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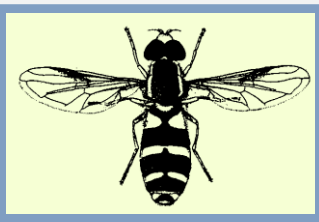

In the previous newsletter I expressed the hope that some feedback from the 7th International Syrphidae Symposium (2013) would be included in this issue, as has been the case with all the previous symposia in the series. I am sorry to say that this has not yet proved possible, but it is my intention that something should appear in the autumn newsletter.

Newsletter No. 55 also gave notice of the formation of the hoverflies Facebook Group. Although some readers were understandably wary of becoming involved in Facebook, this initiative is undoubtedly proving a success as demonstrated by the large number of images that have been posted (even in a sparse year for Syrphids) and the consequent generation of additional records. The group has probably introduced numbers of newcomers to the subject of hoverflies, and the images submitted to the site have the benefit of identification by experts.

Copies of Hoverfly Newsletters issues 1 to 40 can be found on the Hoverfly Recording Scheme website. If anyone would like to receive copies of issues 41 onwards as pdf. documents, please email me and I can send them.

Articles and illustrations (including colour images) for the next newsletter are always welcome. Copy for **Hoverfly Newsletter No. 57** (which is expected to be issued with the Autumn 2014 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 2014. The hoverfly illustrated at the top right of this page is a female *Melangyna umbellatarum*.

Hoverfly Recording Update winter 2013-2014

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In the last year there have been two further additions to the British hoverfly list (*Eumerus sogdianus* and *Scaeva dignota*, both added by Adam Wright and from the Isle of Wight). These additions immediately make the recent WILDGuide out of date (at least in terms of the species list) and rather complicate matters. It is probably wise to hold on to specimens of both *Eumerus strigatus* and *Scaeva selenitica* for the immediate future so that they can be examined critically if necessary.

Who knows what 2014 will bring! Hopefully it will be rather better than 2013, which many recorders report as disappointing. Our own efforts were rather limited and neither of us managed as much field work as we might have hoped to do. We remain active and have several projects on the go.

A supplement for Stubbs & Falk is desperately needed and is close to the top of our list of priorities. In addition, we have been working on a revised key to *Platycheirus*, using photographs of critical characters. Hopefully both of these items will emerge in the next year. We also understand that the current print run of the provisional atlas has sold out, and rather than reprint it we think there is a case for revising it and then reprinting. We are therefore making an interim call for records.

We had hoped to organise a one-day workshop for recorders this spring, but as time flies by it looks as though that will be delayed. Nevertheless, we will do our best to make a meeting happen and will make announcements on relevant websites (HRS and DF

websites). So please keep an eye on the announcements page of the HRS website.

A good many readers may already be aware that there is now a very active Facebook page (UK Hoverflies). We are very grateful to Stephen Plummer for setting this up. It has been quite a revelation because it has attracted a good number of new recorders and has generated lots of interest.

Linked to the Facebook group, we have started to develop a garden hoverfly monitoring project. Taking account of the difficulties encountered with 'Big Hover Watch' we hope that this will be a bit more flexible. We are extremely grateful to the small band who have trialled the BHW protocol and hope that some will try out the garden monitoring scheme. Details of the proposed protocol are shown below. Do please get involved.

Good numbers of records are arriving and it looks as though the 2013 data will pass the 10,000 records mark by the time this issue is published. These days we generally get around 20,000 records submitted each year, so there is a little way to go.

Our commitment to training has not diminished, but we have been less active this winter than in recent years. Nevertheless, we will be running several beginners' courses between now and April, and have in mind an intermediate course which we hope to run in London. Again, watch the websites and Facebook.

Garden hoverfly monitoring protocol

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Introduction

This project has been developed because there are relatively few means of validating trends in invertebrate abundance. Work by JNCC and CEH using Recording Scheme data shows that ad-hoc biological recording can form a powerful tool for monitoring, but there is a need for more rigorously collected data against which to test trends. In the case of hoverflies, we have two datasets: Jenny Owen's studies of her Leicester garden, and Alan Stubbs' garden monitoring scheme. Jenny has ceased recording but Alan is still very active. This is a good start, but more widely dispersed effort is needed. Reporting can have a powerful effect on conservation policy and political attitudes to wildlife, and it is hoped that we can place hoverflies on a similar standing to butterflies.

