

Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme

Newsletter 6, spring 2019

Edited by Martin C. Harvey
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The hunchback fly Acrocera sanguinea from Jersey. This species is widespread on the continent but this is the first record that we are aware of for the Channel Islands. Recorded and photographed by Simon Robson.

Welcome to the spring 2019 newsletter.

This edition contains news of bee-flies (Martin Matthews and John Phillips, page 2; bee-fly watch, page 4; return of the Anthracite Bee-fly, page 5), horseflies (new guide from France, taxonomic puzzles, page 3; Joe Beale late observation, page 5), robberflies (Jann Billker's work on the Oxford collections, page 4) plus recording scheme news and publications updates.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed records, photos and articles. May you have a successful year for soldierflies and allies in 2019!

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.



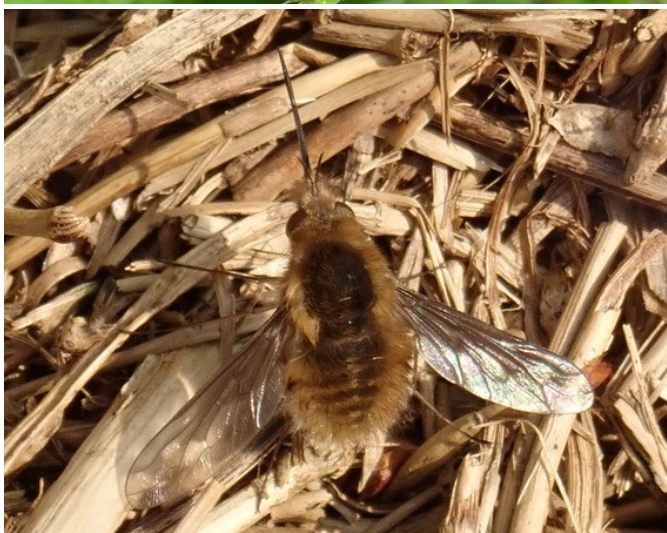
An intriguing clear-winged bee-fly

by Martin Matthews and John Phillips (Gloucestershire Diptera Recorders)



In April 2018 a possible sighting of *Bombylius canescens* (Western Bee-fly) was reported by John and Carol Taylor from Coombe Hill Canal, a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust reserve in the Severn Valley, not far from Cheltenham. The date (22 April) seemed rather early and the location was a surprise as recent Gloucestershire records of this species have all been from the Forest of Dean area.

Fortunately the fly had been photographed and it was possible to compare its appearance with the features described in *British Soldierflies and their Allies* (Stubbs and Drake; 2nd edition 2014). Also, one of us (JP) is acquainted with *B. canescens* and has photographed it himself near his home.



At first glance the fly in the photo did seem to be *canescens*, with its distinctively clear wings, but we didn't think it looked quite right so we asked Martin Harvey for his opinion. Martin responded that the Coombe Hill bee-fly: "... is a *Bombylius major* that is either very teneral, or is a weird variety lacking in pigment. You can just about make out the outline of where the dark shading would normally be, plus the head is too large for *canescens*. An intriguing observation!"



The occurrence of such a clear-winged *B. major* seems to be quite unusual; it would be interesting to know if similar examples have been seen by other observers.

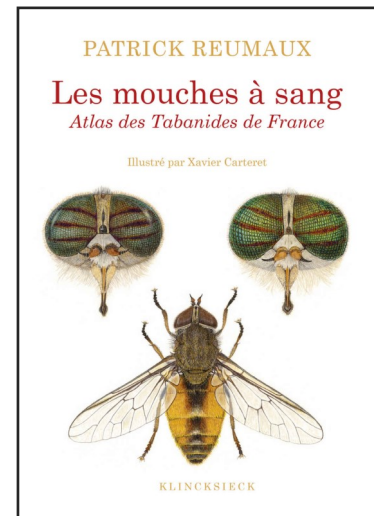
- Top: a 'normal' *Bombylius major* (photo by Martin Matthews)
- Middle: the pale-winged *Bombylius major* (photo by John and Carol Taylor)
- Bottom: *Bombylius canescens* for comparison (photo by John Phillips)

