Hoverfly Newsletter

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I thank the contributors to this newsletter, particularly Roger Morris, without whom this issue would have been a rather thin one. In the first sentence of the recording scheme update he and Stuart Ball have clearly rated 2009 as so far yet another disappointing year. Yet my experience of this year has been somewhat different as, although I have not found hoverflies to be abundant, I have seen an excellent diversity of species. During 2009 to date I have seen two species I had never seen before (*Dasysyrphus friuliensis* and *Myolepta dubia*) and the hoverfly species list for my garden has increased by four.

International interest in hoverflies continues to grow as witnessed by the completion of yet another successful international symposium (the fifth). In Roger's write up of this year's event he refers to two newly-published books on hoverflies. I can recall that when I began recording the only reference work I had was a photocopy of R. L. Coe's out-of-print key. This was supplemented in 1969 by a reprint of Verrall's book, to be followed in 1981 by van der Goot's **Zweefvliegen**.and in 1983 by the first edition of **British Hoverflies**. How things have changed since then! Once I have obtained copies of the two new books I shall have at least seventeen hoverfly books on my shelves.

Articles and illustrations (including colour images) for the next newsletter are always welcome. Copy for **Hoverfly Newsletter No. 48** (which is expected to be issued with the Spring 2010 Dipterists Forum Bulletin) should be sent to me:

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Hoverfly Recording Scheme update July 2009

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What a year it has been so far! April came and went with few great opportunities for recording in nice weather; May was uninspiring at weekends and June was fiercely hot for much of the time. This seems to follow a pattern that has been seen in other recent years and there are reflections in the assemblage of hoverflies encountered. Aphid-feeders appear to have fared particularly badly with the website's "forum" echoing with concerns about the absence of *Syrphus* species. Stem and root-dwellers seem to have fared better as have some saproxylic species such as *Criorhina*, but *Eristalis* too seem to be down.

For us, the highlight of the year so far has been the International hoverfly symposium in Serbia, which provided a welcome stimulus and break. We have lots of ideas and are very keen to get down to writing the text for a draft atlas which will be produced to coincide with the 2011 hoverfly symposium in Glasgow. If you have not forwarded records please do so as we really need to get the data up to date. Remember that we will be providing copies of the draft atlas to post 2000 contributors of 150+ records (at the moment about 150 people).

Plans to launch a monitoring scheme for hoverflies came to a shuddering halt because Roger found he had bitten off too much: a combination of a heavy work commitments and the demands of organising field meetings for Dipterists Forum played havoc with the need to provide guidance. Hopefully this will be rectified this autumn and we will be able to launch in 2010. Meanwhile, Butterfly Conservation are trialing some limited hoverfly monitoring as part of their butterfly transect programme. This involves recording a limited suite of hoverflies and other insects over the last 200 metres of the transect. The hoverflies chosen are:

Episyrphus balteatus
Rhingia campestris
Volucella pellucens
Eristalis pertinax
Leucozona glaucia
Sericomyia silentis

So far this year there have been no reports of new additions to the UK list, but there is exciting news of *Myolepta potens*, which we leave to a separate report from John Phillips. Where else might this enigmatic species occur? Perhaps we should organise a survey of horse chestnuts in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire this winter? Any takers?

Our own survey activity has been quite curtailed by the hoverfly symposium that has meant that we have not made our annual pilgrimage to Scotland. We hope to rectify this in August with a trip to the west coast. Hopefully we will have a lot more to report in the autumn. Meanwhile keep an eye open for a new website to serve the international hoverfly community that Stuart is in the process of constructing.

The brevity of this update is symptomatic of the year. The best bits of the hoverfly symposium are discussed in a separate note but perhaps this is the place to start to encourage readers to think about attending the Symposium in Glasgow in 2011. We plan to schedule this for August but have yet to confirm dates. It would be great to have a large UK contingent, as the representation at recent events in Europe has been a bit thin – just four of us went to Novi-Sad.