Purpose:

- To encourage the development of a community of hoverfly watchers whose cumulative data form the basis for monitoring variations in the abundance of hoverflies across Great Britain and Ireland.
- To establish a monitoring programme that gains in popularity that can be used cumulatively to report on changes in hoverfly abundance, in a similar manner to the approach developed in the RSPB's "Garden Watch" and Butterfly Conservation's transects.
- To develop a long-term dataset to generate the potential for feedback that can be used to assist in reporting on the state of Britain and Ireland's wildlife.

Note: This project will work best by developing a large network of all abilities, with regular new recruits to replace those who cease to record. The objective is very much to develop a long-term dataset which will be particularly valuable to test other data against.

Principles

- This initiative is open to recorders of all abilities. Nobody should be excluded.
- The mechanism for data collection should allow for the difficult species that cannot be taken to species (either because they require microscopic identification or because the recorder has limited experience).
- It should also make provision for people who lack a suitable monitoring area (i.e. garden) and is open to a choice of site – which ideally ought to be readily available for unscheduled visits.

- There is no obligation to record on a particular day. By choosing a site/garden in close proximity to home, it should allow visits when time allows.
- There is a need, however, to make sufficient records to generate meaningful data. At an "ideal" level, a set of records for one day per week is preferred, but gaps are inevitable owing to holidays/bad weather/other commitments.
- Daily visits or multiple visits each week are helpful but not essential – recorders should want to record rather than feeling they have to!
- There is no requirement to take specimens, but we do welcome recorders who wish to make more detailed records.

Technique

- Define a set route around your chosen "patch" (garden/wildlife area)
- Record those hoverflies seen during the course of a walk around the site, noting species and number.
- If you are unsure of the species, record to the taxonomic level you feel comfortable with – Species/Genus/Tribe/Family.
- Where unsure and able to get a photo – take shots and post on Facebook or send directly to Roger Morris (roger.morris@dsl.pipex.com)
- Recording details of the time and weather conditions will help to refine information.
- If the only time you get to record is early in the morning or in the evening please do so – we know relatively little about hoverfly activity at these times of day.

Note 1: Hoverfly activity does change over the day and is closely linked to temperatures. The best time for recording tends to be mid-morning, especially as the spring progresses. However, in very hot weather they may be more active early in the morning or late in the evening.
Note 2: Although many hoverflies will visit flowers, they are not exclusively flower visitors. Many are leaf baskers and some specialise in pollen from grasses and plantains. Developing field craft is part of the process of recording hoverflies and you can expect to see many more as you develop your knowledge of their habits.

Data assembly

- Details of your chosen site need to be logged – we will create a specific site with details of its size and a general description. Initial thoughts are to classify:
  - Urban/rural
  - Garden (small yard, modest - <100m^2, Medium (<300m^2), large <300m^2)
  - Urban park (with wild areas/formal gardens)
  - Wildlife area size <1ha, <5ha, <10ha, 10ha+
- Records should be retained on a spreadsheet using the following headings

Site name	Recorder	Grid ref.	Date	Time	Species	Number	Notes

Site name – if your garden, just keep to the town or street name (no need for house number)
Recorder – your preferred name
Grid Reference – using OS alpha numerical combination (get help from Roger Morris if necessary)
Date – preferably as dd/mm/yyyy
Time – rough time (e.g., 10.30 to 11 am)
Species – use full name please (e.g., *Episyrphus balteatus*)
Number – the count for the species
Notes – anything noteworthy such as a preferred flower. This can be as detailed as the recorder wishes but there is no onus on having to report exact flower visits.

Note: Using Excel you will find that it should be possible to simplify parts of the data entry – you can copy and paste basics such as your name and the site name and grid reference. We need this format as it is the most suited to uplift into RECORDER - quite a lot of time is spent formatting lists. **Please do not** leave gaps between days – these will have to be cleaned out before working with the data.

Polytunnel ton!

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The small polytunnel near Sandy, Bedfordshire, already mentioned in these pages (O'Sullivan and Wolton, 2011), recorded its 100th hoverfly species, *Brachyopa bicolor*, on 2nd June 2013. At just 21 square metres or so, this site might be worthy of some kind of blue plaque – though it would admittedly be rather hard to screw it to the wall.

