, that some readers have experienced problems obtaining the online versions of issues 44 and 45. Any readers who have not yet seen the full colour versions of these two newsletters are invited to contact me so that I can email them the PDFs. I wish to record here my thanks to Darwyn for his help in formatting the new-style newsletters and for putting them into PDF.

Articles and illustrations (including colour images) for the next newsletter are always welcome. Copy for **Hoverfly Newsletter No. 47** (which is expected to be issued with the Autumn 2009 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 June 2009.

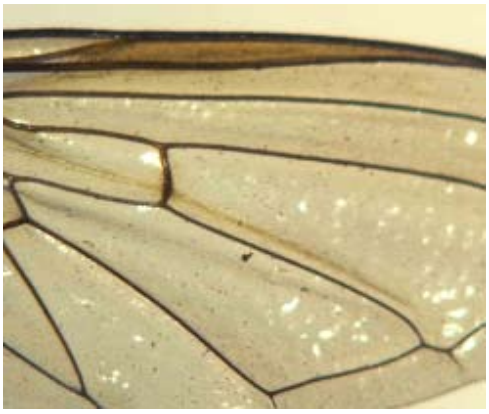
Contents

Rhingia rostrata in Cambridgeshire: wing vein clue to identity

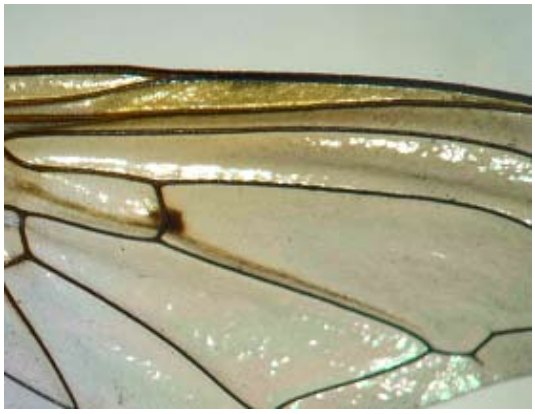
Keith Porter
44 Manor Road, Folksworth, Peterborough, PE7 3SU. k.porter.1@talk21.com

As in the wild, flowers of Devil's-bit scabious are an irresistible lure to syrphids in the garden. A casual glance at a bright looking *Rhingia campestris* led to my first net capture of *rostrata*. I knew from conversations with Roger Morris that this species was expanding and being found more regularly in Northants and elsewhere. The purpose of this note is to add a diagnostic feature that distinguishes *rostrata* from *campestris*. The lack both of black edges to the tergites and of a central dorsal black stripe on the abdomen is striking in live specimens; this was why I first noticed the species amongst the many individuals of *campestris*. In dried specimens of lighter *campestris* tergite edges curl and may need critical examination. The feature that immediately struck me when comparing specimens under the microscope was a wing vein difference. In *rostrata* cross vein r-m has a dark 'spot' that lies on the cross vein and is absent from all the specimens of *campestris* that I have examined. If present in other specimens of *rostrata*, this feature gives added confidence to the recorder.

Pictures crudely taken down my microscope show the difference:



Rhingia campestris



Rhingia rostrata

The same flowers of Devil's-bit scabious in the same week also yielded specimens of both *Volucella inanis* and *V. zonaria*; clearly a good plant to encourage!