Myolepta potens in Gloucestershire

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On 15 June 2007 I visited Blaisdon Wood, just outside the Forest Of Dean about 12km west of Gloucestershire. This is a privately owned mixed woodland which has been a favourite hoverfly site of mine for some years and which has produced some interesting finds, including the dead-wood, rot-hole or sap-run species *Brachypalpoides lentus, Callicera aurata, Criorhina asilica* and *Volucella inflata*, as well as other notables such as *Arctophila superbiens, Didea fasciata* and *Eriozona syrphoides*. On this occasion my attention was drawn to a hoverfly which settled fairly close by, about a metre above the ground on top of bramble bush. In the few seconds for which it was in view I had an impression of a shiny-looking black hoverfly, about the size and with something of the jizz of *Xylota segnis*, but with mostly black legs and what seemed to be yellow colouring on the abdomen, visible through the closed wings. It had landed in a position where it was impossible to catch, but I managed to take a poor photograph before it flew away.

I realised that, unlikely as it might seem, it could have been *Myolepta* sp. This impression was reinforced when I read in Stubbs & Falk (2002) that *M. dubia* "can be overlooked as *Cheilosia impressa* owing to the yellow coloration showing through the wings and giving the impression of yellow wing-bases." This is exactly what I had briefly done.

I returned to the wood (between the downpours) a number of times that year and a few times in 2008, but with no further sightings of anything *Myolepta*-like. Then, on 3 June 2009, I again had frustratingly brief views of a shiny black hoverfly with large yellow patches on the abdomen, very close to the site of the original observation. This time I failed even to get a photo before it vanished, but I was quite confident it was *Myolepta* - but which species? *M. dubia* is scarce enough nationally, and has been found almost exclusively in south-east England, with no records from Gloucestershire and no dots on the map closer than about 50 miles from Blaisdon (Ball & Morris 2000). Even so, it seemed far more likely than *M. potens,* a fabulously rare BAP species with a handful of specimens from the Bristol area between the 1940's and 1961 (Levy & Levy 1998) and a record of larvae at Moccas Park, Herefordshire in 2002 (Stubbs & Falk).

Subsequent visits to Blaisdon Wood in 2009 drew a blank, but on 22 June this year I went to another of my regular local sites at Welshbury Wood, a Forestry Commission woodland on the west edge of the Forest of Dean, about 2km from Blaisdon Wood. This wood has a lower proportion of old broad-leaved trees than Blaisdon, but has nevertheless produced some interesting hoverflies over the years. On this visit I had only walked a couple of hundred yards from the car when I glimpsed a suspiciously black-and yellow looking hoverfly, again on flowering brambles, close to the track. It immediately flew up, but settled down again in the same bush - out of reach of any trapping equipment but giving reasonable views through binoculars. This time I was certain I was looking at *Myolepta,* but the views were such that I couldn't begin to guess which species. Again, I just managed to get a couple of very poor photos before it zoomed off.

I hung around the bush for some time, hoping it might come back, but with no luck, so I continued up the track, trying to feel delighted that I had confirmed Myolepta rather than disappointed because I didn't know which species! It was with feelings of incredulity that, a couple of hundred yards further on, I found what was clearly another Myolepta, again on a bramble bush but this time at not much more than knee height. I wasn't carrying a net, but after a few seconds of heart-in-the-mouth stalking, I managed to get it safely into a tube. It was a male, but I realised I had forgotten which way round the abdomen patterns of dubia and potens were, so I had to wait until I got home, ten minutes later, before discovering from Stubbs & Falk that it matched potens.

I took several photographs of it live in the tube. One of these is shown below.

Myolepta potens male from Welshbury Wood (John Phillips)

This was obviously hot news, so I took it to David Iliff's home a few miles away so he could see it and check the identity. We confirmed the key characters again and also ran it through the key in van Veen (2004), which uses the extent of yellow and black on tergite 3 in addition to the width of the facial stripe to separate the two species. The specimen was later pinned by Martin Matthews. Once it was mounted, he and David gave it further very critical examination and were able to compare it directly with a specimen of a male *M. dubia* which David had collected only five days previously in the New Forest.

Two intriguing questions are what is the species' true status in the Forest of Dean - has it been overlooked in the large areas of apparently suitable habitat? And is *potens* the only species of *Myolepta* in the Dean, or could *dubia* be here as well?