Meanwhile, in Devon, the newer polytunnel has largely dried up. Rob attributes this to a resident flock of sparrows and other birds after the easy pickings. Next year he is going to net the entrances! A male *Microdon myrmicae* was a nice surprise in June 2011. The nearest known breeding site for this sedentary species is, however, just 200m away. Neither site has yet attained the glory of the railway signal-box at Oughtibridge in South Yorkshire, which, when its door was closed for the last time in May 1983, had accidentally amassed no fewer than 105 hoverfly species (Whiteley, 1987). However, if the vagaries of horticulture allow, who knows what might yet be possible…

References

O'Sullivan, J., and Wolton, R. 2011. Polytunnels – fly traps par excellence. *Hoverfly Newsletter* no. 50: 10-11.

Whiteley, D. 1987. Hoverflies of the Sheffield area and north Derbyshire. *Sorby Record*, Special Series **6**: 43

Bedfordshire plans a new book

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A new book on the hoverflies of the county is being planned by the Bedfordshire Natural History Society, with publication expected in about two years' time. If you have any records for the county that have not yet been passed to the County Recorder or to the National Recording Scheme, please send them to the above address, where they will be gratefully received. And if you are planning to visit Bedfordshire in the next two seasons, please do bring your net and let us know what you find. All three British *Callicera* have been recorded here, as well as all the *Brachyopa*, *Neocnemodon* and *Criorhina* species, not forgetting *Mallota cimbiciformis*, *Didea intermedia* and other sought-after hoverflies – so please come and discover more! All observers will of course be acknowledged in the book in due course. For more information, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

The Mythe - 25 years of hoverfly recording

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Background

The summer of 2013 was my twenty-fifth season of recording hoverflies at the Mythe, a small corner of English countryside a five-minute drive from my home. After a couple of years learning to identify the species that turned up in my own garden, I realised that, to make further progress, I needed a convenient, but more natural, site to visit and survey regularly. A 'mythe' is a tongue of land between two converging rivers, in this case the Severn and the Worcestershire Avon. Within this mythe, my chosen site, just north of the town of Tewkesbury, lies almost entirely within the 1 Km grid square SO 8834. This small area includes the eastern bank of the Severn, a tributary stream (the Mythe Brook), a disused railway track (now a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust reserve), a large fishing lake (which intrudes into the neighbouring 1 Km grid square to the west), a rather inaccessible area of abandoned osier beds, a neglected meadow (which has not been grazed since the foot-and-mouth outbreak of 2001) and a sandstone scarp that lies along the east side of the GWT reserve and also encloses a strip of woodland lining the river as it flows towards the town.

Currently there is very little direct human intervention in the ecology of the site. Occasional scrub clearance in the nature reserve helps to retain open areas along the stony railway track and the adjacent sandstone scarp. The path along the riverbank and a wide strip of the meadow are mown annually to maintain access. Some years ago an attempt was made to eliminate American mink from the vicinity and, since then, there has been a gradual increase in fishing at the lake. The river also attracts anglers.

Although there is nothing overtly special about the Mythe, the varied habitats in close proximity, and the limited impact of human activity, have made this a valuable site for wildlife. Diptera that I have recorded over the years include the Dotted Bee-fly (*Bombylius discolor*), the Ornate Brigadier (*Odontomyia ornata*), the Large Marsh Horsefly (*Tabanus autumnalis*) and an uncommon conopid (*Leopoldius brevirostris*) as well as a wide range of hoverflies.

Over the years I have consistently visited the site at least once a month from April to October, and often more frequently, but I should emphasise that this has been a recreational activity and not a rigorous or carefully planned field study. My work, holidays elsewhere, bad weather, and other interests have inevitably restricted the time I have been able to spend there.

Recording experience

During my first year of recording hoverflies at the Mythe (1989), I found 28 species. This total proved to be typical of my first ten years' surveys (which averaged 28.8 species per year, with a range between 21 species in 1998 and 39 in 1995). After that, experience began to tell and during the decade from 1999 to 2008 I recorded an average of 36 species per year with a range between 27 species in 2001 and 43 in 2002. This increase was assisted by the arrival, in 2001, of *Rhingia rostrata* (which was expanding its range in Gloucestershire) and, in 2002, by successful identification of *Cheilosia ranunculi*, shortly after this new species had been separated from *C. albitarsis*. Through the last five years I have achieved a slightly higher average of 38.6 species per year, but this period includes the cool, wet summer of 2012 when I only saw 28 species, the same number that I had recorded in my first season at the site.