Hoverfly Recording Scheme Progress Report – Winter 2008/9

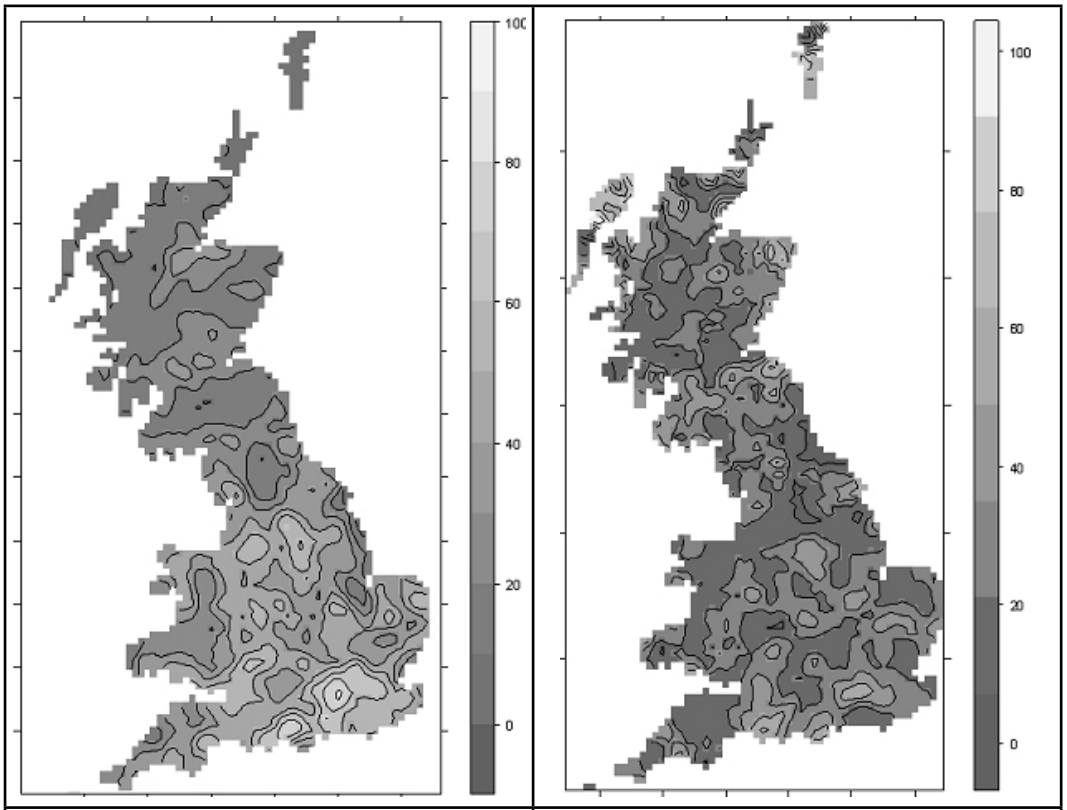
Stuart Ball
255 Eastfield Road, Peterborough, PE1 4BH, stuart.ball@dsl.pipex.com
Roger Morris
7 Vine Street, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 1QE, roger.morris@dsl.pipex.com

As the winter progresses the memories of 2008 fade, but there is no escaping the fact that it was not a good year for hoverfly recording. Our own efforts were heavily curtailed by bad weather and the general impression we get from incoming records is that few recorders had a particularly productive year. That said, there were highlights, including at least two new localities for *Brachyopa bicolor*. Readers who are unfamiliar with *Brachyopa* are encouraged to take a look next year using the techniques described by Roger in the last newsletter.

Provisional atlas 2011

For us, a really important development was the link-up with Kenn Watt whose Scottish dataset greatly improves overall coverage. As mentioned in the last newsletter, we are now in the process of planning an atlas designed to coincide with the International Hoverfly Symposium that will be held in Glasgow in 2011. We hope that the atlas will do more than simply illustrate species' distribution. We hope to include a certain amount of analysis and to include a section updating the larval work that Graham Rotheray has been undertaking over many years. This product will have four authors – with Graham and Kenn joining us.

The atlas we have in mind for 2011 is still in the design stages, but as it is intended as a symposium document, we don't anticipate that it will be widely distributed. It will be available to those who attend the symposium and also to recorders who have made a significant contribution since the last atlas in 2000. We have yet to set a qualification level for receipt of a copy: perhaps 150 records. At the moment rather fewer than 100 contributors have reached this target but there is still time and we hope this will encourage some readers to make an effort in the next two seasons. We would really like people to adopt a poorly recorded square (or squares) and set about putting it on a firmer footing. Those who are uncertain about identifying material are welcome to send material to Roger for identification – the records will still count towards your tally.



The number of species predicted to occur from 1990 onwards in each 10km square out of 108 species for which a good distribution model could be fitted.