References

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5th International Symposium on the Syrphidae

Fusca Gora Reserve, Novi-Sad, Serbia

19-22 June 2009

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(with Stuart Ball and Alan Stubbs)

When we arrived at Alan's house on Tuesday 16 June at 3.25am, there were no signs of life. We rang the bell, and again, and again! We tried knocking and then Stuart went home to try ringing Alan! I heard the phone run its full course at least three times before concluding we would have to leave Alan behind; I went to the car to write a note to put through the letterbox. Lucky I did this as we learned subsequently that Jane had seen me from the window, realised who it was and alerted Alan. A rather cautious Jane answered the door whilst Alan frantically packed. Ten minutes later we were speeding towards Heathrow.

"Slow down, this is an average speed camera section" Stuart warned as we hurtled on to the Peterborough ring road. It was a fast drive to Heathrow but we made it and had time for a rest and a coffee before our 8.15 flight. A lovely cloudless morning meant that we could see a great deal of our route – tracking over Dungeness, northern France, the Alps and on to the Danube floodplain. Serbia and her neighbours are still relatively undeveloped in terms of agriculture but even now it is clear that the traditional strip system is being replaced by big monocultures, eliminating an agricultural heritage that has persisted for generations.

And so began our visit to Serbia – the land of the Danube; of poplar plantations and reedbeds; windblown soils and sands; and of a language that defeated the Peterborough Mafia completely. Between us we boasted the finest schoolboy French but little else other than an aversion to anything beyond the Anglo-Saxon idiom. Fortunately we were met at the airport in Belgrade and effortlessly delivered to the Halls of Residence in Novi-Sad. Our rooms were pleasant apartments with en-suite and catering facilities too.

The visit split fairly neatly into two: the conference and visits to wildlife sites. We arrived a couple of days early with the intention of hiring a car and travelling out to nearby sites. Stuart had a long wish list for birds and had done some reading around. The one problem we had not anticipated was the absence of good maps so our range was rather limited. We managed Fuska Gora National Park on the first afternoon – a section of rather even-aged lime woods perhaps 70 years old (very little of Fusca Gora is much older). We eventually found a flowery open area where insects were abundant. Flies were singularly scarce but we did find a spectacular hornet-mimicking clearwing moth (*Sesia* sp.) - one of four species of clearwings seen on the trip.

The following day we were much more adventurous and headed for Carska Bara, a reserve comprising alluvial riverine forests and large open water bodies. The forests were alive with mosquitoes and we fed them well. These woods comprised a mixture of willows, poplars and ash together with the occasional cherry plum and mulberry. There was plenty of dead wood from some very ancient willows and poplars but we saw few dead-wood insects. This area did yield some very spectacular insects, including a large asilid (*Choerades* sp?) (see photo below) and a variety of Cerambycidae. Birds seen included Golden Oriole, which proved to be widespread in the poplar plantations that cover much of the wetter ground (for export to Italy for paper-making), and a magnificent colony of Bee-eaters in a road cutting on the route to the reserve. Stuart got his first big "tick" - Pigmy Cormorant. The most interesting fly was possibly a spectacular long bodied red tachinid (photo below). Hoverflies, meanwhile, were noticeably absent!

Our attempts to find habitat along the Danube on the Thursday morning were less successful and we were greatly heartened to find that the conference centre was embedded in the woodlands of Fusca Gora – a wonderful setting with an area of open grassland abutting the woodlands. Here we enjoyed several hours entomology – more clearwings, several asilids and dozens of male *Merodon* jostling for territory on a hot concrete track. During our stay we also saw the spectacular blue Cerambycid *Rosalia alpina* which is a very great rarity – it drew a large crowd and was much photographed.

The great thing about staying at Fusca Gora is the wonderful buzz of insects – a low hum interspersed by the shrill sound of cicadas and crickets. This hum is millions of honey bees that visit the lime trees for nectar. This puzzled us at first until on one woodland walk we found the explanation: a cornucopia of beehives stacked as mobile units on coaches and lorries modified to transport hives (photo below).