New book on French horseflies

- Reumaux, R. 2018. *Les mouches à sang: Atlas des tabanides de France* (genres *Theriopectes*, *Hybomitra*, *Atylotus*, *Tabanus*, *Glaucops*, *Dasyrhaphis*). Klincksieck. [c. £25 from UK booksellers]

This book on French ‘blood flies’ has keys, species accounts and distribution maps for six of the genera in family Tabanidae, three of which occur in Britain. My own knowledge of the French language is sadly lacking, and I have not yet had a chance to make use of Google translate to test out any parts of the keys. But one thing that is obvious is that the book is beautifully illustrated by Xavier Carteret, with plates showing the whole flies and in many cases the colourful eye patterns that are apparent in the living insects.

This is probably not an essential purchase for the British dipterist, but it adds to the available resources for these flies. The publisher’s website laments the fact that there were no other books on French Tabanidae in print “in spite of the number, the size, the beauty (or the horror)” associated with horseflies. This book provides useful information on some fascinating flies, with illustrations that make the case for their beauty.



Hybomitra taxonomy

A recent paper by Theo Zeegers puts forward the argument that the species we currently refer to as “*Hybomitra ciureai* (Séguy, 1937)” (Levels Yellow-horned Horsefly) should be synonymised with the name *Hybomitra solstitialis* (Meigen, 1820). And the species we currently refer to as “*Hybomitra solstitialis* (Meigen, 1820)” (Scarce Forest Horsefly) should be regarded as a pale form of *Hybomitra bimaculata* (Macquart, 1826). This view has not been met with unanimous agreement by British dipterists; Meigen’s type specimen for *Hybomitra solstitialis* does not accord with the UK concept of *H. ciureai* (Andrew Grayson pers. comm.) and the taxon we currently call “*Hybomitra solstitialis* (Meigen, 1820)” does seem to be consistently different to *bimaculata* in the UK at least, and to have a rather different ecology (Steven Falk pers. comm.). More research into horsefly variation and species limits across Europe is needed to address the challenges of this difficult genus.

- Zeegers, T. 2018. A new synonymy in the horsefly genus *Hybomitra* (Diptera: Tabanidae). *Nederlandse Faunistische Mededelingen* **50**: 89–92.

Soldierflies and allies publications

The following articles and notes have appeared in the two most recent issues of *Dipterists Digest*.

- Grayson, A. 2018. *Atylotus plebeius* (Fallén) (Diptera, Tabanidae) in Britain, including discoveries made during 2018. *Dipterists Digest* **25**: 99–103. [Details the first records since 1999 of this species, from Cheshire – a very welcome report for conservation of this rare species.]
- Harvey, M.C. 2018. *Eupachygaster tarsalis* (Zetterstedt) (Diptera, Stratiomyidae) in Berkshire (V.C. 22). *Dipterists Digest* **25**: 104. [First county record since 1998.]
- Shuttleworth, A. 2017. *Chorisops nagatomii* Rozkošný (Diptera, Stratiomyidae) new to Scotland. *Dipterists Digest* **24**: 224.

At the 2018 Dipterists Forum annual meeting Judy Webb gave an excellent talk on “Soldierflies and Horseflies of the Oxfordshire fens”. Judy’s notes and some photos are available to download from her website at judithwebb.weebly.com (scroll down to the entry for 10 November 2018).

Robberfly records from the Oxford Natural History Museum

by Jann Billker



Jann at work in the Oxford Museum of Natural History

As part of my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award in 2017/18, I decided to volunteer in the collections of the Oxford University Natural History Museum. Over the period of about a year I frequently visited the museum after school to identify the British unidentified specimens of Asilidae from the Westwood Room. The Asilidae are one of my favourite groups and I had about 190 specimens to identify and also to gather the data from their labels to sort them correctly.

