

Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme

Newsletter 5, spring 2018

Edited by Martin C. Harvey
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The Silver Colonel *Odontomyia argentata* shining bright in Berkshire in 2017. Photo by Peter Creed.

Welcome to the spring 2018 newsletter. Unfortunately I was unable to produce this one on time to be printed in the Dipterists Bulletin, but it is [available online](#) via the recording scheme website.

This edition contains news of robberflies from Suffolk, and an excellent new book on the robberflies of the Netherlands and Belgium that is going to be very useful in the UK as well (pages 2–3); a report from 2017's Bee-fly Watch (pages 4–5); updates from Cheshire and Lancashire (page 6); the spread of *Stratiomys longicornis* (page 7); and news and updates from the recording scheme, including details of the recently published conservation status review by Martin Drake (pages 8–9).

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed records, photos and articles. I look forward to hearing about all your discoveries in 2018!

Martin Harvey

Records welcome

The recording scheme can only function if people send in their records – please continue to do so if you are a regular recorder, and if you haven't yet sent any in now is a good time to join in! Even if you are just starting off with your first Dark-edged Bee-fly record it all helps build up our knowledge of what these species do.

- Information on recording: www.brc.ac.uk/soldierflies-and-allies/records
- Soldierflies records on iRecord: www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/activities/summary?group_id=350&implicit=
- Identification information: www.brc.ac.uk/soldierflies-and-allies/resources

Thanks to the Biological Records Centre for supporting the recording scheme website.



Robberflies at Purdis Heath

by David Basham



Eutolmus rufibarbis at Purdis Heath. Photo by David Basham.

Purdis Heath is within the southern section of the Suffolk Sandlings, just east of Ipswich. As part of the volunteer heath restoration team at Purdis Heath I and some colleagues have taken up the challenge of recording as many species as we can that live on and forage across the heath. At the moment the site's SSSI designation is based on its heathland specialist plants including Bell Heather and Ling and on its acid grassland species including Fescues, Sheep's Sorrel and Hawkweeds. By compiling a list of site species it is hoped that any future designations may be able to include some of the other rare or declining Heathland Hymenoptera and Diptera for example, as well as the Silver-studded Blue Butterfly, for which the site is specifically managed under the auspices of Butterfly Conservation.

To this end a small group of us during the summer of 2017 decided to make a start on the site's Diptera to see what we could find. I was already aware of some quite prominent and easily spotted Asilidae - robberflies - present on the site and had in previous years had a photo ID of *Dysmachus trigonus* and *Dioctria baumhaueri* provided by our County Recorder, Peter Vincent.

From early July through to mid-August we collected specimens on five dates as we were available and as the weather allowed. All specimens were collected from the heath itself or from the secondary Oak and Birch woodland surrounding the site and sent to Peter Vincent for identification. He very kindly provided the details summarised here.



Neoitamus cyanurus at Purdis Heath. Photo by David Basham.

Asilidae species identified prior to 2017:

- *Dysmachus trigonus* (Fan-bristled Robberfly)
- *Dioctria baumhaueri* (Stripe-legged Robberfly)

Asilidae species identified in 2017:

- *Choerades marginatus* (Golden-haired Robberfly)
- *Dysmachus trigonus*
- *Eutolmus rufibarbis* (Golden-tabbed Robberfly)
- *Machimus cingulatus* (Brown Heath Robberfly)
- *Neoitamus cyanurus* (Common Awl Robberfly)

Of particular note in my memory was the female *Choerades marginatus* that was collected from a branch picked out in a sunbeam just above a sap run on a damaged Oak tree. The run was attracting quite a cloud of flies around it as well as several Hornets that were hunting in the ooze and a Red Admiral butterfly. A good hunting spot for a robberfly it seemed to me.

We were pleased with our efforts in 2017 and will be keeping an eye out for some other species of Asilidae if possible this year. Overall we recorded 45 species of Diptera with most of them being new to our site records and a few, like some of the sarcophagids, being important county records.

Considering how close Purdis Heath is to urban Ipswich it's amazing what's there if only one takes the time to look.

With thanks to Peter Vincent, Suffolk Diptera Recorder.



Choerades marginatus at Purdis Heath. Photo by David Basham.