Finally, our wildlife quest was richly rewarded by a visit to Delabato Sands on the Monday as the conference excursion. This wonderful expanse of blown sand and loess supports amazing flower-rich grasslands. The range of flowing plants is almost mind-blowing, but it gives a fantastic impression of what Steppe habitat would have been like, with the Mongol hordes pouring across. The nomadic way of life has gone, but there are still shepherded flocks and some very unfamiliar breeds of sheep and cattle (photo below). This proved to be a birding excursion as several delegates were keen birders and those less well acquainted were given the opportunity to improve their lists – we too saw Pigmy Cormorant as well as Squacco Heron, a colony of Bee-eaters and several storks.

The conference itself was excellently organised and included many presentations of the high standard we have come to expect. The sessions were:

Past, present & future of Syrphidology, which included talks by Alan Stubbs (Growth of the British Hoverfly list since 1901) and Francis Gilbert: The future of Syrphidology. We were also introduced to the new Dutch hoverfly atlas, which is a magnificent volume of over 400 pages, in which it is suggested that *Chalcosyrphus valgus* is extinct in Holland. This announcement triggered the same response as can be expected in the UK – it was re-found just a few days after publication of the atlas! Alan's talk, meanwhile, showed how the UK list had grown at a rate of almost one species per year in the past 108 years. This session also saw the introduction of part one of Hans Bartsch's amazing book on the Syrphidae of Sweden.

Faunistics & Zoogeography, which included talks on the fauna of Togo (Axel Ssymank), the fauna of the high Altai mountain range in central Russia (Anatoli Barkalov) and the fauna of the Galicica National Park (Vladimir Krpac). This topic also elicited a wide range of posters along similar themes including details of the fauna of Surinam (Menno Reemer) and the Syrphid fauna of the Kamchatka peninsular (Valery Mutin).

Taxonomy & Phylogeny, that included a very stimulating presentation on the Microdontinaae (Menno Reemer) and an investigation into the genus *Chrysotoxum* (Jeff Skevington & Daniele Sommaggio) in North America. The former showed just how diverse the Microdontinae are, whilst the latter illustrated the challenges of trying to define species when the morphological characters are very similar and the DNA

profiles appear to be equally narrowly defined. Two presentations on the genus *Eumerus* (Martin Hauser – *Eumerus* in Australia; and Dieter Doczkal – the phylogeny of *Eumerus*) provided plenty of food for thought. Many of the Australian species appear to have arrived through human activity including *E. strigatus* and *E. funeralis*, but there are natives including the magnificent *Eumerus superbus* whose larvae develop in Cycad cones.

Ecology & Conservation, which included two talks from the Hoverfly Recording Scheme organisers ("The distribution of hoverfly species richness in Great Britain" [Stuart], and "some species of hoverfly which are expanding their British ranges" [Roger]). Other presentations included Jeff Skevington who described some of the work on hoverflies that is happening on the back of the North American initiative on pollinators. This will include a guide to the hoverflies of North-east North America (400 species). Tom Gittings described the work of an Irish team looking at Syrphidae in non-designated wetlands in Ireland, which showed that relatively small sites have a remarkably rich wetland fauna worthy of recognition.

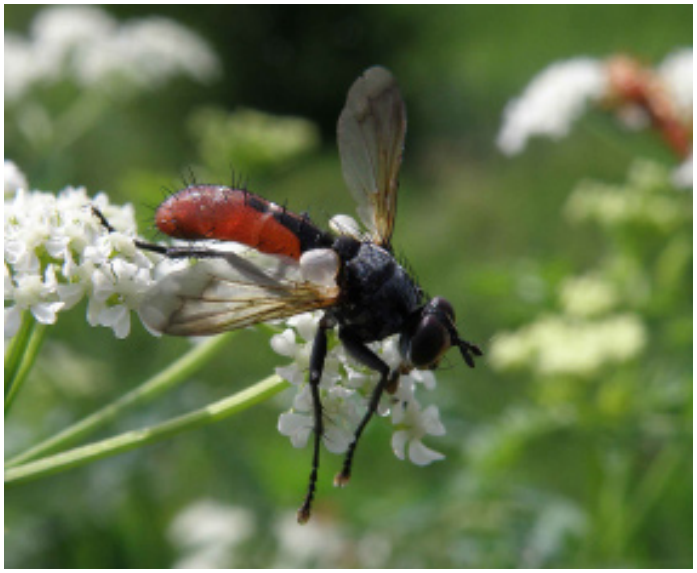
The full range of presentations was too long to report in detail, but as in previous years, the meeting proved very stimulating and of course we came back with lots of ideas and several big jobs. Stuart has taken on the biggest job – a web portal to start to develop descriptions of all taxa using wikki technology that will also be used to capture and disseminate records in the form of maps.