Proportion (%) of those 108 species which have actually been recorded from 1990 onwards. Squares where this proportion is low are "poorly recorded".

Planning for the Symposium is at a very early stage, but an organisational nucleus comprising Stuart, Roger, Graham Rotheray, Francis Gilbert and Geoff Hancock has been formed. We want to make this a really exciting event and hope that there will be a better UK presence than has been the case for the last two of these Symposia!

Hoverfly status review

We very much hope that the review of hoverfly statuses will be published by the time this report reaches readers. The text has been delivered to JNCC and it is now up to them to deliver! The addition of Kenn Watt's data has helped considerably, although the list of species has not altered greatly. We have one particularly problematic species – *Platycheirus immarginatus*. This is generally thought of as a coastal species, but the HRS has received many inland records – about 22% of the total. The problem is that we suspect that many of these are based on females and we are now firmly of the opinion that the leg colour character used in the key in Stubbs & Falk is unreliable. Males **can** be reliably identified, and records based on males from well established recorders are all coastal. We have yet to see a male specimen taken away from the coast! If we only accept male records, then it is an exclusively coastal species in Great Britain, recorded from 70 ten km. squares, and should remain "Nationally Scarce". If we accepted all records, then it occurs widely inland, from 98 ten km. squares, and is on the borderline to no longer qualify for this status. We decided to map only the coastal records, retain it as "Nationally Scarce" and documented these problems in the text.

Training events

Last year's identification courses seem to have had quite an impact on Dipterists Forum membership. They have also encouraged a number of new recruits to hoverfly recording. We were particularly pleased with the results of two courses held in Glasgow where the average age was considerably under 40! That group has been very productive and we hope to run another course for a similar group in 2009.

The second of the two Glasgow courses was held at Rowardennan, Glasgow University's field centre on the banks of Loch Lomond. It was a great venue and it yielded a tantalising record: amongst a batch of material that appears to have been collected by students from the general environs of the field centre – there was an unlabelled female specimen of *Syrphus admirandus*. This is a northern European species that keyed out readily using the new Finnish Hoverfly book (Haarto & Kerppola, 2007). It looks rather more like a large *Scaeva* than a *Syrphus* and has pointed wing-tips – a very distinctive feature (which is not mentioned in van Veen (2004)'s key!). It is tantalising because, without a data label, we cannot claim this as a "new to Britain". Needless to say we have plans to look for the beast next summer!

Spring 2009?

Spring will be upon us by the time this newsletter emerges. Hopefully you will have time to register an interest in the monitoring initiative that is discussed in the separate note in this bulletin. Other opportunities to bear in mind include looking for *Cheilosia* larvae in thistles as we did last summer (see account of our journey to and from last July's field meeting in Scotland). Also, do keep an eye open for some of the species that are on the move – especially *Sphegina sibirica* in southern England.

Happy hunting

A possible hoverfly monitoring project – a call for volunteers

Stuart Ball
255 Eastfield Road, Peterborough, PE1 4BH, stuart.ball@dsl.pipex.com
Roger Morris
7 Vine Street, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 1QE, roger.morris@dsl.pipex.com

Butterfly monitoring has been ongoing since 1976 and has become an established and important means of following changes in the butterfly fauna of the British Isles. Similar schemes have been set up elsewhere in the world, and many wardens undertake butterfly transects to monitor the effects of management or the overall condition of their reserve. Butterflies can tell us a lot, but more could be achieved using a wider range of taxa. The problem is that monitoring for one group is not necessarily compatible with others: search techniques differ and of course some taxa are more obvious than others.

Hoverflies are an obvious addition to the monitoring process, not least because they occupy a much wider suite of niches. They are therefore potentially more versatile and useful in monitoring conditions within some sites such as woodlands where saproxylic and predaceous faunas have the potential to tell us a great deal more about what is going on. Long-term monitoring effort such as Jenny Owen's malaise trap and Alan Stubbs' garden monitoring scheme provide some indications of how data could be secured, but we are aware that neither is necessarily suitable for reserve wardens or for relative novices to hoverfly recording. Something different is needed and we hope to develop and refine a monitoring scheme over the next few years. Defining such a scheme needs a bit of work and therefore we are looking for people who would like to trial the idea. In 2009 we hope to investigate the issues that are likely to emerge and to develop the idea into something that can be disseminated to a much wider audience.