The accumulated total number of species I have recorded from the Mythe grew to 49 after five years of observations, 62 after ten and 78 after fifteen years (by the end of the 2003 season). The rate of discovery of 'new' species has been much less through the last ten years, but at the end of 2013 my personal accumulated total has reached 91.

As I retired on 1 January 2013, and spent the whole summer at home, I was able to make more visits than in the past, and time my activities to take advantage of favourable weather. So, it is no surprise that this year I have recorded 48 species, my highest annual total to date. Rather more surprising is that this total includes two 'new' species (*Melangyna compositarum* and *Pipiza bimaculata*), although it does not include a few species that I would normally expect to see at the site (eg *Cheilosia illustrata* and *Epistrophe grossulariae*).

Throughout the 25 year period of observations the Gloucestershire County Recorder, David Iliff, has supported me by checking and correcting my identifications and suggesting likely species that I might have overlooked. He has also visited the site himself occasionally and has found two additional hoverflies, raising the current overall accumulated total number of species recorded from the Mythe to 93.

Residents and regulars

I have only recorded five species in every year that I have been visiting the Mythe, they are: *Melanostoma scalare*, *Episyrphus balteatus*, *Eristalis pertinax*, *Helophilus pendulus* and *Myathropa florea*. I have seen a further fifteen species in at least 21 years: *Platycheirus albimanus*, *Epistrophe eligans*, *Leucozona lucorum*, *Syrphus ribesii*, *S. vitripennis*, *Cheilosia albitarsis*, *C. variabilis*, *Rhingia campestris*, *Eristalis arbustorum*, *E. nemorum*, *E, tenax*, *Volucella bombylans*, *V. pellucens*, *Syritta pipiens* and *Xylota segnis*. All of these hoverflies are common in Gloucestershire.

There are thirteen species that I have recorded in at least 11 but no more than 20 years: *Baccha elongata*, *Epistrophe grossulariae*, *Eupeodes corollae*, *E. luniger*, *Sphaerophoria scripta*, *Xanthogramma pedissequum*, *Cheilosia illustrata*, *C. pagana*, *C. vernalis*, *Rhingia rostrata*, *Eristalinus sepulchralis*, *Eristalis intricarius* and *Helophilus hybridus*. This group includes *R. rostrata*, a recent arrival which is now seen every year, and the probable migrant *E. corollae*, but it also includes conspicuous species such as *E. grossulariae* and *C. illustrata* (both recorded in 11 years) which I would expect to observe almost every year if they are permanent residents at the site.

A further twenty species have been recorded in at least 5 but no more than 10 years: *Melanostoma mellinum*, *Platycheirus clypeatus*, *P. peltatus*, *P. scutatus*, *Chrysotoxum bicinctum*, *Dasysyrphus venustus*, *Epistrophe diaphana*, *Eupeodes latifasciatus*, *Melangyna umbellatarum*, *Scaeva pyrastri*, *Cheilosia vulpina*, *Chrysogaster solstitialis*, *Neoascia podagrica*, *Riponnensia splendens*, *Helophilus trivittatus*, *Parhelophilus frutetorum*, *P. versicolor*, *Merodon equestris*, *Pipiza austriaca* and *P. noctiluca*. Some of these species are probably under-recorded residents (*M. mellinum*, *C. solstitialis*, *R. splendens*, the *Parhelophilus* and *Pipiza* species). *E. diaphana* and *M. equestris* were not seen at the Mythe in earlier years but appear to have become established there recently. *S. pyrastri* is a recognised migrant and perhaps some of the other species in this group (the three *Platycheirus*, *C. bicinctum*, *E. latifasciatus*, *M. umbellatarum* and *H. trivittatus*) are also migrants, or at least inclined to wander.

Much of the site, including the fishing lake, is subject to periodic flooding. This normally occurs during the winter and early spring, but there was an exceptional summer flood in July 2007. In Hoverfly Newsletter 44 (Spring 2008) I reported the occurrence of an unusually large number of *Helophilus trivittatus* at the Mythe immediately following this event, when very few other adult hoverflies could be found. It now appears that several species suffered marked population crashes as a result of the flood. *Leucozona lucorum*, *Cheilosia albitarsis*, *C. ranunculi* (from 2002 onwards) and *C. variabilis* were all quite common before the event, but have only appeared in low numbers since 2007; *Neoascia podagrica* and *N. tenur* were recorded less frequently in previous years but it may be significant that since 2007 I have only noted *N. podagrica* once (in 2010) and *N. tenur* not at all. The rare soldierfly *Odontomyia ornata* also seems to have been lost, although it was last seen there only seven weeks before the site was inundated.