New robberfly field guide



A fantastic new book on robberflies has been published: *Field guide to the robberflies of the Netherlands and Belgium*, by Reinoud van der Broeck and André Schulten. An English-language version is available, and the guide covers all the British species with excellent photos and illustrations at a very reasonable price. For more details see the [publisher's website](#); I don't think it is possible to order copies for the UK direct from that site, but the guide is now available from the usual UK entomological booksellers.

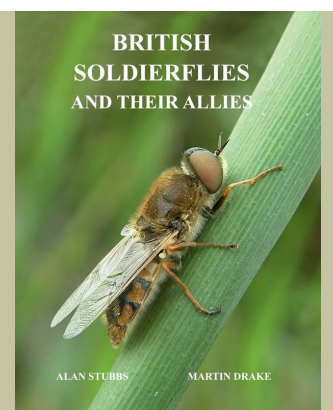
A few things to note for UK use: the guide does of course include a number of species that are not known from the UK, and the guide uses the genus *Tolmerus* for some of the species that we include in genus *Machimus* (e.g. the common UK *Machimus atricapillus* is *Tolmerus atricapillus* in the guide). Our *Dioctria baumhaueri* is treated as a synonym of *Dioctria hyalipennis*.

***British soldierflies and their allies*, by Alan Stubbs and Martin Drake**

British Soldierflies and their Allies by Alan Stubbs and Martin Drake is the definitive guide to the species covered by the recording scheme, with well-illustrated identification keys and comprehensive species accounts.

The new edition incorporates many observations on the biology and distribution of the flies that have been made and published during the last twelve years. There are also a few minor corrections to the keys, and a more substantial improvement to the keys to Tabanidae (horseflies).

The price to members of Dipterists Forum or BENHS is £20 (£36 for non-members). Orders via the BENHS website: www.benhs.org.uk/publications/british-soldierflies-and-their-allies-second-edition



Bee-fly Watch 2017



Chloe Wrench admires a Dark-edged Bee-fly (photo by Dan Wrench)

Last year saw the second of our annual 'bee-fly watch' projects, aimed at encouraging people to record the most familiar of the species covered by the recording scheme: Dark-edged Bee-fly, *Bombylius major*. In 2016 we did very well at increasing the number of available records, but in 2017 numbers rose again, with over 1,200 records sent in. The Dotted Bee-fly *Bombylius discolor* also received by far its highest ever annual total of records, with 130 for the year.

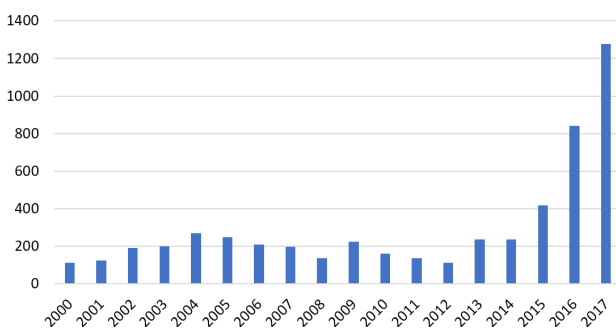
Almost 600 people contributed records in 2017, and once again Nigel Cottle topped the league with 45 records of Dark-edged and Dotted bee-flies. Chris Sellen, Ryan Clark, Tracy Money and Peter Hogan were not far behind.

In 2016 the first sighting of Dark-edged Bee-fly was reported on 13 March; in 2017 the very first report was from 2 March on the south Wales coast, with another seen on 3 March and then a steady flow of records from 9 March. Overall it was an early year, with the vast majority of sightings in March and especially April, and rather few records in May and June.

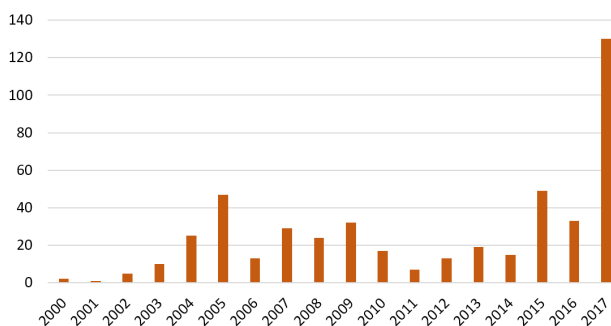
The focus on Dark-edged Bee-fly has produced a lot of new 10km-square records for this species (see map opposite), and the 2017 records include four vice-counties which had no previous records on the scheme database: North Northumberland (VC68), Linlithgow (VC84), East Perthshire (VC89) and Angus (VC90).

