

Identifying soldierflies and allies: bee-flies in genus *Villa*

Compiled by Martin C. Harvey for the Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme

*Version 2 at 3 April 2026 – revised to add *Villa hottentotta*, first found in the UK in 2025*

These guides are only possible thanks to the generosity of the brilliant photographers who have allowed their images to be used. Special mention must be given to Steven Falk, whose photo collections form the backbone for this species guide:

Steven Falk's [photo collections on Flickr](#)

Other photographers included in this guide are André den Ouden, Karin Oving, Martin Harvey, Penny Metal, Pierre Bonmariag, Richard Watkins and Sylvie Hérault.

In this guide four species are presented in alphabetical order, each with a page for males, then females. The pages for males include distribution maps taken from iRecord.

As far as possible, these guides show features that can be seen on live insects in the field, or are likely to be visible in photographs. For comprehensive identification keys and species accounts see [British soldierflies and their allies](#), by Alan Stubbs and Martin Drake. See also the recording scheme's [additional notes](#) to accompany the Stubbs and Drake keys.

For lots more information on soldierflies and allies go to the recording scheme [website](#), [BlueSky](#) page or [Facebook](#) group.

For lots more information and events, and to support the study and conservation of flies, please consider joining [Dipterists Forum](#).

Records wanted!

Once you have identified your fly, please let the recording scheme have the details! Add to [iRecord](#) or send to the [recording scheme](#) so that we can share the records for conservation and research.

The Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme is part of Dipterists Forum



The Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme is supported by the UKCEH Biological Records Centre



Recognising the genus: *Villa*

Genus *Villa* contains four fairly large species, all of which are similar in appearance. They have a characteristic overall appearance with a fairly broad abdomen. They do not have the long proboscis associated with bee-flies in genus *Bombylius*.

There are differences in the markings on the abdomen and wings, which differ between males and females of each species, so it is important to be aware of which sex you are looking at. Due to variation in the markings, it will not always be possible to confirm identifications from photographs, especially for older specimens where scales and hair patterns may wear away.



© Martin Harvey

Take care – white tegulae and pale bands on abdomen can wear off with age

The species have differing distribution and habitat preferences (see next page), but these are becoming less clear-cut as two species appear to be spreading into new areas.

- *Villa cingulata* is found on inland grasslands, initially on chalk but moving into neutral and acidic grasslands in recent years.
- *V. modesta* seems to be confined to coastal sand dunes.
- *V. hottentotta* arrived in the UK in 2025, and so far has been found in a London park and on coastal shingle; on the continent it is mostly associated with inland sites that are open, have sandy soils and warm microclimates, including gardens and brownfield sites; however, it has recently been found in sand dunes in the Netherlands.
- *V. venusta* (= *V. fasciata*) was formerly found on inland dry heathlands, but is believed extinct.

There are additional *Villa* species on the continent that may await discovery in the UK (e.g. *V. longicornis* and *V. panisca*), and specimens should be retained if any of these are suspected.

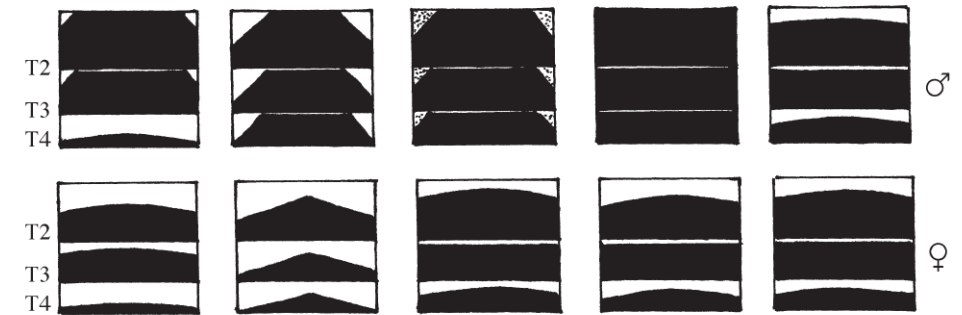
All the species can be found in summer, from June through to August or September. *Villa* bee-flies have parasitic larvae; their hosts are not known with any certainty in the UK, but observations from other countries suggest that they are parasitoids of moth caterpillars and pupae, probably noctuid moths.

Both males and females have eyes that are separated on the top of the head – male eyes are a little closer together than female eyes, but this can be difficult to pick out. For all species except *hottentotta* there is a difference in the colour of the tegulae (small flaps covering the wing bases): males have silvery-white tegulae, females have buff-brown.

Summary of abdomen patterns (including *V. panisca*, not yet found in the UK)

“T2, T3, T4” = Tergite 2, Tergite 3, Tergite 4 (“tergite” = top surface of abdomen segments); males in top row, females in bottom row

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



cingulata [*hottentotta*] *modesta* [*paniscus*] *venusta*

Idealised typical abdomen patterns in *Villa*

slightly narrower gap between eyes

MALE

FEMALE

slightly broader gap between eyes

tegulae usually buff-brown, more variable

tegulae silvery-white (except *hottentotta* which is blackish)

© Steven Falk

Distribution and habitats

Location and habitat can be helpful in narrowing down the possibilities when recording *Villa* bee-flies. However, some of these species have been expanding their range and moving into new habitats in recent years, so nothing can be taken for granted!

