Hoverfly Newsletter
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As the opening article explains, the rapid sales of the first edition of the Wild*Guide* and the popularity of the Hoverfly Facebook page are indicators of an increase in the population's awareness of and interest in hoverflies. Perhaps as a result of this a hoverfly, *Episyrphus balteatus*, has been selected by the Royal Society of Biology as one of a list of ten species to be voted for in a poll to find Britain's favourite insect. I am sure most readers will be delighted that a hoverfly features in such a short list, even if they do not all agree on the actual choice of hoverfly species, and many will have other preferred candidates. The species that immediately comes to my mind is the elegant *Scaeva pyrastri*, or perhaps, for its sheer charisma, *Volucella zonaria* (but perhaps that one should be disqualified as not being a native species since it was not regularly seen in Britain until the 1940s). However on balance *Episyrphus balteatus* was probably the best choice as it is easily recognised and in most summers (including this one) it is the hoverfly most conspicuously present.

Readers receiving this newsletter with the Dipterists Forum bulletin are welcome to ask me to send it to them as a PDF which will enable them to see any illustrations in colour. In due course it will, along with earlier newsletters, be available on the Hoverfly Recording Scheme website.

I would like to record here my thanks to Martin Matthews for his meticulous proof reading of the draft of this newsletter and other issues in the series.

Copy for **Hoverfly Newsletter No. 60** (which is expected to be issued with the Spring 2016 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 November 2015. The hoverfly illustrated at the top right of this page is a female *Epistrophe nitidicollis*.

Hoverfly Recording Scheme Update

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By the time this newsletter reaches readers much of the summer will be over. It has been a very busy one and ends with some important announcements. Perhaps the most significant one is the publication of a second edition of the WILD*Guide Britain's Hoverflies*. It is amazing to think that it was first published in 2013 and has already required a reprint. That means that around 4,000 people now have access to a new colour guide. The revised guide is bigger and better, with 16 additional pages, a section on photography and a series of illustrations of the most frequently photographed species in the traditional plate format of other field guides.

Many readers will know that in recent years biological recording has changed very considerably. For several years we have only had a very small number of records submitted on paper. Most arrive as spreadsheets or database downloads. Over the last two or three years the numbers of records arriving via web-based interactive forums has increased dramatically and it has become difficult to meet the demand for help with identifications. In the course of the past 18 months we have become increasingly reliant upon help from Ian Andrews and Joan Childs, both of whom have played a very important role in the development of the UK Hoverflies Facebook page. We were therefore delighted when both Ian and Joan agreed to become formal members of the Hoverfly Recording Scheme Team. In addition, we are very pleased to announce that Ellie Rotheray will also be joining us – and will hopefully play a key role in developing interest in hoverfly larvae. We also hope that Ellie will be able to help Roger with data extraction and provide a bit of impetus in getting some papers published!

Many readers will wonder what has become of the intended atlas. It is happening – we have a revised draft text but are still checking some of the data. This time we are putting more effort into sorting out records that do not seem to fit the phenology charts properly. It is a slow process and we have become a bit bogged down – not least because of the pressure of work required to keep on top of the data from the Facebook page. So far this year, nearly 10,000 new records have been submitted through this forum and other internet sites. It looks as though the overall number of records from this source could top 15,000, which is a very significant proportion of the data if compared to previous years. 2014 was a bumper year for data with over 35,000 records submitted from all sources and it seems likely that 2015 could exceed that.

Although there have been lots of records coming in, our own efforts to add records have not been as productive as we might have hoped. In early June we went to run a course on Orkney. We hoped to do some recording on the outward and return journeys but found that the spring was very severely delayed over much of Scotland. In Speyside there was not a glimmer of rowan flowers and the mountains were heavily snow-covered. There were few hovers to be seen. Upon reaching Orkney we did have one big surprise – *Parasyrphus nigritarsus* at two localities. There can be very little doubt that it is established on 'Mainland' but where else? From what we could see it is likely to be associated with the green dock beetle *Gastrophysa viridula*. Other notable records from the trip included *Platycheirus immarginatus*, *P. perpallidus* and *Neoascia obliqua*, together with a single specimen of *Xylota tarda* – the first time Roger has ever taken it!