One idea would be to set up a series of "constant effort sites" where recorders visit during set periods over the spring and summer. The main period of interest would be between late April and mid-July, but the idea could be extended to include visits in late July and August. The following table outlines the possible timing of visits if extended over a full season.

April	May					June				July				August				September		
24-30	1-7	8-14	15-21	22-29	30-5	6-12	13-19	20-26	27-3	4-10	11-17	18-24	25-31	1-7	8-14	15-21	22-28	29-4	5-11	12-18	19-25
Visit 1				Visit 2				Visit 3				Visit 4				Visit 5					

Timing

Each visit needs to be timed to coincide with peak hoverfly activity and therefore needs to be between 10 am and 12 am over a defined route with suitable localities for recording hoverflies i.e. sunlit areas with flowers and suitable leaves (especially lime & sycamore). Recording during the middle of the day should be acceptable until July, after which the hottest period should be avoided – in which case starting earlier is to be preferred.

A three-week period for each recording visit has been defined to take account of multifarious factors that make weekly counts unrealistic. Ideally, the visit should be timed within the second of each three-week period but there is latitude for variation – as long as the date of the visit is recorded.

Recording

Ideally, all species of hoverfly should be recorded, with difficult taxa retained for critical examination. However, this approach will not suit many recorders (either because they lack experience or because they are averse to taking specimens). A twin-track approach is therefore suggested:

Novices and conscientious objectors: Species recorded should be confined to those species that we believe can be reliably identified in the field and which are readily recognisable. These are listed on the proposed recording sheet. Photographs of uncertain species could be retained and submitted for identification (not always possible).

Experienced all-taxa recorders: Readily identified species should be noted and counted. More difficult taxa (i.e. those that definitely require microscopic examination) should be retained and recorded later.

Unlike the butterfly transect which relies on fast visual examination of a particular route, tak-

Site name:		**Recorder:**			
Grid ref. (4-figure)		**Date:**		**From to** (time)	
Conditions		**Main nectar sources**		**Notes**	
Species	**No.**	**Species**	**No.**	**Additional species***	**No.**
Baccha elongata		Eristalis tenax			
Platycheirus albimanus		Helophilus pendulus			
Chrysotoxum bicinctum		Myathropa florea			
Chrysotoxum festivum		Merodon equestris			
Dasysyrphus albostriatus		Sericomyia silentis			
Epistrophe eligans		Volucella bombylans			
Leucozona glaucia		Volucella inanis			
Leucozona lucorum		Volucella pellucens			
Scaeva pyrastri		Volucella zonaria			
Syrphus sp.		Syritta pipiens			
Cheilosia illustrata		Xylota segnis			
Eristalis pertinax		Xylota sylvarum			
* Please note whether specimen retained.					

ing account of specimens seen within a corridor, hoverfly recording needs to be tailored to the site. So, keep to a specified route and define a series of stopping points where recording can be undertaken – say a series of patches of hogweed or obvious nectar sources such as hawthorn, blackthorn or dogwood flowers. The route needs to be sufficiently long to allow a reasonable period of recording, and needs to take account of seasonal variation. However, it should not be so long that it cannot be completed within a reasonable time-period of between 1 & 1.5 hours. Stops to record hoverflies should be sufficient to note what is there at the time, rather than waiting for new or more flies to arrive.

Aspirations

Our hope is that we might recruit around 50 people across the UK. Ideally, the surveys would cover all species, but as we realise that people of varying confidence might like to participate we think there is scope to vary the approach to fit skills. Primarily, we would like to record those common species that can be recorded in the field once a recorder is reasonably competent and can use a simple chart of the commonest species. This part of the survey might also form the basis for school projects.