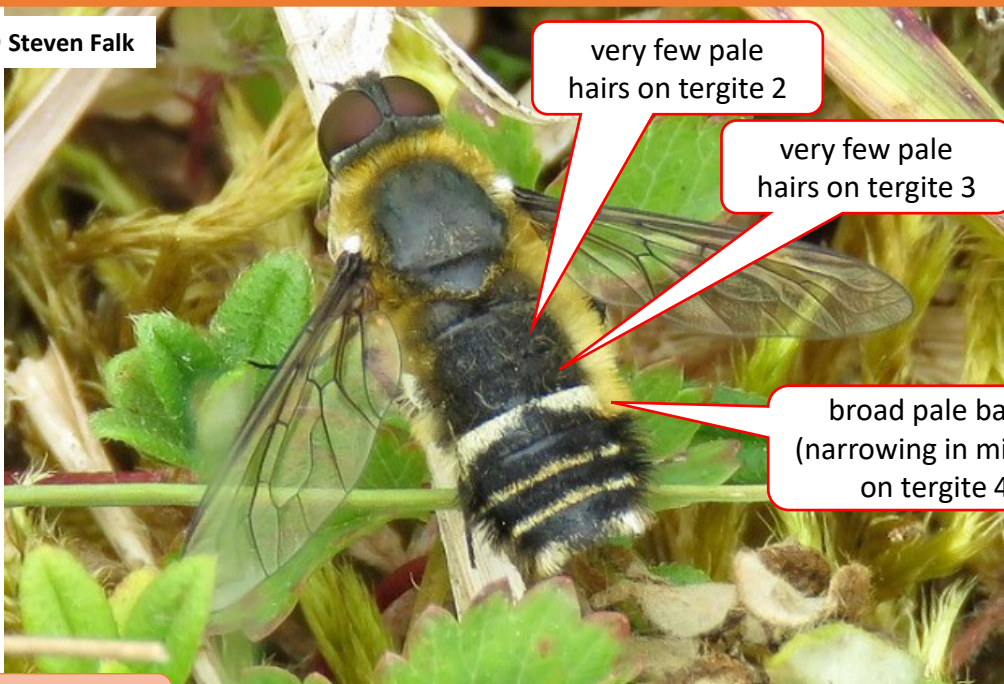
Species	Habitat	Overall distribution
V. cingulata	Grasslands; formerly confined to chalk and limestone grasslands, but now known from neutral and acidic grasslands as well.	Mainly in southern central England and south Wales, range expanding in recent years.
V. hottentotta	A wide range of inland open habitats (including gardens and brownfield sites); recently found in coastal dunes in the Netherlands.	First found in London and Kent in 2025, has the potential to spread widely.
V. modesta	Coastal sand dunes.	Widespread around the coasts of England, Wales and southern Scotland.
V. venusta (= <i>V. fasciata</i> in recent continental keys)	Formerly on dry heathlands.	Formerly on heaths in Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey, but no records since 1958 – believed extinct in the UK.

Two additional species are found on the near continent, and might be found in the UK in future. Specimens would be needed to confirm any records of these species:

Species	Habitat	ID notes
<i>V. longicornis</i>	Coastal sand dunes, has been expanding range in the Netherlands.	Males are most similar to <i>V. cingulata</i> , but with a more substantial pale band on tergite 2, and few if any black scales on the frons. Females are very similar to <i>V. modesta</i> – need to check the colour of the bristles underneath the abdomen on sternite 3 (black in <i>modesta</i> , pale in <i>longicornis</i>).
<i>V. panisca</i>	An inland species, known from Scandinavia and central Europe, no recent records for Netherlands and less likely to be found in the UK.	Has a broader dark band along the costa (leading edge) of the wing (similar to <i>V. venusta</i>); males have dark tegulae (similar to male <i>V. hottentotta</i>).

See also additional species known from Norway: *V. halteralis* and *V. occulta* (key available online: [Falck 2009](#)).

© Steven Falk

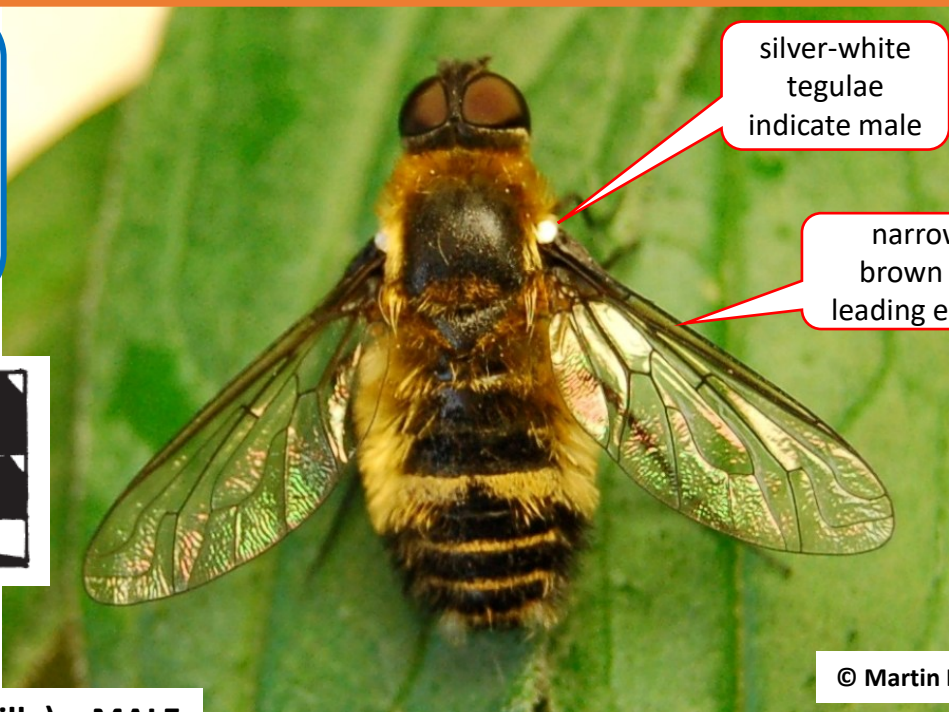
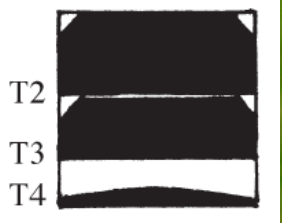