Moving on to incoming data, the most impressive feature of the Facebook group is that their joint efforts really help to tighten up our understanding of the phenology of some species at a yearly level. Data for *Episyrphus balteatus* now shows quite clearly that it overwinters in much the same way as *Eristalis tenax* (a note will be produced for Dipterists Digest). Data for *Eristalis tenax* also raises some interesting questions about the data held by the HRS. Perhaps most usefully, we are starting to get a feel for the relative frequency of *Xanthogramma pedissequum* and *X. stackelbergi*. Only a proportion of photos can be identified with any real confidence, but the numbers posted mean that we are getting useful records. Other interesting records include several new locations for *Cheilosia caerulescens* and a new Norfolk record for *Callicera rufa*.

The volume of data coming in via the Facebook page is impressive, but it also raises a very serious question about how we maintain momentum whilst not overloading Roger. This winter we will be looking at ways of spreading the data extraction load. The crucial issue is to create a system that avoids duplication of effort, which is quite a challenge.

Readers will also recall that we had intended to run a one-day hoverfly conference in the spring, but unfortunately we found that we had overstretched ourselves. It is now in planning for spring 2016. Please keep an eye on the HRS and DF websites for further information.

Finally, we should introduce a new word to the lexicon: hoverating – a term first coined by John Bridges, one of our most active recorders who hails from the North-east and is making a huge contribution to our understanding of hoverflies in his local area. For the Greater Oxford Dictionary the term might be explained as 'the activities associated with photographing and recording hoverflies'. We expect a Wikipedia entry sooner than the Greater Oxford Dictionary but perhaps in a few years' time many more people will be off hoverating!

Sphaerophoria potentillae Claussen 1984: notes on habitat, behaviour and female colouration.

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This hoverfly has only ever been recorded at three sites in the British Isles – at Beaford Moor and Common Moor (East Putford) in north Devon where it was discovered in 1989 (Stubbs 1989), and at Retire Common in mid Cornwall where Ivan Perry found it in 2001. In June 2013 and 2014 I found single males at Common Moor, but failed to find it at Beaford Moor on three visits in 2013. Alan Stubbs (1989) notes that before it was found at Beaford Moor and Common Moor it was only known from a series of bogs in NW Germany where an association with heath tormentil *Potentilla erecta* was noted. The World of Syrphidae website www.syrphidae.com suggests it has also now been recorded in the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Latvia and Estonia. If any reader has any information on its status in these or other countries, do please let me know.

This year I visited Retire Common on 9 June. Here, I'm pleased to say, I re-found the fly, catching 4 males and 3 females in the same small habitat patch. This is one of the most treacherous sites I have searched for flies, the wetter areas consisting of high wobbly *Molinia* tussocks with deep liquid mud trenches in between, created by heavy cattle grazing. Trying to use a net while balancing on these tussocks was challenging, but worthwhile since it is here that I found the S. *potentillae*. Elsewhere, in areas of short damp heath I found only a few *S. philanthus*.

Spurred on by this success, I visited Beaford Moor again, on 11 June. From my experiences at Common Moor and Retire Common, I had a better idea where to look, and found the hoverfly here too, catching two males and a female. So the fly persists at all three known British sites. All have predominantly wet heath and *Molinia*-dominated mire plant communities – a type of Culm grassland to use Devon terminology.

I now have two rules for finding the species:

1. If it's easy to walk and sweep, don't bother. Look for tussocky *Molinia* with occasional flowering heath tormentil *Potentilla erecta* straggling over it. *Molinia* tussocks develop where there is lateral flow of water, so these places are notably wet.

2. If there are any other flies about, don't bother. All three habitat patches where I've found the fly have been notably devoid of other Diptera. The occasional *Dolichopus atratus* and maybe the odd *Melanogaster hirtella* are about the best one can hope for.

Given these conditions, I take my hat off to those who originally found the fly – Alan Stubbs, John Mousley, Austin Brackenbury and Ivan Perry. David and Ted Levy also caught the fly, at Common Moor and Beaford Moor, in 1990.

I observed the fly on heath tormentil flowers, the only flowers available – the hoverfly is appropriately named. It is very unlikely that it visits yarrow *Achillea millefolium* flowers as suggested in Stubbs and Falk (2002) since this plant does not occur in this habitat, but it might perhaps visit the other flower mentioned, buttercup, since lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* was seen nearby, although in more nutrient-rich runnels and flushes. When disturbed, the fly heads downward between the tussocks, so is difficult to catch and in particular to sweep.