If this project gets support we propose to develop a project newsletter and an e-group. Over a series of years the data assembled should help to develop the sort of monitoring outputs currently achieved by the butterfly-monitoring scheme. Yes, it will have its limitations; but it offers the possibility of giving hoverflies a more prominent profile in all sorts of ways. It

would be really good to see hoverflies used as indicators of change in the countryside, but to do so we need your help.

Our feeling is that the sites chosen for this monitoring project could be adapted to fit individual needs: your garden, a school nature area, a local nature reserve or maybe your favourite "patch"? We are planning to produce an identification sheet along the lines of those published by the Field Studies Council and our hope is that participants will help to trial it by downloading from the website and printing it at home.

Anyone who is interested should visit the Hoverfly Recording Scheme website www.hoverfly.org.uk and register interest through the forum thread.

Platycheirus sticticus (Meigen 1822) – a cautionary tale

Roy Crossley
1, The Cloisters, Wilberfoss, York, YO41 5RF, telephone 01759 388809

On 14 July 2008 I swept a single male *Platycheirus sticticus* (Mg.), my first ever, in a moorland valley on the eastern edge of the North York Moors National Park. The site is a delightful mix of peaty bogs, tumbling streams and scattered old woodland. After nearly fifty years of collecting hoverflies I ought to have spotted this as something different straight away, but in the net, amongst a milling mass of varied flies, I took it to be dark *Melanostoma mellinum* (L.) and thought it might be worth keeping for further study. When I was rough-sorting at night, at a cursory glance I took it to be a dwarf *Platycheirus albimanus* (Fab.), and probably an aberrant, maybe even an intersex, on account of the small first tarsal segment of the front leg., and fortunately I decided to pin it and look at it in detail later.

It was only when pinning the specimen that I noted the relatively large head in proportion to the size of the body, as in *Platycheirus discimanus* Loew, to which it looks rather similar. However, the character that alerted me to the fact that this was something quite different was the very conspicuous, spiny, isolated posterior bristle towards the apex of the front femora. This is illustrated in Plate R in **British Hoverflies** (Stubbs & Falk), and also, slightly more prominently to my eyes, at p.171 in **Hoverflies of Northwest Europe** (van Veen).

In his book, Alan Stubbs comments (p184), 'It would be easy to overlook this species in the field'. So it is! And not only in the field either, so take care with tiny, dark *Platycheirus* specimens; as we say up here in Yorkshire –"Tha' nivver knows"

Fieldcraft notes – finding *Cheilosia*

Roger Morris
7 Vine Street, Stamford, Lincolnshire, PE9 1QE, roger.morris@dsl.pipex.com

It is remarkable how few recorders include the genus *Cheilosia* on their lists. Why is this? Perhaps one reason is that they are not terribly easy to identify? Another might be that they are more cryptic and therefore don't get noticed? My suspicion is that difficulty in identification may be compounded by the challenge they pose to search techniques. So how can one increase the haul? Most *Cheilosia* are regular flower visitors. They seem to prefer open flat flowers and can be found pretty well throughout the year. My year follows a familiar pattern:

April: The obvious place to look is on *Salix* flowers where both *C. albipila* and *C. grossa* can be found. But, don't just stop there. Spring dandelions can be exceptionally rewarding – I regularly find *C. bergenstammi* at these, sometimes with *C. pagana* and *C. vernalis*. The latter two can also be found at lesser celandine, occasionally accompanied by *C. albitarsis* agg.

May: Buttercup season brings out *C. albitarsis* and *C. ranunculi* – both will visit creeping and bulbous buttercups but are rarely seen at meadow buttercup. *C. fraterna* behaves in a similar way. Watch out for leaf baskers – *C. variabilis* is a major proponent, but I have seen *C. chrysocoma* behaving in a similar manner. This latter species looks so like female *Andrena fulva* that it may get overlooked. Hawthorns can be a useful lure – most frequently for *C. impressa* which also seems to turn up at the flowers of ramsons (together with *C. pagana* and perhaps others). The other good (possibly under-rated) lure is *Anthriscus sylvestris* (cow parsley or Queen Anne's lace) – but specimens can be quite dispersed. Nonetheless *C. proxima, C. pagana, C. variabilis* and *C. vulpina* are regular visitors.