very few pale hairs on tergite 2

very few pale hairs on tergite 3

broad pale band (narrowing in middle) on tergite 4

Usual habitat: grassland, especially chalk downlands but has recently been spreading into neutral and acidic grasslands as well



silver-white tegulae indicate male

narrow band of brown shading at leading edge of wings

© Martin Harvey

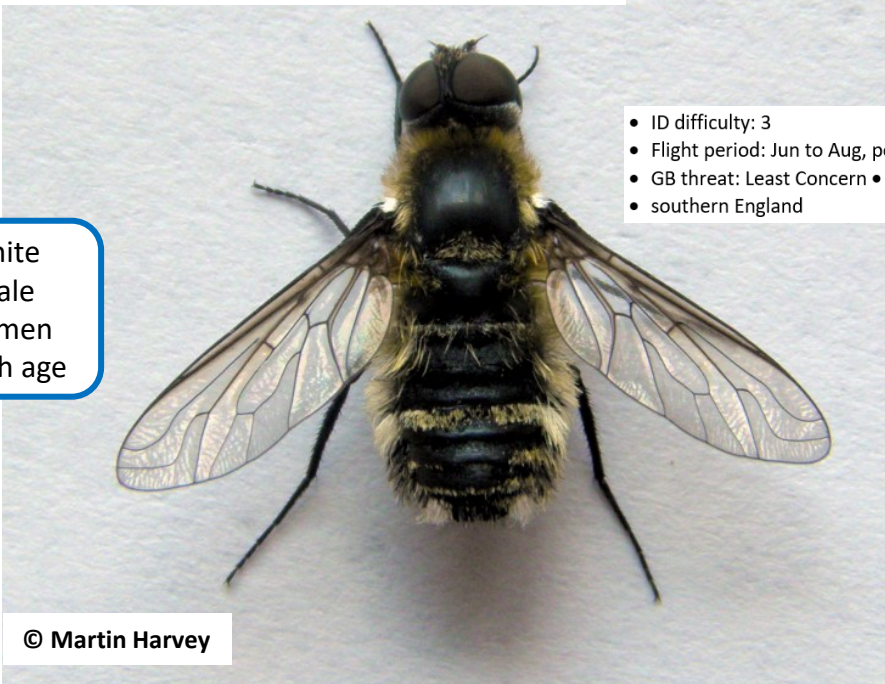
[Steven Falk link](#)

Villa cingulata (Downland Villa) – MALE



Take care – white tegulae and pale bands on abdomen can wear off with age

© Steven Falk

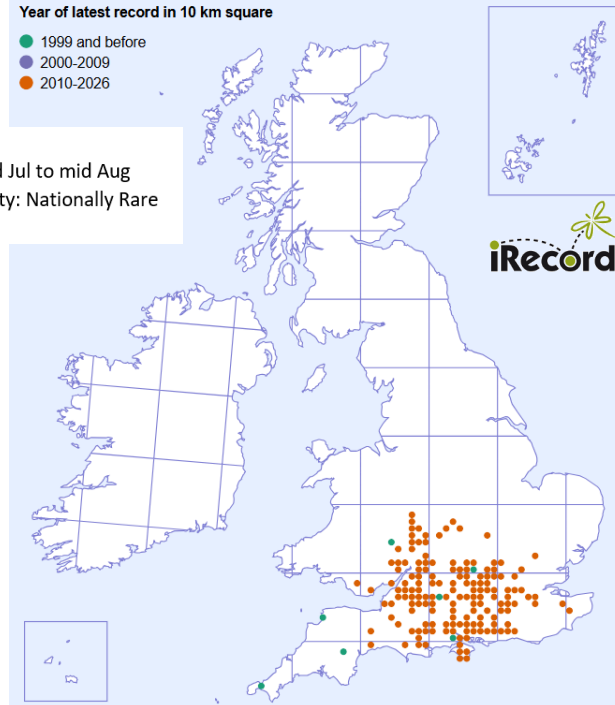


© Martin Harvey

- ID difficulty: 3
- Flight period: Jun to Aug, peak mid Jul to mid Aug
- GB threat: Least Concern • GB rarity: Nationally Rare
- southern England

Year of latest record in 10 km square

- 1999 and before
- 2000-2009
- 2010-2026

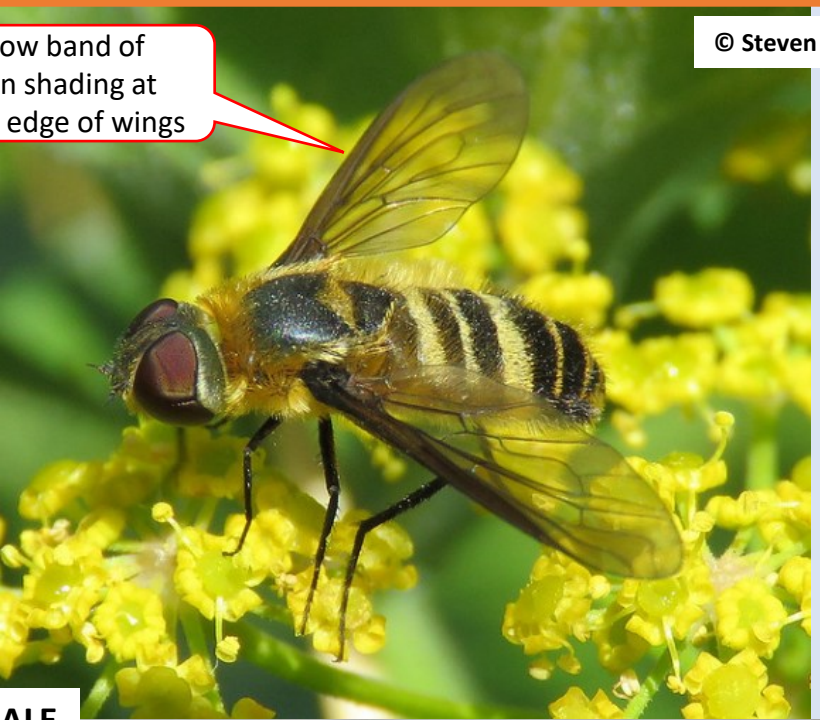


iRecord



buff tegulae indicate female

narrow band of brown shading at leading edge of wings



[Steven Falk link](#)