Who knows about "hill-topping"? This is a concept I certainly had not encountered before but it is clearly well understood elsewhere. Jeff Skevington is a singular exponent when searching for pipunculids but it appears to hold good for Syrphidae too. In essence the evidence suggests that certain flies will congregate at the top of isolated hills, sometimes in considerable numbers. Jeff quotes several hundreds of pipunculids on occasions – orders of magnitude more than I find these flies each year! Apparently there is no telling which hills will be productive but when the right hill is found the results can be remarkable. Alan and I now understand the purpose of Leith Hill (Surrey) and maybe this and others such as the Wrekin should be visited to ascertain their productivity as a site for hill-topping hoverflies? Can you think of an isolated hill near you?

News of new or potential new species also emerged with Tore Nielsen introducing *Eristalis obscura*. This is seemingly a cryptic species that is very similar to *Eristalis rupium* – so hold on to male *E. rupium* and tease out the genitalia.

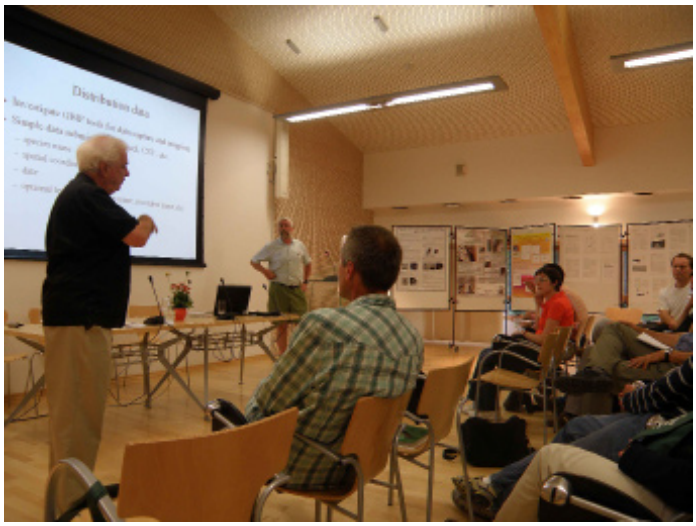
Finally, we were invited to confirm previous undertakings to run the next Symposium in the UK. We have risen to the challenge and have a venue (Glasgow University) and an organising committee (Stuart Ball, Francis Gilbert, Geoff Hancock, Graham Rotheray and yours truly).

Choerades species? This spectacular asilid was relatively abundant in some poplar plantations.



This tachinid looks familiar but is much bigger than British species.

Lorry mounted beehives. These were the source of the background hum that pervaded the forest around the conference centre.



F. Christian Thompson & Stuart Ball lead the discussion on new initiatives to integrate data across Europe and maybe the World.

The speaker holds the attention of the audience – from back to front: Francis Gilbert, Frank Dziock, Menno Reemer & Dieter Doczkal.

Cattle herding at Delbato Sands. This is a traditional way of life that has reached the 21st Century but surely cannot last much longer with likely negative consequences for these wonderful flower-rich grasslands.

Diary of a square-basher – spring 2009

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The winter dragged on terribly this year – from January onwards I was itching to get away and start recording. March came and went with little opportunity to record: just one day when I visited Wakerley Great Wood and took several *Platycheirus discimanus* and *Melangyna quadrimaculata* – both of which I've had here before. Two *Cheilosia grossa* were actually of more interest as additions to the site list. And so into April: the first weekend in April was booked as a walking trip to Swaledale so I did not expect to do much entomology. But on the Sunday we visited Whitcliffe Wood west of Richmond – a fantastic piece of limestone scarp with nice grasslands where the fertiliser could not go – thyme and rock rose were very evident. In the wood itself I was amazed at the number of hoverflies hovering over and settling on dried leaves – the four specimens taken all proved to be *Melangyna lasiophthalma*.

