

Tachinid Recording Scheme

NEWSLETTER –

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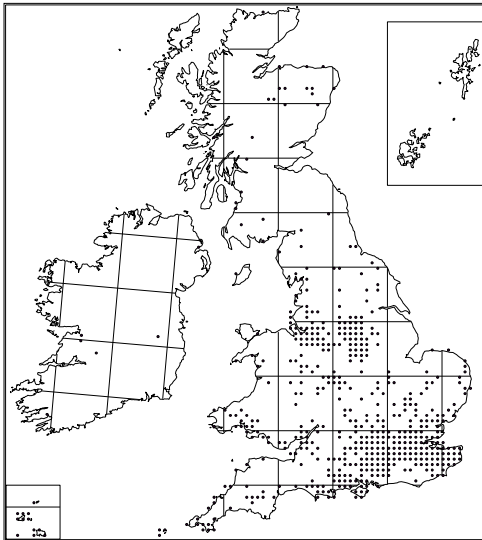
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Welcome to the first newsletter of the Tachinid recording scheme – it's taken a while for us to get into print with a newsletter but we hope you think it is worth it after the long wait!

THE SCHEME: The Tachinid Recording Scheme is organised by Chris Raper and Matt Smith. The scheme covers the British Isles, Ireland and Channel Islands and we would very much like to receive any and all Tachinids records you may have – whether it comes from your own collections or from historic data, museum specimens, recent field sightings or rearing data with host information. We can take paper records and we are able to accept records in a variety of electronic formats. Probably the easiest way to contact us about anything connected with the scheme is by e-mail.

SCHEME PROGRESS: The recording scheme has been up and running a few years now and we have had a steady flow of records from recorders across the country, including some substantial datasets from Kent, Essex and the Sorby Natural History



Society. We have just received about 2500 Welsh records which, together with a few others, are in the process of being added to the database. Including our own efforts the number of records received to date stands at approximately 8500. As you can see from our 'Records Received' map, there are plenty of parts of the country without a single record on our database. Please help to fill these gaps.

Ideally, the minimum information for each record should include the species, date, grid reference and the collector/ determiner. We are also happy to have a go at identifying any Tachinids specimens you might have.

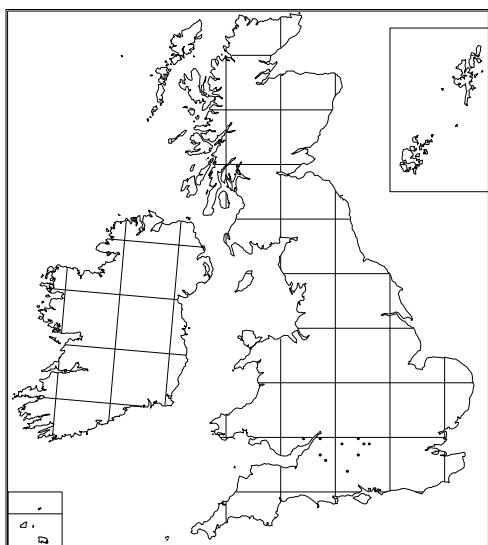
TRS Records - Records received.

TRS WEBSITE: The Recording Scheme has its' own website (put together by Chris) which can be found at <http://tachinidae.org.uk>. It is intended to provide a reference area can be used as an aid the study and recording of UK Tachinids. On our site you will find some basic information about the Tachinidae and their biology, along with amendments, additions and margin notes for the current RES Tachinid key (Belshaw 1993). Other sections include identification tips, information on species new to the UK since 1993, a photo library (a very new and growing addition), the current list of UK species, host information and distribution maps for those species for which we have records.

SPECIES NEW TO BRITAIN: Since Robert Belshaw's Tachinid key was written in 1993 there have been at least 16 species of Tachinid added to the British list - the most recent of which was *Thelaira leucozona* (Panzer) (Bergstrom 2004). Species 'New to Britain' do prove somewhat of a challenge to identify, being 'new' they will not have been included in the key to British Tachinidae. The alternative is to use the 'Central European Key' (Tschorsnig & Herting 1994). The key was originally written in German but, with the aid of a retired scientific translator, we have had it translated into English. The translated key is available on our website and is in use by Tachinid workers across Europe with no corrections reported - so far!

RECENT RECORDS: *Phasia hemiptera* is a large, spectacular Tachinid and one of the few Tachinids that can be easily recognised in the field. This species is a parasite of large Shieldbugs such as *Palomena prasina* and *Pentatoma rufipes*. We have received a good number of records for this species over the past two years, possibly the trend for warmer summers is benefiting this fly. *P.hemiptera* also appears to be doing well in Europe; a recent paper notes the rediscovery of the species in Denmark (Bygebjerg 2004).