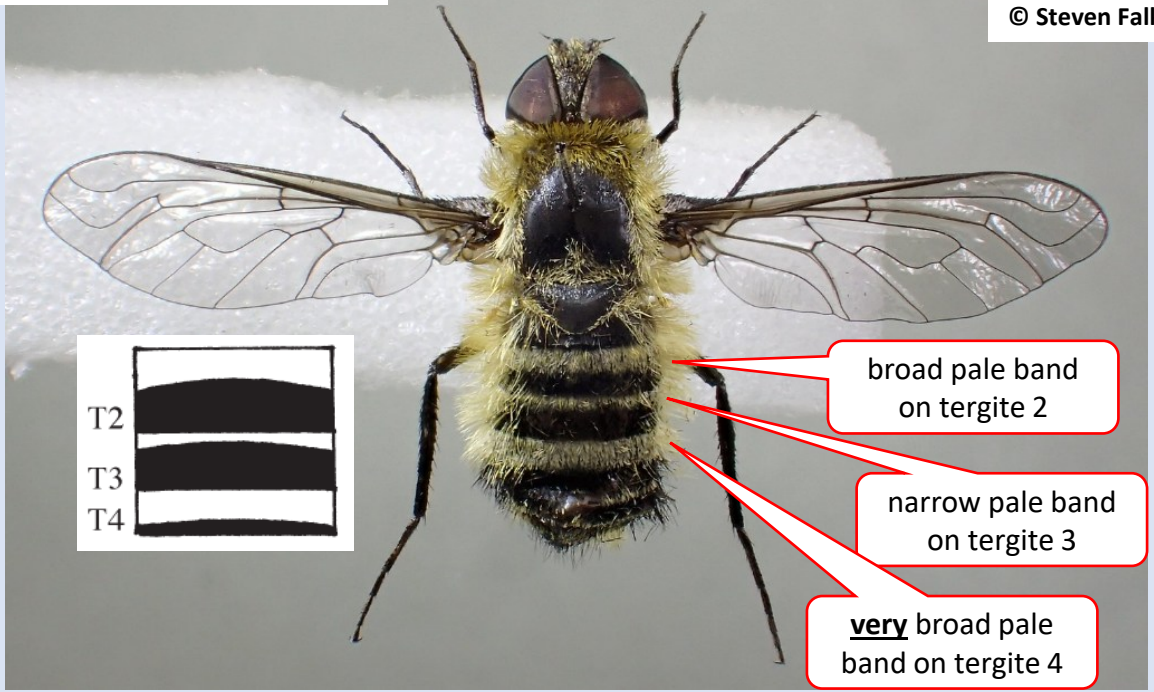
Villa cingulata (Downland Villa) – FEMALE



hind tibia with flat scales shorter than spines

Take care – pale bands on abdomen can wear off with age

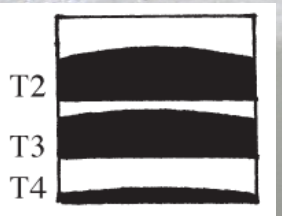
Usual habitat: grassland, especially chalk downlands but has recently been spreading into neutral and acidic grasslands as well



broad pale band on tergite 2

narrow pale band on tergite 3

very broad pale band on tergite 4



© Penny Metal CC BY
via [iRecord \(UK\)](#)

numerous orange-yellow scales behind head

blackish tegulae

buff-brown hair tufts



***Villa hottentotta* (Buff-tailed Villa) – MALE**



© André den Ouden CC BY
via [observation.org](#)

© André den Ouden CC BY
via [observation.org](#)

See also [comparison with male *Villa modesta*](#)

Additional images available via [www.photos-macro.fr](#) [here](#) and [here](#)

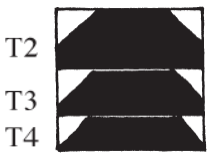


© Pierre Bonmariage CC BY-NC
via [observation.org](#)

On the continent, mostly associated with inland sites that are open, have sandy soils and warm microclimates, including gardens and brownfield sites; recently been found in sand dunes in the Netherlands.