Bee-fly Watch provided a valuable overview of these two species in 2017, and we will be [running it again in 2018](#). Watch the recording scheme website for updates and join in if you can.

Dark-edged Bee-fly: records per year



Dotted Bee-fly: records per year

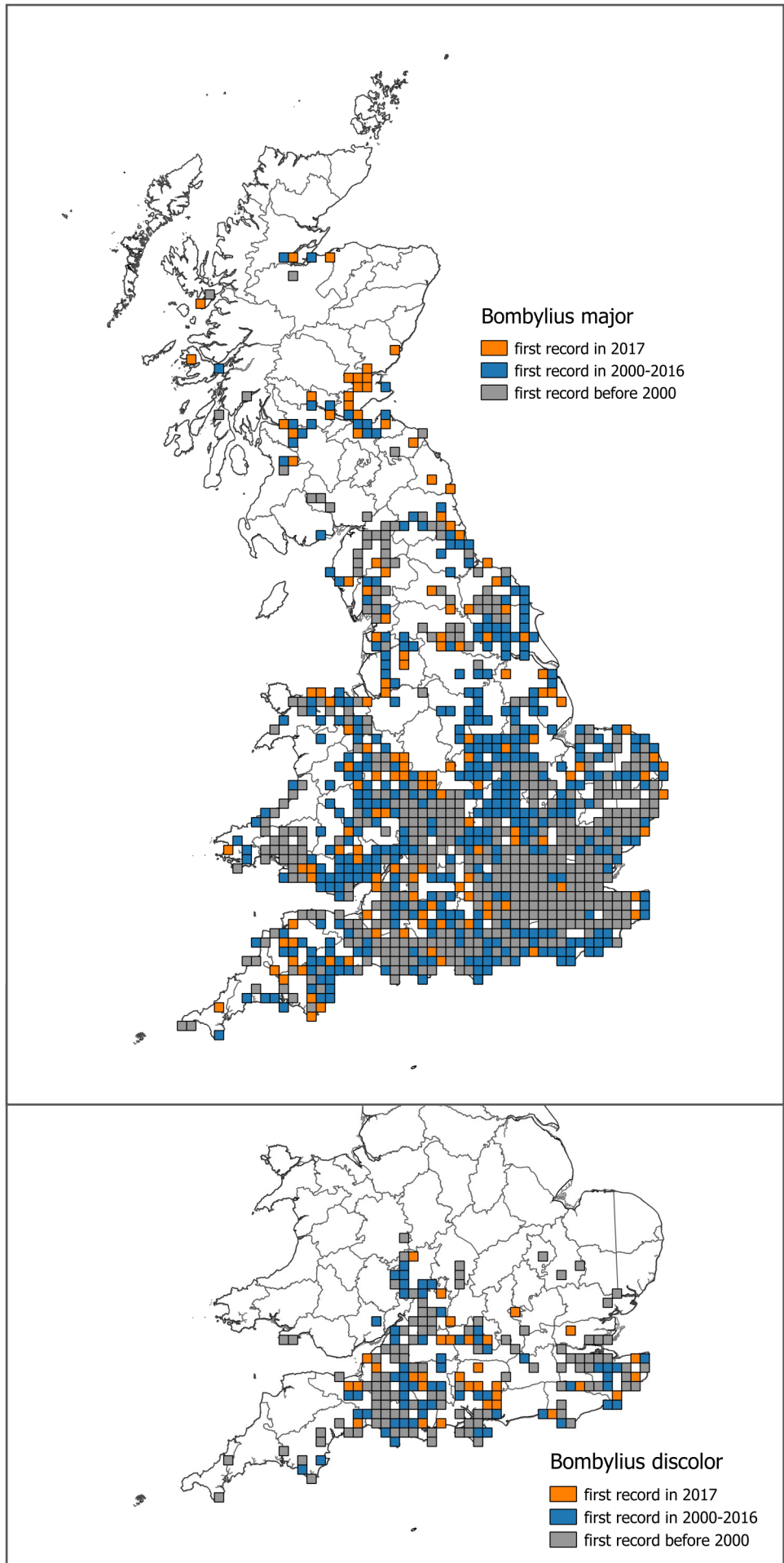


Records per year since 2000 for the two most widespread *Bombylius* bee-fly species



A Dotted Bee-fly provides excitement for Penny and David Green during a moth trapping event

Distribution maps for *Bombylius major* (above) and *Bombylius discolor* (below). The orange squares indicate new 10km records in 2017.