The specimens I have caught have all been noticeably small (6.5 – 7.0 mm long) – smaller than *S. philanthus*, for example. The females caught with the males have metallic blue banding along the rear edges

of tergites 1 – 4, as well as along the front of tergite two (see photo). Indeed, they are rather attractive! I am now examining the tergites of females of other *Sphaerophoria* species, to see the degree to which this blue banding holds true for them, and would welcome observations from readers.

The challenge ahead is to find the hoverfly at other sites. I've started to look, but so far without success. I've yet to find anywhere with a sufficient dearth of other flies!

Stubbs, A.E. 1989. An additional *Sphaerophoria* discovered in Devon. *Dipterists Digest* (first series) 2: 34-35.

Stubbs, A.E. & Falk, S. J. 2002. *British Hoverflies* (second edition). The British Entomological and Natural History Society.

Sphaerophoria potentillae female (photo: Robert Wolton)

Brachypalpus laphriformis and other wood-decay associated hoverflies from Flisteridge Wood, North Wiltshire (VC7).

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On the 9 May 2015 my attention was drawn to a large oak in Flisteridge Wood (ST9991) from which one of the lower boughs had split away from the main trunk exposing a large cavity with brown heart rot. When I approached the tree two examples of *Ferdinandea cuprea* were immediately obvious on the main trunk, and whilst I was preparing to photograph them a male *Brachypalpus laphriformis* also alighted close by. This is only the second time I have encountered this Nationally Notable species in Wiltshire - the previous occasion being many years ago, on 13 June 1984 in Savernake Forest, when several individuals were seen on a huge fallen beech trunk.

For many years I have undertaken occasional and casual recording in Flisteridge Wood and noted a variety of wood-decay hoverflies, including all four species of *Criorhina*, with *C. ranunculi* being the most frequently encountered. Three species were present at holly blossom on the 19 May 2002 – males of *C. asilica* commonly, along with three *C. berberina* (two typical and one form *oxyacanthae*), and three *C. ranunculi* (red-tailed). A single male *C. floccosa* was observed 12 April 1998 at blackthorn blossom, and other records of *C. ranunculi* span the period 1997 to 2014, when adults of both red and white tailed forms have been seen at crab apple, sallow, holly and blackthorn blossom. A further species of note is *Xylota xanthocnema* – a single male taken by a large fallen oak on 13 June 2009.

Flisteridge Wood appears to support a significant wood-decay hoverfly fauna. It is an ancient woodland site, and, although some sections have modern conifer plantations, most of the wood is semi-natural, dominated by birch but with many post-mature oaks, including large specimens with extensive wood decay habitat; the one attracting the *Brachypalpus* is approximately 4.5m girth breast height, suggesting an age in excess of 230 years. Overall wood-decay habitat is plentiful with some complete dead standing oaks along with fallen examples left in situ, and other trees with abundant wood-decay habitat include birch, ash and sallow.

Interesting Recent Records

Volucella zonaria: Linda Vista Gardens, Abergavenny SO295141, 10 August 2015 (John Harper).

Doros profuges: Martin Down SU0320, 4 June 2015 (Paul Brock).

Doros profuges female, Martin Down
(photo: Paul Brock)

Myolepta potens: female feeding on hemlock flowers by shore of River Severn, Awre Peninsular SO698069, 8 August 2015 (John Phillips). Site is about 4 km. from nearest ancient woodland and about 8 km. from nearest recorded site for the species.

Myolepta potens female, Awre
(photo: John Phillips)

Heringia senilis: male on fennel at Woodmancote SO968277, 2 August 2015 (David Iliff). Identification confirmed by John Harper after microscopic examination of genitalia. Another male was on same plant on 11 August, as were females (*Heringia heringi/senilis*) on 29 July and 2 August.

Heringia senilis: upper left: male on fennel (photo: David Iliff); upper right: thorax, scutellum and tergites 1 and 2, showing white hairs; lower left: hind tibia, showing white hairs; lower right: genitalia showing median plate (photos: John Harper).

Postscript:

A flower's eye view of the nectar-sucking and pollen-moulding mouthparts of a *Eupeodes luniger* taken in April 2015 at Abergavenny in South Wales" (photo: John Harper).