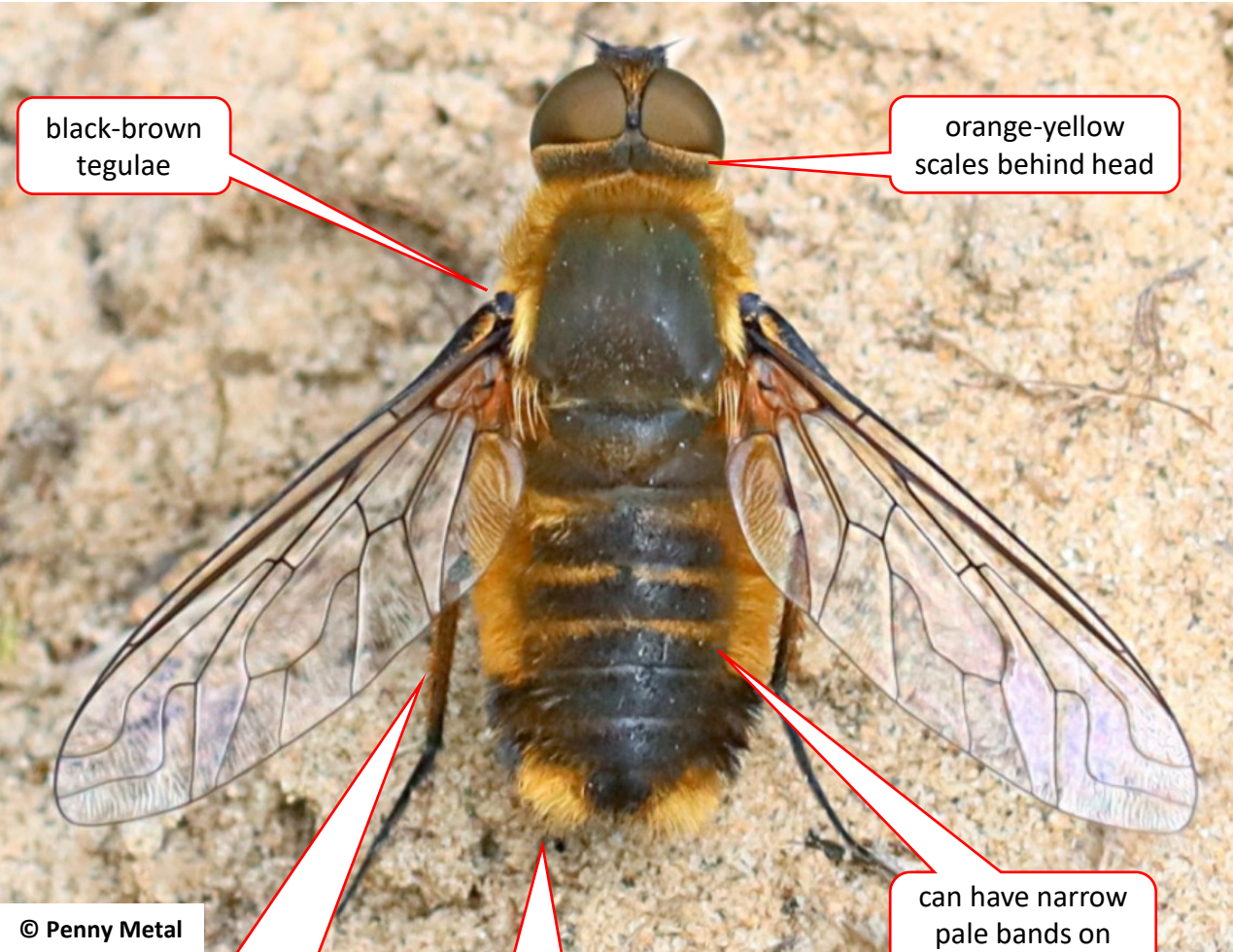
In the UK in 2025 there were two records from coastal sites in Kent, and one from a sandy bank in a south-east London park.

pale bands on abdomen very thin or absent



Comparison of males:

Villa hottentotta (left) and *Villa modesta* (right)