Soldierflies and allies in Lancashire and Cheshire during 2017

by Phil Brighton



Atherix ibis by Trevor Southward

will be a first for South Lancashire (VC59). *Oxycera nigricornis* was recorded for only the second time in VC60 at the Lancashire Wildlife Trust's Heysham reserve.

I had another vice-county first with *Vanoyia tenuicornis* on 19th June at the Cheshire Wildlife Trust site of Red Rocks at the north-west tip of the Wirral. It has previously been recorded just across the Dee in Flintshire in 1996. There is

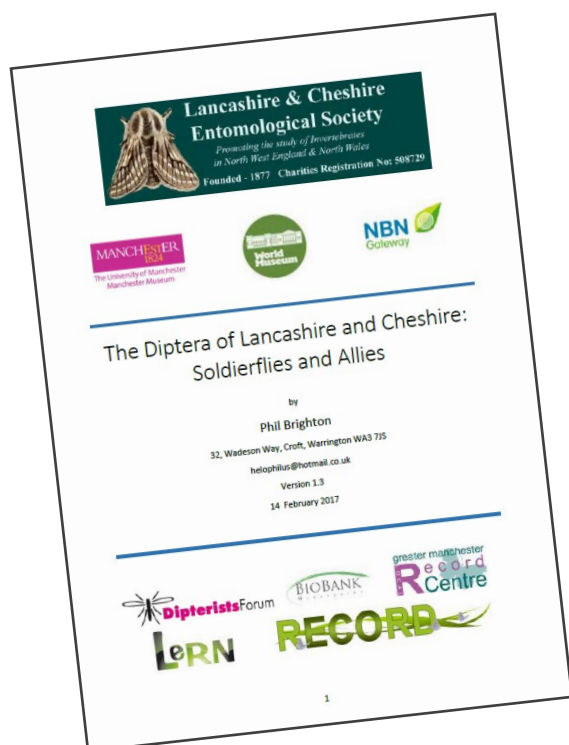
also a 2006 record from Merseyside Biobank from St Helens in VC59, but I omitted this in my county checklist as it could not be verified. My morning at Red Rocks also yielded *Stratiomys singularior*, *Oplodontha viridula*, *Oxycera trilineata*, *Acrosathe annulata* and *Dysmachus trigonus* in this compact but varied site, hemmed in by the Royal Liverpool Golf Course since 1869.

iRecord has been well-used for the group by dipterists and non-specialists well spread over the region (VCs 58, 59 and 60), providing a total of 203 records. This alone is maintaining the rate of recording for the current decade, which is clearly set to beat the previous best of 1231 records in the 1990s. The fact that records are available to all users as soon as they are uploaded makes it very straightforward for the county recorder to do a quick review of the year like this one.

The records include three of *Stratiomys potamida*, half a dozen or so of *Atherix ibis* adults, and a fourth record of *Tabanus autumnalis* for the region. A female tabanid found dead in a garden greenhouse in Chorley was recorded initially as *Hybomitra bimaculata*, but my examination of the well-preserved specimen against the Stubbs and Drake key clearly points to *H. distinguenda*. Either way it