I began with identifying the specimens and found some to be too damaged to be identified, others without sufficient data and some had already been identified previously. Some specimens were difficult and if I was unsure whether I had correctly identified a specimen, I asked John Ismay, who would confirm it for me. After I had the specimens identified, I entered all of the data into a spreadsheet. And this was in fact the most difficult part, because the handwriting on the labels was often very difficult to read. In order to help find the place names I used the Ordnance Survey Gazetteer of Great Britain.

In total, I have assigned 168 specimen into 16 different species. Once I had finished entering all the data, I sorted all of the flies into their respective species boxes. Finally, Zoë Simmons, the collections manager, kindly gave me permission to send the Asilidae data to the Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme.

I would like to thank the museum, especially Zoë Simmons, for their support and resources, as well as John and Barbara Ismay for their help with identification.

[And many thanks on behalf of the recording scheme to Jann for taking on this task and sharing the resulting records.]

Bee-fly Watch 2018

For the third year running we promoted 'bee-fly watch' in the spring, to encourage the recording of Dark-edged Bee-fly *Bombylius major* and Dotted Bee-fly *Bombylius discolor*. Over 1,200 records of *B. major* were sent in (about the same as in 2017), but *B. discolor* dropped back down to 67 records, about half of the number received in 2017, suggesting that it did less well this year.

In 2016 the first sighting of Dark-edged Bee-fly was reported on 13 March; in 2017 there were some very early records starting on 2 March, but in 2018 we were back to a more normal 14 March for the first record, with Dotted Bee-fly following from 3 April onwards.

To join in during 2019 please add your records to iRecord, and watch the recording scheme website for updates.

Anthracite Bee-fly returns?

In 2016 the Anthracite Bee-fly *Anthrax anthrax* was discovered in a garden in Cambridgeshire, by Rob Mills. That was the first confirmed record in the UK, following some records from 1929–30 that could not be substantiated. At the time we wondered if the new sighting would herald the wider spread of this distinctive bee-fly, but no further sightings were made in 2017. However, we now have another record, from 19 June 2018.

This time *Anthrax anthrax* was seen just outside Canterbury, East Kent, by Michael Woods. The fly proved to be camera-shy, and Michael was only able to capture a rather blurred photo (definitely not up to his usual standard of insect photography!), but in conjunction with his description of the fly this seems very likely to be the second UK record. Once again it is from a garden. The Anthracite Bee-fly is a parasitoid of *Osmia* mason bees and other hole-nesting bees, and has been spreading on the continent, so it is definitely one to look out for next summer.



Anthracite Bee-fly near Canterbury (photo by Michael Woods)

Autumnal horsefly

by Joe Beale



On 16 September 2018 I was watching Ivy Bees *Colletes hederæ* around flowering ivy on the top of a suburban garden wall, near grassy open space in Blackheath, London SE3 (Royal Borough of Greenwich). I was surprised to see a male tabanid nectaring there. I observed it for several minutes and took close-up images. When home I keyed it out, using the second edition of *British Soldierflies and Allies* (Stubbs and Drake), as *Tabanus bromius*. I don't recall seeing this species locally before. Martin Harvey confirmed it once I had posted it on iRecord.

I am relatively new to tabanids and while I knew this was a common species in many places I understood from the book that it might be a rather late individual. In fact Martin Harvey tells

me that it is the latest on record, the previous latest being 5th September 1986 in Somerset, as well as being apparently out of range (the closest populations probably being the large parks of SW London). While discussing the record on Twitter, another observer mentioned he had recorded this species the previous day, in a different region. I assume that the hot, dry weather this summer had something to do with these very late individuals and am thankful to Martin for confirming my identification and letting me know the extra information about it.

Recording scheme updates

Number of scheme organisers doubles!