black-brown tegulae

orange-yellow scales behind head

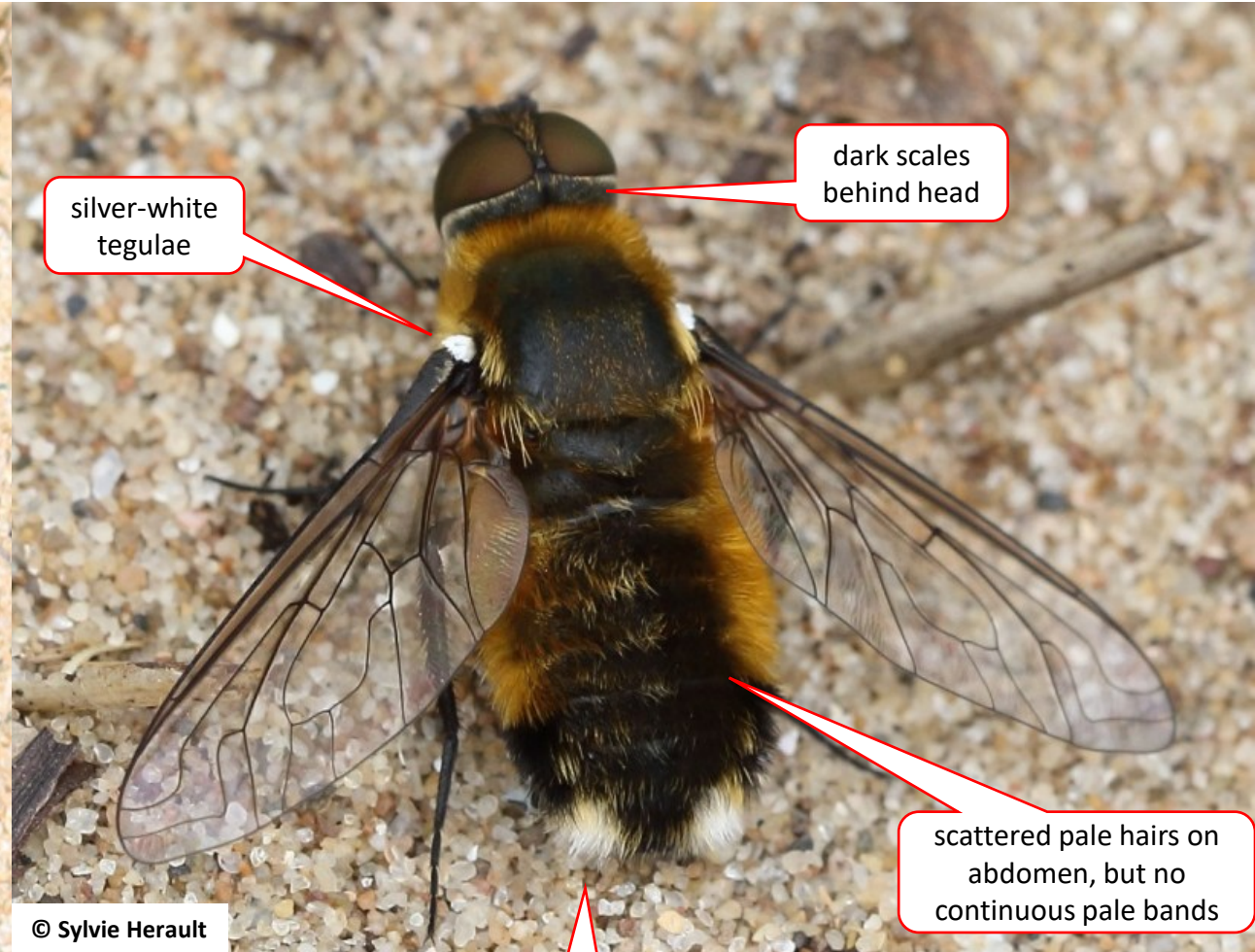
buff-brown hair tufts

can have narrow pale bands on abdomen

© Penny Metal

[orange-yellow scales on hind tibiae may also be a useful pointer]

Additional *hottentotta* images available via www.photos-macro.fr [here](#) and [here](#)



silver-white tegulae

dark scales behind head

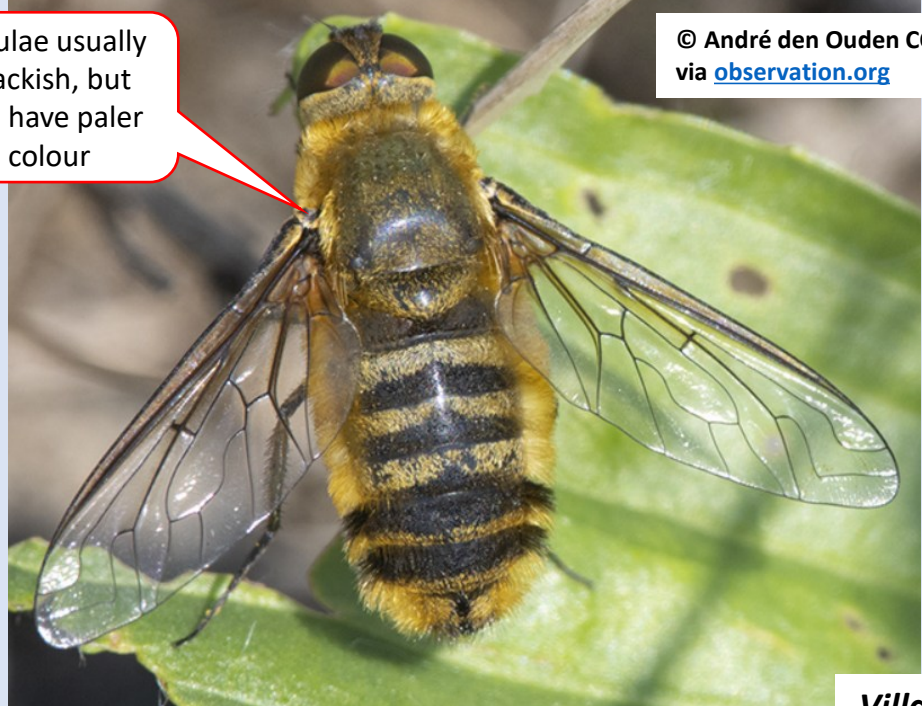
white hair tufts

scattered pale hairs on abdomen, but no continuous pale bands

© Sylvie Herault

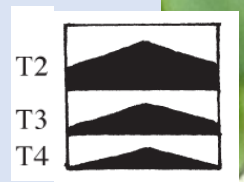
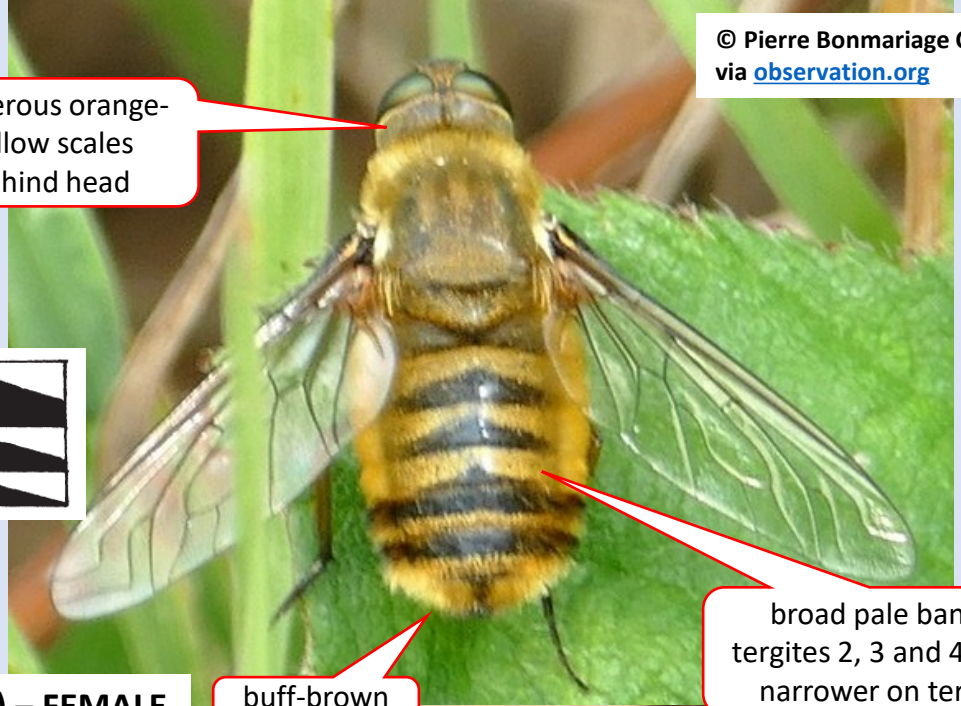
tegulae usually blackish, but can have paler colour