Easter weekend approached and I waited with bated breath – would the weather be o.k. for a trip? I had a visit to North Wales in mind. Strangely it did not materialise – I think I made a mistake with the forecasts as the weather was actually good. By Sunday I was champing at the bit and the forecast said that if I went north I could get past the overcast front and into sunny weather – and it was totally right. The cloud front was clearly demarcated at the northern end of the North York Moors and I sped into sunny weather. It was hard work and rarely very productive but some useful observations were made. For example most sites yielded *Eristalis intricarius*, which has been quite scarce in recent years. Virtually all sites yielded *Melangyna lasiophthalma*, sometimes in numbers. The big surprises were *Criorhina ranunculi* from a heathy upland conifer forest (taken at *Salix* together with one of the spring *Myopa* that I have yet to check). The other surprise was *Platycheirus discimanus* from a *Salix* in a damp valley between two larch plantations. I'm beginning to wonder whether larch is a common denominator as it is also in Wakerley Great Wood. The following day was a wash-out as the sea fog gripped the coast and it took me a while to work out where to go. Still, it was a nice break.

Two trips to northern England had me gripped: I love the less popular dales, and so it was no surprise that I sped north again in late April. This time I aimed to look at Swaledale and Teesdale. Day one was o.k. but not terribly productive. Vast banks of ramsons were just coming into flower but there was no sign of *Portevinia maculata*. The odd cherry *Prunus avium* proved to be a useful lure and I hoped to find *Criorhina ranunculi* – but to no avail (it turned up inspecting the base of an oak in Teesdale, however). My overnight stop was the Black Bull at Reeth – a wonderfully quirky place with the best black pudding on any menu I have tried. Having booked in I took an early evening jaunt down the valley to Stainton Low Wood and Scar Spring Wood. Here the bird cherry *Prunus paduus* was in flower and made a splendid splash. Not much was attending and I retreated to the Black Bull for a nice pint of Theakston's. Day two was a case of 'chase the sun'. My first stop at Whitwell Forest east of Catterick was remarkably productive for the Vale of York: *Platycheirus ambiguus*, *P. tarsalis*, and *Helophilus hybridus*. I see the latter very infrequently and often wonder whether this is an oversight. More unproductive stops were followed by a stop in Ellers Wood on Hawnby Moor (N. York Moors) where a big *Prunus avium* proved to be very

productive: 12 species including *Melangyna arctica*, *Platycheirus ambiguus* and *Ferdinandea cuprea*. Several *Criorhina ranunculi* cruised the upper branches but were well above net height even with my extendable landing net handle that allows me access to branches at around 18 ft.

This spring has been a terrible frustration. More often than not the weekdays have been much nicer than weekends, and I have spent many miserable days stuck at the computer and cursing that I could not go out to play! Time to retirement 9 years and three months plus a few days …. "oh …. if only" has been the cry this spring. So, the May Day bank holiday weekend was eagerly awaited, only to be dashed by unpromising forecasts. I generally don't travel far unless the weather looks good. A 500 mile round trip has to be productive to be justified; especially when it includes an overnight stay. That does not mean that I don't do such trips as the Saturday of the May Day weekend showed.

On Saturday 2 May I was up and ready for off by 7 am. On the road shortly after 7, I was in North Wales by 10.30 on a nice warm sunny morning. First stop on a roadside verge on the A5 east of Betws-y-Coed was promising with lots of *Leucozona lucorum* and a fair few other hovers (the list was actually just 9 species including a rather small *Cheilosia albipila*). Not a bad start and I hoped for greater things. Not so; several further stops yielded very little and I started to realise why so much of Wales is poorly represented on the maps. This realisation happens every time I go to North Wales and yet I still go back! The nutrient-poor acid upland soils are pretty inhospitable and most stops were unrewarding. Stops in the vicinity of Lake Vyrnwy gave some respite and at one I noted the first *Sericomyia lappona* and *Chrysotoxum arcuatum* of the year. By 16.00 I was casting my net in search of a room. The pub at Clun was not appealing as I had stayed there a while back and had a dreadful night because the front door seemed to slam every five minutes until 1.30 in the morning! Knighton was not appealing; Presteigne looked good but was too expensive. I gave up looking at 18.30 and headed for the M5 and home. A good Indian meal rejuvenated me after 14.5 hours at the wheel and 475 miles for just 46 records!