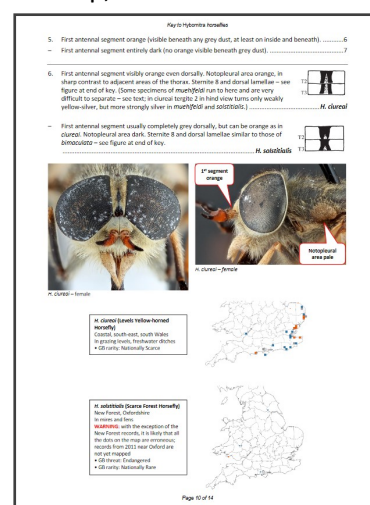
Following discussions at the Dipterists Forum Preston Montford meeting last February, the recording scheme is delighted to welcome Alex Dye as an additional recording scheme organiser. Alex recently completed a Masters degree in entomology at Harper Adams, and is working as an entomologist at Rothamsted Research. For the recording scheme he has been busy helping with iRecord verification, writing articles and contributing to our Twitter activity – thanks Alex!



Training courses and resources

Soldierflies and allies were one of the focus groups at the annual Dipterists Forum workshop at Preston Montford last February, providing an opportunity to work on the trickier groups and get more familiar with a wide range of species. Some new resources were produced for this workshop, which can be downloaded from www.brc.ac.uk/soldierflies-and-allies/resources – these include:

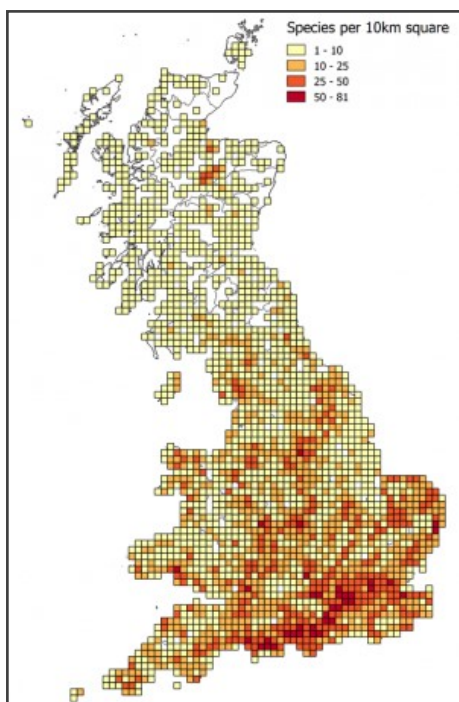
- Guide to *Chloromyia formosa* and *C. speciosa* (the latter is not thought likely to occur in Britain but could easily be overlooked if it did turn up)
- Photo guide to antennae of female *Haematopota* species (Tabanidae)
- Illustrated key to genus *Hybomitra* (Tabanidae)
- The UK species of *Thereva stiletto* flies (Diptera, Therevidae). Adapted from: Falck, M. 2011. The stiletto flies (Diptera, Therevidae) of Norway. *Norwegian Journal of Entomology* **58**, 131–163 (many thanks to Morten Falck for permission to adapt his key for UK use)



We also ran a workshop for the Tanyptera Trust at Liverpool World Museum in March 2018, and for BENHS at the Natural History Museum in January 2019.

Draft atlas available

Another outcome of the Preston Montford workshop was the compilation of a draft atlas for soldierflies and allies, updating Martin Drake's 1991 publication. This atlas includes all the data currently held in the main recording scheme database (which includes records from iRecord) up to 15 January 2018, and also shows any additional records available via the online NBN Atlas at that time (not all of which are fully verified). In total this amounts to over 150,000 records from over 3,000 people.



The main element that is missing from the draft Atlas are some of the records sent in to the scheme via spreadsheets and other formats in recent years – apologies if your records are among the backlog that is yet to be processed, and we will try to produce an updated version in the not too distant future.

The Atlas also includes brief summaries of the habitat and conservation status for each species. It can be downloaded from the scheme website at www.brc.ac.uk/soldierflies-and-allies/atlas

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)