© André den Ouden CC BY via [observation.org](https://www.observation.org)



numerous orange-yellow scales behind head

© Pierre Bonmariage CC BY-NC via [observation.org](https://www.observation.org)



broad pale bands on tergites 2, 3 and 4 (slightly narrower on tergite 3)

buff-brown hair tufts

Villa hottentotta (Buff-tailed Villa) – FEMALE

© Richard Watkins CC BY-NC-ND via [observation.org](https://www.observation.org) (the first UK sighting)



© Karin Oving CC BY-NC via [observation.org](https://www.observation.org)



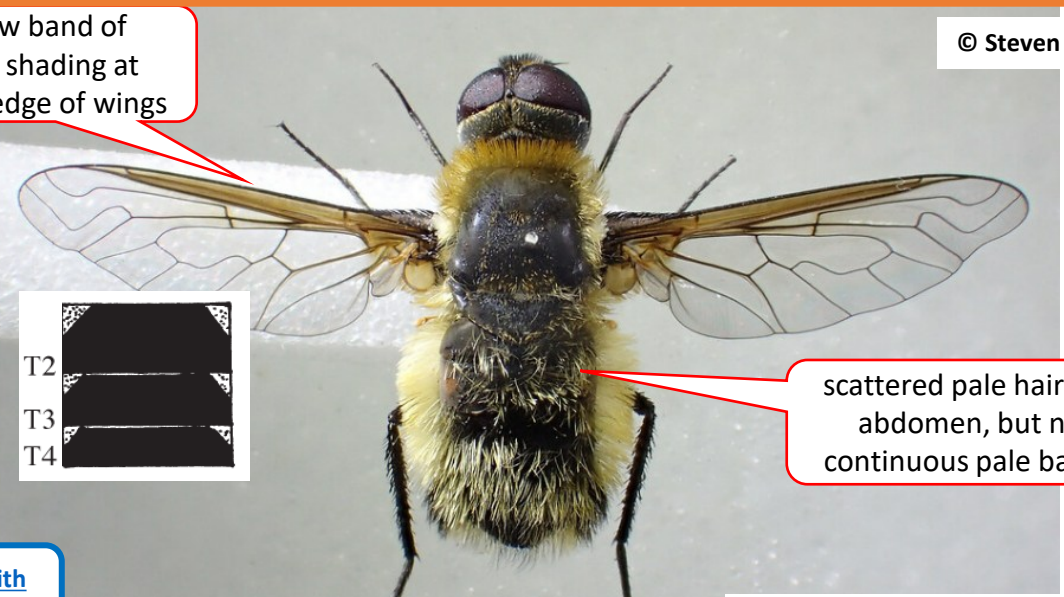
© Steven Falk

scales behind head mostly dark, a few few orange-yellow



narrow band of brown shading at leading edge of wings

[Steven Falk link](#)



© Steven Falk

scattered pale hairs on abdomen, but no continuous pale bands

See also [comparison with male Villa hottentotta](#)

Villa modesta (Dune Villa) – MALE

- ID difficulty: 3
- Flight period: Jun to early Sep
- GB threat: Least Concern • GB rarity: Nationally Scarce
- mostly coastal
- sand dunes (partly fixed), old records for Breckland

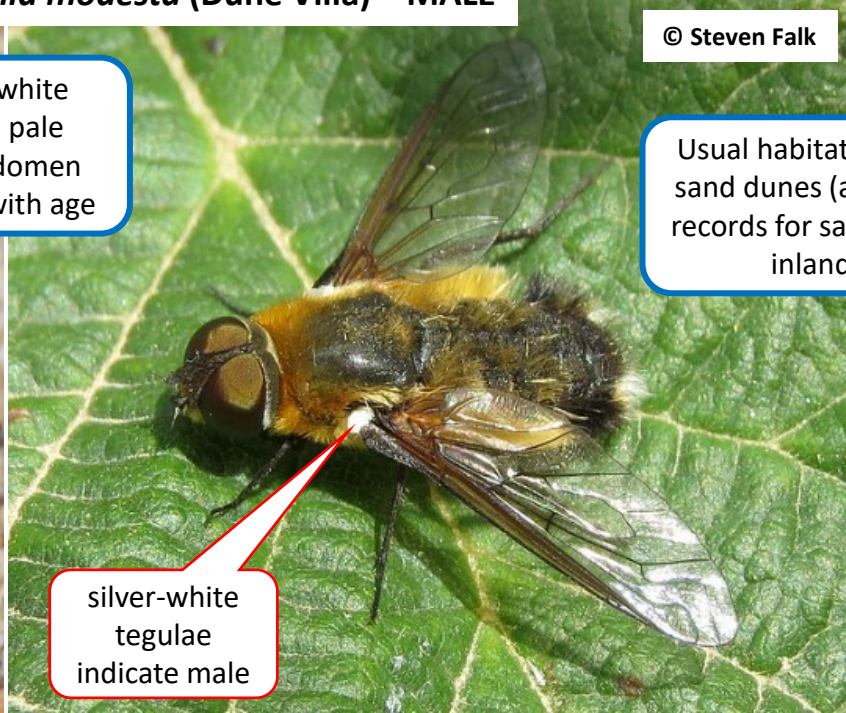
© Sylvie Herault via iRecord

[iRecord link](#)