The following two weekends were a real disappointment – changeable, windy and few sunny spells on most days. I managed a trip to Norfolk on 10 May – looking at six poorly recorded squares that form a block below Norwich. I've been there before and achieved very little and the same happened this time. As usual, I realised after I got back that poorly recorded squares are generally so because there is so little decent habitat. But this was not entirely the case as I found some quite acceptable woodland and a really nice set of lanes with flowery verges and tall hedges. None were as productive as Wothorpe Woods, which are a short walk outside Stamford and which I generally visit late in the afternoon on days when the weather picks up late in the day. My first visit this year on 9 May yielded an amazing 23 species – at least for a rather scruffy bit of ash-sycamore woodland.

What was particularly interesting on this and on subsequent visits to Wothorpe Woods was the number of *Criorhina asilica* males. These really are excellent solitary bee mimics when in flight – for a predator faced with a glancing view of a moving insect they look just like *Andrena scotica*. This convinces me that when looking at mimics we need to think not about the absolute colours but at the overall visual image, especially when on the move. This is also the case with *Pipiza* which when flitting amongst bugle can be highly reminiscent of *Lasioglossum* bees. When one bears in mind that a predator possibly has but a split second to make a decision to attack, that little bit of indecision counts. It is also an issue for the entomologist as I have stopped and thought twice before following up with the net and often miss individuals as a result.

By the middle of May I was fretting at the difficulty of getting any recording done. Weather forecasts for the Bank Holiday weekend were not wholly encouraging. Checking the forecasts on 18 May I looked widely – Richmond (Yorks), Berwick on Tweed and Dumfries – maybe a hint of good weather on Saturday – I must pray hard! In the end I spent two days on the north Pennines and the vale of York across to the North York Moors. This was really hard work because there were so few hoverflies about. True, I found *Portevinia maculata* almost wherever I looked and found ramsons. Overall I made around 155 records of hoverflies which in my estimation is well down on other years. Several species were notably missing, especially *Syrphus* species whose general absence has been the subject of debate on the Hoverfly Recording Scheme website's "forum" (http://www.hoverfly.org.uk/viewtopic.php?t=644).

There were of course a few high points from this trip, with the best being the lovely gorge woodland at Gill Beck, which runs into the River Tees and Brignall Banks. This fantastic little site comprised alder carr on flushed banks with ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) and butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) with mixed deciduous woodland in the gorge that had obviously received some attention from a landscape gardener. *Neoascia obliqua* was evident amongst the butterbur and was a nice addition to the haul, but better was to come. Near the stream I investigated the sunlit base of a sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and found an absolute cloud of *Brachyopa*. A little further down into the gill I was even more surprised to find good numbers of *Brachyopa* around the base of a large western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*). All of the specimens taken seem to run to *Brachyopa scutellaris* although I have some nagging doubts about the shape of the antennal pit. Still, this appears to be the first record of a *Brachyopa* in association with a non-native conifer in the UK. This site also yielded two *Dasysyrphus venustus* whose form differed greatly from many that I see, being rather longer-bodied and perhaps a bit hairier. I wonder when the splits of this species will be published? Perhaps we will find out in Novi Sad?

The other high point for me was at Clay Bank – a forestry plantation at the northern end of the North York Moors where I found *Sphegina sibirica* in some numbers (together with *S. clunipes*). This represents a consolidation of the known distribution because Roy Crossley has already taken *S. sibirica* on the North York Moors. Nonetheless it should be a reminder to everyone to keep an eye open for this species when visiting conifer plantations.

This trip actually proved to be my last before the summer field meeting. One weekend at the spring field meeting in Scarborough (see the DF newsletter), the Hoverfly Symposium at Novi-Sad and the summer field meeting occupied most of my time and coincided with the best recording weather. So for 2009 records from June will be very limited. At the time of writing I am planning a couple of trips to northern England and southern Scotland for late July and August. I'm hoping for better conditions and a good haul of records.