One-offs and vagrants

There are nineteen species that I have noted in more than1 but fewer than 5 years: *Platycheirus angustatus*, *P. granditarsus*, *Chrysotoxum verralli*, *Dasysyrphus albostriatus*, *Melangyna labiatarum*, *Meliscaeva auricollis*, *M. cinctella*, *Parasyrphus punctulatus*, *Cheilosia impressa*, *C. proxima*, *C. ranunculi*, *C. soror*, *Melanogaster hirtella*, *Neoascia tenur*, *Eumerus funeralis*, *Eristalis horticola*, *Volucella inanis*, *Criorhina ranunculi* and *Xylota sylvarum*.

There are also another nineteen species that I have only seen once. Including the calendar year of each record, these are: *Platycheirus manicatus* (91), *P. tarsalis* (92), *P. rosarum* (09), *Chrysotoxum festivum* (10), *Didea fasciata* (98), *Leucozona glaucia* (01), *Melangyna cincta* (08), *Melangyna compositarum* (13), *Meligramma triangulifera* (89), *Syrphus torvus* (89), *Ferdinandea cuprea* (00), *Eumerus strigatus* (95), *Heringia vitripennis* (03), *Pipiza bimaculata* (13), *P. luteitarsis* (09), *Volucella inflata* (99), *V. zonaria* (06), *Chalcosyrphus nemorum* (09), and *Criorhina berberina* (89).

Some of the hoverflies in these two lists have probably been under-recorded. The smaller *Cheilosia*, *N. tenur*, *M. hirtella* and *H. vitripennis* are obvious candidates. *C. soror* may also have been overlooked in the past but seems to have become more common very recently. The more conspicuous species, such as *E. horticola*, the three *Volucella*, *L. glaucia* and *F.cuprea* were almost certainly represented by genuine individual transients. *C. verralli* has been expanding its range recently; my first capture at the Mythe was also a new county record. *N. tenur* was new to the East Gloucestershire vice-county and the record of *H. vitripennis* was the first in the vice-county for 80 years.

And finally, the additional species recorded by David Iliff are *Epistrophe nitidicollis* and *Melangyna lasiophthalma*.

Absent friends

Even after twenty-five years, there may still be more hoverflies waiting to be found in this very ordinary corner of the countryside. Quite apart from the possibilities provided by continuing climate change and pure chance, there are at least a few obvious absentees from the current list of species recorded at the Mythe. It is likely, for example, that *Anasimyia* occurs at the site; I have glimpsed possible examples there occasionally, and I have recorded *A. transfuga* at similar locations nearby. Other relatively widespread genera not represented in the site list include *Sphegina*, *Orthonevra*, and *Brachyopa*.

I have already, fortunately, ignored my original intention to stop monitoring the site regularly when I had a year with no 'new' species; this happened in 2007 (the year of the summer flood) and again in 2011 and 2012. I now feel inclined to carry on until we have recorded 100 species. The target is in sight!

Hill topping in *Sericomyia*

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Walking between rocky outcrops near the exposed windswept summit of Beinn Mhor, the highest point of South Uist, one of the larger islands of the Western Hebrides, I was surprised to find several *Sericomyia silentis*. That was in August 2012 and at the time I wondered what they could be doing there at some 620m above sea level: I had encountered none on the way up and there was little suitable larval habitat present so high. One I netted and this was a male. Was it, I wondered, an example of hill topping? In the few publications I have to hand, I can find no reference to such behaviour in hoverflies.

Returning to the Hebrides last summer, this time to the Isle of Skye, my wife, dog and I were walking in June along the edge of a high sea cliff edge when we encountered some *Sericomyia lappona* on a heathy knoll, about 200 m above the sea. We settled to watch and photograph them for a while and counted about 6 individuals, apparently all males. They would settle in a sheltered spot, flying up frequently to investigate any other largish insect flying nearby – usually as it happens one of the other males. Although no mating was observed, they gave every appearance of being on the lookout for females also coming to the highest point in the landscape to find mates – classic hill topping behaviour. Below us, about 50m away was a lochan with muddy edges, heavily used as a watering hole by cattle and sheep and much nutrient-enriched as a result (we found a huge leech there). This lochan was, I suspected, where the hoverflies came from, although we did not see any adults there.