Tabanus autumnalis by Martin Grimes



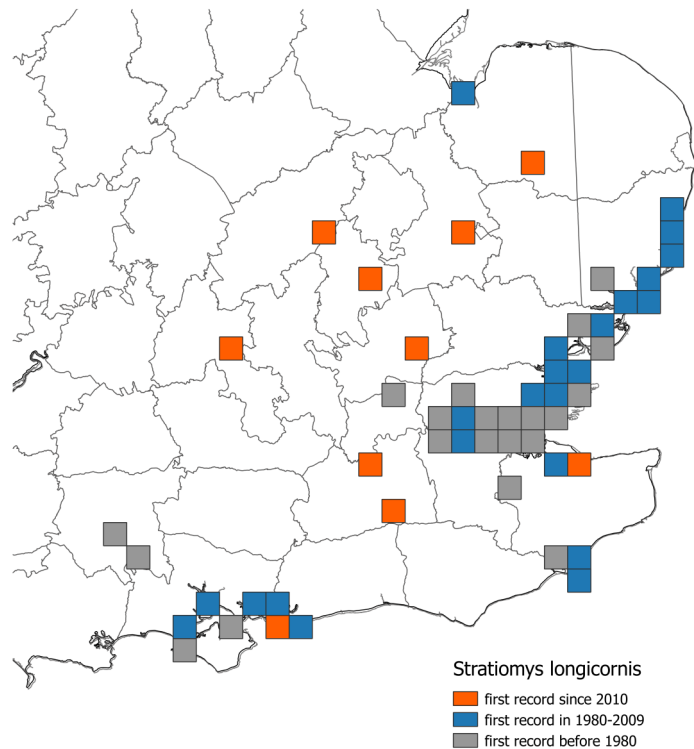
My overview report on the soldierflies and allies data for the region up to 2016 is now available on Liverpool Museum's Tanyptera project website:

www.northwestinvertebrates.org.uk/publications/checklists

Stratiomys longicornis heads inland

In their book on the British soldierflies, Stubbs and Drake describe the distribution of Long-horned General, *Stratiomys longicornis*, saying “For the most part, this is a coastal species occurring from Norfolk to Hampshire”. That description largely held true until 2011, when it was reported from Sandy in Bedfordshire by Andy Schofield. Further inland records have accumulated since, including first county records for Hertfordshire in 2014 (Simon Knott), Surrey in 2015 (Andrew Halstead), Cambridgeshire in 2016 (Ivan Perry), Northamptonshire in 2017 (Howard Bentley) and also Oxfordshire in 2017 (Jason Gosling).

Larvae of this species are thought to specialise in strongly saline conditions in ditches and water bodies near the coast. Assuming that at least some of the recent inland records represent breeding populations (which has yet to be proven) then perhaps the spread of this species could be related to the spread of salt-tolerant plants along roadsides as a result of salt being applied to roads in winter. However, the spread of such plants has been apparent for some decades now, so maybe the soldierfly is expanding into new habitats as the climate changes. More investigation is required into the larval breeding conditions.



Stratiomys longicornis in Hertfordshire in 2014, by Simon Knott



Recording scheme updates and other news

The main recording scheme database currently contains 105,738 records, arriving at a rate of just under 4,000 per year in recent years – many thanks to all who have sent in records. The preferred route for receiving records is via the online iRecord system, which makes it easy to incorporate data and share it via the National Biodiversity Network, but records via spreadsheet and other routes are very welcome – see: www.brc.ac.uk/soldierflies-and-allies/records

Training courses and resources

Soldierflies and allies will feature at the annual Dipterists Forum workshop at Preston Montford in February 2018, and we are also running a workshop for the Tanyptera Trust at Liverpool World Museum in March. As a result there are lots of new resources being added to the website, including new identification guides and a first draft of an atlas – look out for all the updates.

Social media

Don't forget that you can join in with discussion and identification assistance on Twitter and Facebook .
Twitter: [@SoldierfliesRS](https://twitter.com/SoldierfliesRS) – Facebook: [British Soldierflies and Allies](https://www.facebook.com/BritishSoldierfliesandAllies)

Notable records in 2017

A few highlights from the 2017 records:

- *Laphria flava*, Bumblebee Robberfly (Nationally Scarce), six records from Abernethy RSPB reserve: Mark Gurney, Rosie Earwaker, James Silvey
- *Lasiopogon cinctus*, Spring Heath Robberfly (Nationally Scarce), Surrey: Gillian Pullinger; South-east Yorkshire: Ian Andrews
- *Leptarthrus vitripennis*, False Slender-footed Robberfly (Nationally Rare), Buckinghamshire: Ched George; Surrey: Rod Williams
- *Pamponerus germanicus*, Pied-winged Robberfly (Nationally Scarce), South Northumberland: John Bridges
- *Rhadiurgus variabilis*, Northern Robberfly (Vulnerable, Nationally Rare), East Inverness-shire: Gabrielle Flinn
- *Chloromyia formosa*, Broad Centurion - this is the most frequently-recorded of all the species in the recording scheme, so congratulations to Rob Wolton for managing to add a new vice-county record for the South Ebuades (recorded on both Islay and Colonsay) in 2017!
- *Odontomyia argentata*, Silver Colonel (Nationally Scarce), Berkshire: Judy Webb, Peter Creed; East Suffolk: Peter Vincent; South Lincolnshire: John Lamin
- *Oxycera leonina*, Twin-spotted Major (Vulnerable, Nationally Rare), West Norfolk: Mark Welch
- *Chrysops sepulchralis*, Black Deerfly (Nationally Scarce), Dorset: Pete Boardman
- *Haematopota grandis*, Long-horned Cleg (Nationally Scarce), Dorset: Pete Boardman
- *Spiriverpa lunulata*, Northern Silver-stiletto (Nationally Scarce), Merionethshire: Rob Wolton