Hoverflies and mimicry

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The relationship between hoverflies and Hymenoptera as mimic and model has been a matter of considerable interest for many decades. Attempts to match hoverflies to particular bee and wasp models (e.g. Howarth *et al*., 2000) serve to reinforce this perception. Perhaps it is true, but the question then arises as to how it can be that the mimic often greatly outnumbers the model or occurs at a time of year when putative models are not flying. Furthermore, many mimics only bear weak resemblance to the model, so how do they gain protection by mimicry? Perhaps the answer lies not in the absolute form of the mimic but in a combination of form and behaviour?

My own observations of three species seem to provide useful indications of the importance of behavioural mimicry by hoverflies:

Criorhina asilica males can be found in May flying low and fast above low vegetation in a manner that highly resembles *Andrena scotica* rather than *Apis mellifera* which Howarth *et al*. suggest. When faced with these fast-moving objects I have frequently found myself stopping to think before attempting to capture a specimen to confirm its identity. Once caught, it is clearly a fly but it sounds like an angry bee.

Criorhina ranunculi often fly high amongst sallows or at *Prunus avium*. At first glance they are bumblebees flitting from flower to flower, but there are subtle behavioural differences and flight patterns that ultimately separate them from bumblebees. It takes a while to be certain, however.

Small pipizines can frequently be found cruising amongst ground ivy flowers. In this mode they readily resemble the small *Lasioglossum* bees that are also in attendance, yet they bear little resemblance to these bees once dead and pinned, perhaps explaining why Howarth *et al*. don't list this link.

The point about these examples is that whilst they are obviously not bees when caught and examined, their behaviour is sufficiently similar to a bee that a dipterist (predator) is confused, consequently reducing the chances of capturing the individual mimic. A plausible explanation for the surfeit of mimics over models is that some degree of imprinting means that many young predators recognise the unique combination of colour, behaviour and sound made by Hymnoptera. Consequently, they do not attack mimics whose deception is sufficient to confuse and perhaps even enough to reinforce the association between the various behavioural characteristics and an unpalatable meal? In human terms the most obvious analogue is that of *Volucella zonaria* which is quite obviously a fly when at rest and yet it is frequently confused by non-dipterists as a hornet.

This behavioural mimicry might help to explain why some recorders find some genera more readily than the majority of recorders. I certainly think this may be so for the Pipizini as in my experience the genera *Pipiza*, *Pipizella*, and *Heringia* are often quite abundant. Perhaps this is because I also take an interest in small aculeate Hymenoptera that they appear to mimic?

References

Howarth, B., Clee, C. & Edmunds, M. (2000). The mimicry between.British Syrphidae (Diptera) and aculeate Hymenoptera. *British Journal of Entomology & Natural History* **13**(1): 1-39.

Some interesting Welsh Records for 2008

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I agree with Nigel Jones (Hoverfly Newsletter No. 46) that although 2008 was not a particularly fine year weatherwise, nevertheless I recorded some interesting species, namely:

Criorhina asilica sex unknown as the insect evaded capture, Hawarden Park, Hawarden, Flintshire, 20 May.

Criorhina berberina female The Warren, Talacre, Flintshire, 30 May.

Criorhina floccosa female Mynydd Llwydiarth, near Pentraeth, Isle of Anglesey, 14 May

Chrysotoxum festivum male Greenfield Valley, Bryn Celyn, Flintshire, 1 July, male Greenfield Valley, Greenfield, Flintshire 20 June, female The Warren, Talacre, Flintshire , 26 July.

*Helophilus trivittatus l*ocally frequent at coastal sites in Conwy and Flintshire

Heringia heringi male North Wales Path, Rhyl, Denbighshire, 13 May

Heringia pubescens male North Wales Path, Rhyl, Denbighshire, 19 May

Pipizella virens female Holywell, Flintshire, 12 June

Rhingia rostrata male Greenfield Valley, Bryn Celyn, Flintshire, 29 July

Sphegina elegans female Greenfield Valley, Bryn Celyn, Flintshire 24 June

Sphegina verecunda male Hawarden Park, Hawarden, Flintshire 6 June; female Greenfield Valley Bryn Celyn, Flintshire 28 June.