June: This is the start of the umbellifer season when all manner of *Cheilosia* can be found at hogweed. *C. illustrata* is particularly noteworthy but there are many others. It is worth holding on to a large selection because a large *C. proxima* may well turn out to be *C. vulpina*. As the hogweed subsides, other umbellifers become more apparent. I find upright hedge parsley to be particularly good.

July: A generally excellent month for *Cheilosia* with lots happening on all remaining umbellifers. Keep a careful eye open for *Myolepta dubia*, which looks remarkably like a *Cheilosia* when its wings are folded over the abdomen – the yellow tergite markings are sometimes heavily obscured. At this time *Cheilosia soror* and *C. scutellata* become prominent members of the assemblage (more so in southern England).

August: This is actually an excellent month for *Cheilosia* with lots of lures: ragwort is often festooned with all manner of *Cheilosia* whilst angelica can be extremely productive; in northern England this is a good way of finding *C. longula*. Don't overlook yarrow which is often a good lure for *C. vernalis*; and keep a weather eye open for that patch of *Matricaria* in the field margin – this too can be good and I have found such species as *C. griseiventris* in attendance.

September: The choice is a bit more limited but in the latter stages of August and into September I tend to stop at verges with catsear and *Leontodon* sp. These sorts of locations provide a great chance of both *C. latifrons* and *C. griseiventris*. The ivy patches can also be productive with a limited fauna such as *C. scutellata* and *C. pagana*, which may be found into October.

Cheilosia are not always straightforward to identify and although it is possible to get a feel for what they might be, the best bet is to retain a large selection as several species lurk cryptically amongst the others. Have a go – there is much to be gained and in so many places we know very little about the occurrence of *Cheilosia*. This was apparent to me when I arrived in the Peterborough area. From the maps it looked like a *Cheilosia*-free zone but when I got to work there was actually quite a rich assemblage

Announcement: the 5th International Symposium on Syrphidae

The V International Symposium on Syrphidae will take place in Novi Sad (Fruska gora-Andrevlje), Serbia, from 18 to 22 June 2009. Details can be found on http://www.diptera.info/news.php, http://www.ib.ns.ac.yu/CBBC/en/index.htm and http://syrphidae.com/.

Interesting recent records

2007 records from Leon Truscott:

Chrysotoxum elegans Penlee Point, Cornwall, 16 & 29 June and 5 August.

Xanthandrus comtus Rame, Cornwall, 30 October. Torpoint, Cornwall, 25 November (in garden moth trap (actinic light)).

Xanthogramma citrofasciatum Penlee Point, Cornwall, 4 May and 22 June. Cawsand, Cornwall 24th May.

2008 records from Leon Truscott:

Chrysotoxum elegans Penlee Point, Cornwall, 3 & 6 June, 7, 15 & 21 August and 8 October. Rame, Cornwall, 19 June and 15 August.

Chriorhina berberina Penlee Point, Cornwall, 11 June.

Meligramma guttatum Penlee Point, Cornwall, 6 July (2nd record for this site).

Microdon myrmicae Wimalford, Bodmin Moor, Cornwall, 7 June (now regular at this site).

Xanthandrus comtus Penlee Point, Cornwall 8 June and 6 & 19 July. Torpoint, Cornwall, 7 September & 26 October, the latter in garden moth trap as in November 2007.

Xanthogramma citrofasciatum Penlee Point, Cornwall, 18 May (seems established in this area).

Xylota segnis Seaton Valley, Cornwall, 19 November (a late date).

2008 Hoverfly notes by Nigel Jones:

Although most species of hoverfly were around in very reduced numbers during 2008, no doubt reflecting the very poor weather through much of the season, I did encounter a number of interesting species. A few species were notable for their apparent absence, whilst a few other species appeared to thrive.

Brachyopa bicolor was found at Attingham Park, Shropshire 7 & 18 May SJ5410 (see Hoverfly Newsletter Autumn 2008).