Laphria flava by Mark Gurney

Review of conservation status for soldierflies and allies

Martin Drake's long-awaited review of conservation statuses for soldierflies and allies was published last August and can be downloaded from the Natural England website (link below). The review provides up-to-date information on the status of all 162 species in the soldierflies and allies (Larger Brachycera) group, using the internationally-agreed IUCN threat status terms and criteria. In addition, a rarity status is given for species that are nationally rare or scarce.

The review is based on all available data up to 2012, with additional data subsequently incorporated for those species with recent range changes. Species accounts are provided for species assessed as Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable, Near Threatened, or Data Deficient.

It's a shame that it has taken so long for this document to appear, following the original data collation in 2012, and it is also a shame that it has been made available only as a PDF, with no spreadsheet version that would make it easy to extract the new statuses for use in databases and for analysis. And even in the PDF document it is not entirely straightforward to look up the current status for all species: the table starting on page 11 gives the definitive list of statuses for the threatened, rare and scarce species (but misses out nearly all the common species), while the table in Appendix 1 does list all the species, but only gives the "unmoderated" rarity status, thus making it easy to pick out the wrong status for some species.

Hybomitra muehlfeldi should be treated as "Nationally Scarce" as per the page 11 table, not "Nationally Rare" as given in the appendix (Martin Drake pers. comm.). Note that *Beris clavipes* and *Philonicus albiceps* are missing from the page 11 table; both are shown as Nationally Scarce in Appendix 1, but have been moderated down from this and now have no rarity status. *Choerades gilvus* is given a status of Endangered in this review, on the basis of two records from 1990, having previously been unrecorded since 1951. However, since the review went to print one of the 1990 records has been found to be erroneous, and the other is unconfirmed, so *C. gilvus* should probably be considered as Regionally Extinct.

I hope I've managed to pick out the correct statuses and have added them to the checklist spreadsheet that you can [download from the recording scheme website](#).

Despite the few small blemishes this new publication is very welcome and will focus attention on the many threatened species in the soldierflies group, providing a clear summary of what is known of their distribution and ecology. Hopefully it will pave the way for increased conservation and monitoring.

- Drake, C.M. 2017. [A review of the status of Larger Brachycera flies of Great Britain - Species Status No. 29](#). Natural England Commissioned Reports, Number 192.



Two spring species to watch out for

There are two scarce species that fly early in the year, from about mid-April, and that are likely to be under-recorded: Silver Colonel soldierfly, and Spring Heath Robberfly. It would be great to get more people out looking for them, but you do need to find suitable habitats to stand a chance of seeing them.

Silver Colonel soldierfly, *Odontomyia argentata*

A soldierfly of fens and marshes. The males have distinctive silvery abdomens (see Peter Creed's photo on the cover of this newsletter). Most records are from the south and east of England (in a band running from the New Forest to Norfolk), but it has been found in the midlands in recent years and could be spreading further. Full details and identification tips are at: www.brc.ac.uk/soldierflies-and-allies/silver_colonel



Lasiopogon cinctus
by Ian Andrews

Spring Heath Robberfly, *Lasiopogon cinctus*

This small robberfly is found on sandy heathlands, dunes and other sandy habitats. Look for sheltered spots and south-facing banks with bare ground or stones for basking. Although Surrey has the greatest number of records, there are scattered sites in many counties across much of England and Wales, and the blank areas on the map may represent under-recording more than absence. Full details and identification tips are at:

www.brc.ac.uk/soldierflies-and-allies/spring_heath