Back in England, in mid-August, I climbed to a high point on the north-western corner of Dartmoor, only a few miles from where we live. Here at 530m above sea level, on the ruins of a raised Bronze-age hut circle at the end of a long ridge, I again found *Sericomyia*, this time *silentis*. I was watching them behaving in the same way as the male *lappona* on Skye, when one flew up to investigate a larger than usual insect. A quick and fortunate stroke of my net revealed this to be a male bot fly, *Gasterophilus intestinalis*, the first I had seen. Bot flies are, it seems, well known for hill topping. On my return downhill, I investigated Sourton tor, and here saw a queen wasp in the centre of a ball of males as well as a pair of mating wall butterflies *Lasiommata megera*. As with the bot flies, this butterfly is now very thinly spread across the landscape: the chances of finding a mate are much increased if both males and females fly to the highest point in the landscape and wait for a partner to arrive.

I should be interested to hear of any published accounts or observations of hill topping in *Sericomyia* or other hoverflies.

Sericomyia lappona (photo: Rob Wolton)

Xylota sylvarum and *Xylota xanthocnema*: colour of tibiae

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Some hoverfly genera include pairs of species where a relatively common one closely resembles a scarce one. One such pair comprises the widespread *Xylota sylvarum* and the Nationally Scarce *Xylota xanthocnema*. The key distinction between the two species given in British Hoverflies is the colour of the hind tibiae, the apical half of which is black in the case of *sylvarum*, but yellow (like the rest of the hind tibiae) in *xanthocnema*.

The same distinction is used to separate the two species in the new WILDGuide (Britain's Hoverflies). Use of this character can, as these books indicate, be problematic in the field as the black area on the hind tibiae of *sylvarum* is sometimes only visible from certain angles; from other angles the entire hind tibiae can appear yellow.

The fact that *sylvarum* differs from *xanthocnema* by having this black apical half to the hind tibiae is correct; but our (independent) observations reveal that it is not the whole story: in fact the apical halves of *all three* pairs of tibiae (not merely the hind pair) are black in *sylvarum*, while all three pairs of tibiae are entirely yellow in *xanthocnema*. Knowledge of this should make the task of separating the two species in the field considerably easier, as there would be a fair chance of catching the light sufficiently favourably to see the darkened area on at least one of the six tibiae of *sylvarum*, especially as the front and mid tibiae have reduced golden hairs.

This is not a new observation; the fact that all the tibiae of *sylvarum* have the apical half darkened was used in R L Coe's 1953 key to Syrphidae to distinguish it from *xanthocnema*, and the same is true of two fairly recent European publications (vanVeen 2004 and Bartsch 2009).

These features can be seen in the images below; but what also can be seen in Figs. 1 and 2 are the complications arising from different angles, shade, and perhaps colour rendering from surrounding surfaces.

Fig. 1 *Xylota sylvarum* female (photo: David Iliff)

Fig. 2 *Xylota xanthocnema* female (photo: David Iliff)

A closer look (Figs. 3 and 4) from a different angle reaffirms the points made above but also raises other interesting features:

Fig. 3 *Xylota sylvarum* female hind tibia (photo: John Harper)

a) in Fig. 3 the "shin" of the hind tibia of *X. sylvarum* is actually yellow under the shining golden hairs in the apical half which, if seen square on (ie. from above in the field) could give the impression of a completely yellow hind tibia. Thus using the front and mid tibiae as well would be a useful safeguard against misidentifications. Also they have shorter and less distractingly golden hairs.

b) the hind tibia in Fig. 4 of *X. xanthocnema* shows a dark smudge in the apical half, which at least in this specimen from Wales, could mislead the unwary into thinking that this is a case of a dark apex obscured by golden hairs as cautioned in British Hoverflies.

Fig. 4 *Xylota xanthocnema* female hind tibia (photo: John Harper)

An approach to hoverfly identification by a reluctant killer

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I've always been interested in observing wildlife, and for three decades travelled the world as an enthusiastic birdwatcher. Soon, butterflies and dragonflies also became subjects of interest, but I didn't notice hoverflies until I retired from work and spent a lot more time gardening. I found hoverflies colourful, interesting insects and I was surprised how many different species I could find in my garden. As my interest developed, I started looking for them in the woodland each day when I took my dogs for a walk.