Brachypalpoides lentus - a single specimen in woodland, 19 June, Tan Tree Bank, Rowley, Shropshire, SJ291058.

Cheilosia albipila - on Salix flowers, Riddles Wood, Westcott, Shropshire, 22 April, SJ403017.

Cheilosia semifasciata - a fifth Shropshire site for this scarce species was discovered on 26 May, Snailbeach Coppice SJ387024.

Criorhina asilica 23 May, Attingham Park, SJ548103; 19 June, Tan Tree Bank, Rowley, SJ291058 – both in Shropshire.

Criorhina ranunculi - on salix flowers, 16 & 22 April Riddles Wood, Westcott SJ403017; 2 May Gamebuck Rough, Penley SJ4037 – both in Shropshire.

Epsitrophe diaphana – a singleton was recorded on 30 May, Kingston Seymour, Somerset, ST392672.

Epistrophe grossulariae appeared to be numerous in 2008, with 28 sightings between 4 June and 19 August, mainly in Shropshire.

Very few *Eumerus* were encountered during 2008, with just two *E. funeralis* 24 May and 19 August (Shrewsbury area) and no *E. strigatus* were recorded.

Ferdinandea cuprea was encountered on many occasions, most notably on 4 June, Breidden Hill, Montgomeryshire, SJ2914, where fifteen were seen, nearly all going to yellow flowers of *Ranunculus* and Compositae

Ferdinandea cuprea (Nigel Jones)

Platycheirus peltatus at *Campanula* (Nigel Jones)

Ferdinandea ruficornis 20 May Attingham Park SJ548099 and 1 August, Stevenshill, Shropshire, SJ5550035, where two were flying to *Campanula trachelium* flowers along with very large numbers of *Platycheirus peltatus*.

Helophilus trivittatus enjoyed another good year with twelve sightings between 30 May and 21 September in Shropshire, Worcestershire, Cardiganshire and Somerset.

Helophilus trivittatus (David Iliff)

Heringia pubescens (David Iliff)

Heringia pubescens 2 May, Gamebuck Rough, Penley, Shropshire, SJ4037.

Mallota cimbiciformis - this scarce species was sighted on three occasions in Shropshire: 19 July, New Coppice, Haughmond, SJ542155; 21 July Hollies, Haughmond, SJ535137; 28 July Racecourse Common, Llawnt, SJ257309. All were nectaring on *Heracluem sphondylium* flowers. I also noted several reports of *Mallota* sightings on various internet forums, indicating that this species may have surged during 2008.

Melangyna umbellatarum was unusually numerous, with nine sightings between 24 May and 19 August, including a surprising record from my garden in Shrewsbury SJ491113.

Microdon mutabilis 09 June, Waun Las NNR, SN530181.

Neoascia geniculata 14 May, Attingham Park, SJ551098.

Parasyrphus punctulatus thrived during 2007, but I did not encounter a single specimen in 2008. Perhaps a reaction to the very cool spring of 2008.

Pipiza luteitarsis 24 May, Redhill, Shrewsbury SJ4709.

Rhingia rostrata was not encountered as frequently as in the two previous seasons, with just four sightings - 5 May Stevenshill, Shrops, SJ5503; 6 May, Blackstone Farm, Worcestershire, SO798745; 3 August Tan Tree Bank, Shropshire SJ292058; 6 August Attingham Park, Shropshire SJ548103.

Sphegina sibirica 4 July, Merrington Green, Shropshire, SJ4620.

Trichopsomyia flavitarsis 9 June, National Botanic Garden of Wales, Camarthenshire SN521179.

Triglyphus primus - a pair were taken from a track at the edge of an arable field, 21 July, Uffington, Shropshire, SJ530141.

Volucella zonaria - a second Shropshire record was made on 15 September, Shrewsbury SJ498131.

Xylota florum 19 June Rowley, Shropshire SJ298055; Hall Close Coppice, Alveley, Shropshire, SO752837.

Xylota xanthocnema 16 June, Attingham Park, Shropshire, SJ548103.