A number of the smaller species of the Phasiine also appear to be spreading. *Phasia barbifrons* was first recorded from the UK from at a site in Kent in 1999. In 2004, we have had records for this species from as far west as Swindon in Wiltshire and as far north as Bilston in Staffordshire.



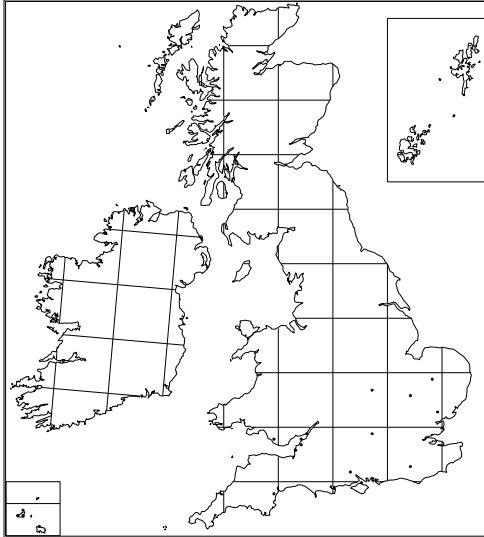
Cistogaster globosa, another small and to date very rare (RDB 1) species, was also recorded from several sites in 2004. We currently have records of this fly from 10 sites since 1999 (Map left).

Umbellifer flowers are always good places to look for Tachinids. Unlike many other species of Tachinid however, taller growing species of umbel such as Hogweed seem to be ignored and *Cistogaster* seems prefer visiting smaller, lower growing umbels that flower at or below the tops of the grasses. Unlike some species, *Cistogaster* does not seem a very 'flighty' species and usually returns to its perch if disturbed. Look out for this species in July and August this year.

Cistogaster globosa: 1999-2004 Records.

SPECIES TO WATCH OUT FOR: Even with the limited amount of data that we have collated so far, some interesting patterns of distribution for one or two species seem taking shape. Having recorded mostly in southern England, we had assumed that *Nowickia ferox* was a fairly common and widespread species. Looking at the current distribution map it appears to be restricted to the southern third of Britain. Any records of this species from Oxford northwards would be very interesting.

Sturmia bella was first recorded from in the UK from Bartley in Hampshire in 1998.



Since then it appears to be have been spreading rapidly and has been recorded from over 20 scattered localities across southern England and Wales.

Sturmia is a parasite of Nymphalid butterfly larvae. Female flies lay their eggs on the leaves of the food plant and these are ingested by the caterpillar as it feeds. *Sturmia* larvae leave the host shortly after the caterpillar has pupated, descending from the suspended butterfly pupa to the ground on long, sticky 'threads'. A good way to find this species is to look for medium sized flies 'lurking' around broods of Small Tortoiseshell larvae on nettles, particularly during late summer.

Sturmia bella: 1998-2004 records.

With at least 16 species of Tachinid added to the British list since 1993, we are wondering what will be the next species to turn up on the mainland. A strong candidate would appear to be *Ectophasia crassipennis*. First noted on the Channel Islands in 1997, this species appears to be expanding its European range. It is a relatively large and distinctive species, looking like a slightly smaller and more brightly coloured *Phasia hemiptera*, though with less well marked wings. Photos of this species can be seen on the TRS Website.

Dutch Tachinid specialist Theo Zeegers also recommended we look out for *Gymnosoma nudifrons*. He says that 'In Holland, *G.nudifrons* is by far the most common [*Gymnosoma*] species; *G.rotundatum* is restricted to the southern border'. It is found in the eastern Netherlands on sandy heaths. Using the RES Key, *G.nudifrons* would happily key out as *G.rotundatum*. In the UK, *G.rotundatum* has a peculiar distribution and appears to be restricted to parts of Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire. Any specimens of '*G.rotundatum*' from other parts of the UK would be well worth keying out using the European key, just in case.

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Belshaw, R. 1993.. *Tachinid flies. Diptera: Tachinidae*. Handbooks for the identification of British Insects. Royal Entomological Society of London 10, Part 4a(i). 170 pp.

Bygebjerg, R. 2004. *The tachinid fly Phasia hemiptera (Diptera, Tachinidae) rediscovered in Denmark*. Ent. Meddr 72: 75-77. Copenhagen, Denmark (ISSN 0013-8851)

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