When travelling overseas, I had also started taking photographs of butterflies as an aid to identification, and this was my initial, naive approach to hoverfly identification – take a lot of photographs and hope to use these to identify the hoverfly.

It wasn't long before I found that this approach often did not produce the results I'd hoped for, and I quickly learned that, in general, the majority of flies could not be identified to species level from photographs. On the other hand I've never been keen on killing any creature, and absolutely not for the sole aim of discovering what it is, so I found myself in something of a dilemma – I was seeing hoverflies that I knew I couldn't identify from a photograph, but I didn't want to kill them just to find out what they were!

Since my initial interest developed I have submitted all of my records to the Hoverfly Recording Scheme for verification, and having read the comments about collecting specimens in British Hoverflies (A. Stubbs and S. Falk, 2002), and in the section "The Ethics of Collecting" in the recent Britain's Hoverflies WILDguide (S. Ball and R. Morris 2013), I've changed my views and now believe that killing flies for **the purpose of identification and recording** is an acceptable practice. Nevertheless, I wanted to try to maximise the number of species I could identify, whilst killing as few hoverflies as possible. I explained the methodology I followed to Roger Morris when I submitted my records to him, and he suggested I write an article for this newsletter to share this approach with others who may share my reluctance to kill hoveflies en masse.

The approach I have adopted is as follows:

Firstly, I try to identify the hoverfly by sight. In the beginning, when I saw a hoverfly in the field I always photographed it but, as I've gained more experience, I've found I can identify certain species by sight. These include some larger species such as *Volucella* and *Sericomyia* species, *Myathropa florea*, *Cheilosia illustrata*, and smaller distinctive species such as

Episyrphus balteatus, Chrysotoxum bicinctum, Leucozona glaucia and *L. lucorum*, and others.

If I'm not able to identify the hoverfly by sight, I attempt to catch it. I don't possess a net, but I am usually able to catch the fly into a small plastic pot - though, frustratingly some do elude me! Once caught I try to identify the hoverfly in the field with the aid of a hand lens at x10 or x20. If successful, I then release the hoverfly.

If I cannot identify captured hoverflies in the field, I take them home. I usually place the flies in the fridge for a period to slow them down so that I can photograph them. Prior to taking the photographs I consult the identification guides and keys to try to narrow down the species options and then I attempt to capture the diagnostic details using a macro, close-up lens. If I am then able to successfully identify the hoverfly, I release it. Usually I do this in my garden which is adjacent to the woodland where I collect the specimens. If the habitat differs, I may opt to return the fly to where I found it the following day.

If I'm unable to identify the live fly from the photographs, I take my final option and kill it. Initially I used the freezer to kill the fly, but more recently I've bought some ethyl acetate and I now prefer to use that method. Usually I then take more macro photos of the dead specimen.

Finally, if I'm still uncertain, I seek the help of experts either to identify the specimens for me, or to verify my own attempt at identification. I would like to thank my county recorder David Iliff, and also Roger Morris, for helping me in this respect.

Analysis of my 2013 data submission to the HRS shows that I submitted 952 species records. I saw more species than I had seen in previous years - 87 species, of which the vast majority were found in my home patch, the Forest of Dean. I had 20 'lifers', of which 17 were caught, and 11 were subsequently killed for identification. My records show that I killed 56 flies – only 6% of my total records.

In conclusion, I've found that the number of species I've been able to identify has been greatly increased by catching hoverflies whilst, by adopting my multi-step approach, the number I needed to kill to achieve a successful identification was relatively small.

Myolepta dubia - still spreading?

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A male *Myolepta dubia* was taken at Ringstead Downs, West Norfolk (TF700400) on 2 June 2011. The site is a dry chalk valley, grazed by sheep, with surrounding secondary woodland. Access to the woodland is restricted, so it was not possible to check for suitable breeding sites. Unfortunately this record was too late to be included in the latest Hoverfly Atlas (Ball, S.G., Morris, R.K., Rotheray, G.E. & Watt, K. R: Atlas of the Hoverflies of Great Britain (Diptera Syrphidae), Wallingford, Biological Records Centre), but it would appear that this is the most northerly British record to date and the first for a Norfolk site.