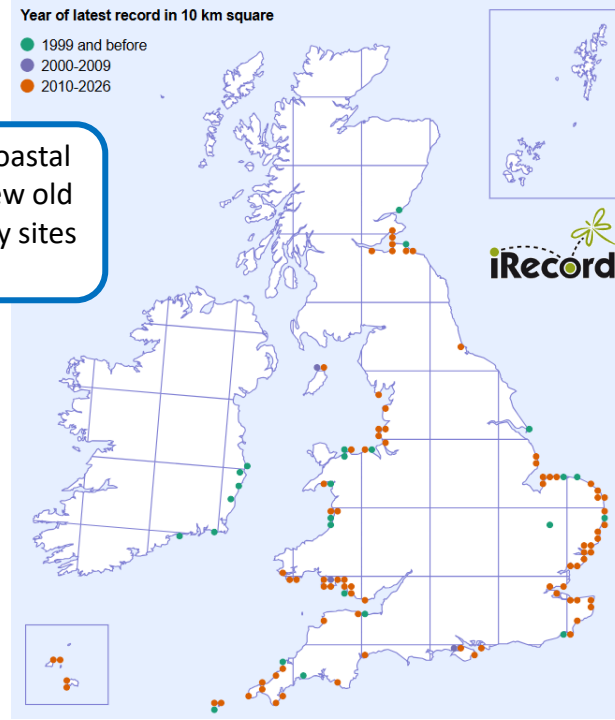
Take care – white tegulae and pale bands on abdomen can wear off with age

silver-white tegulae indicate male

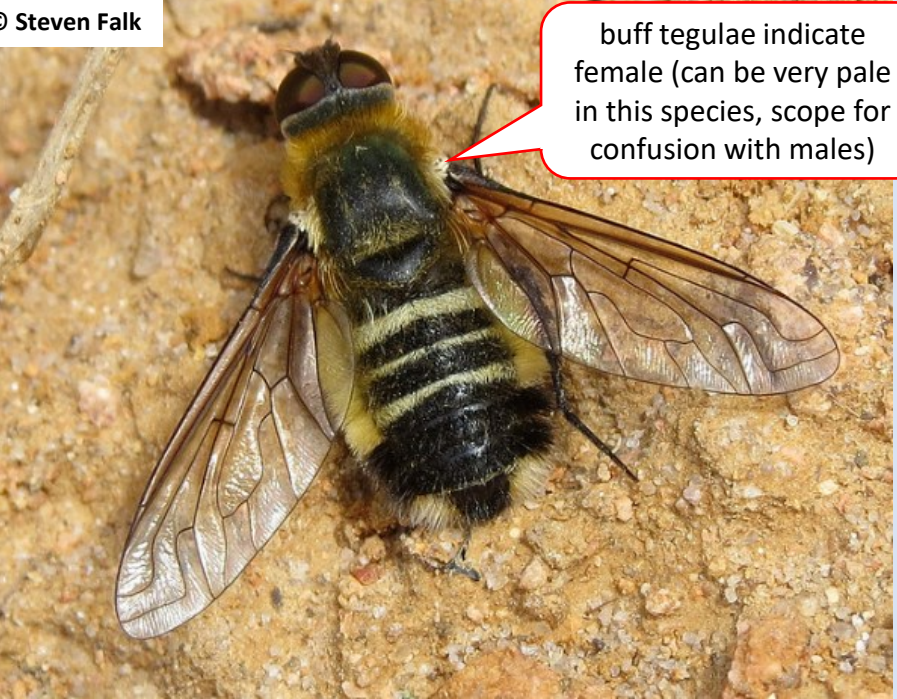


© Steven Falk

Usual habitat: coastal sand dunes (a few old records for sandy sites inland)

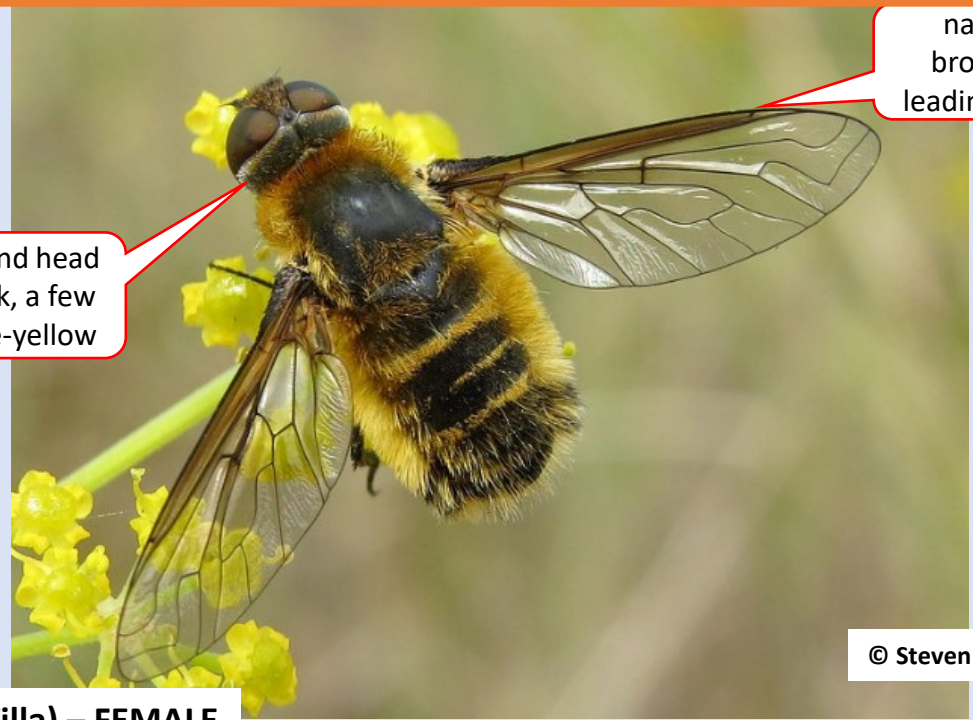


© Steven Falk



buff tegulae indicate female (can be very pale in this species, scope for confusion with males)

[Steven Falk link](#)



scales behind head mostly dark, a few few orange-yellow

narrow band of brown shading at leading edge of wings

© Steven Falk

***Villa modesta* (Dune Villa) – FEMALE**

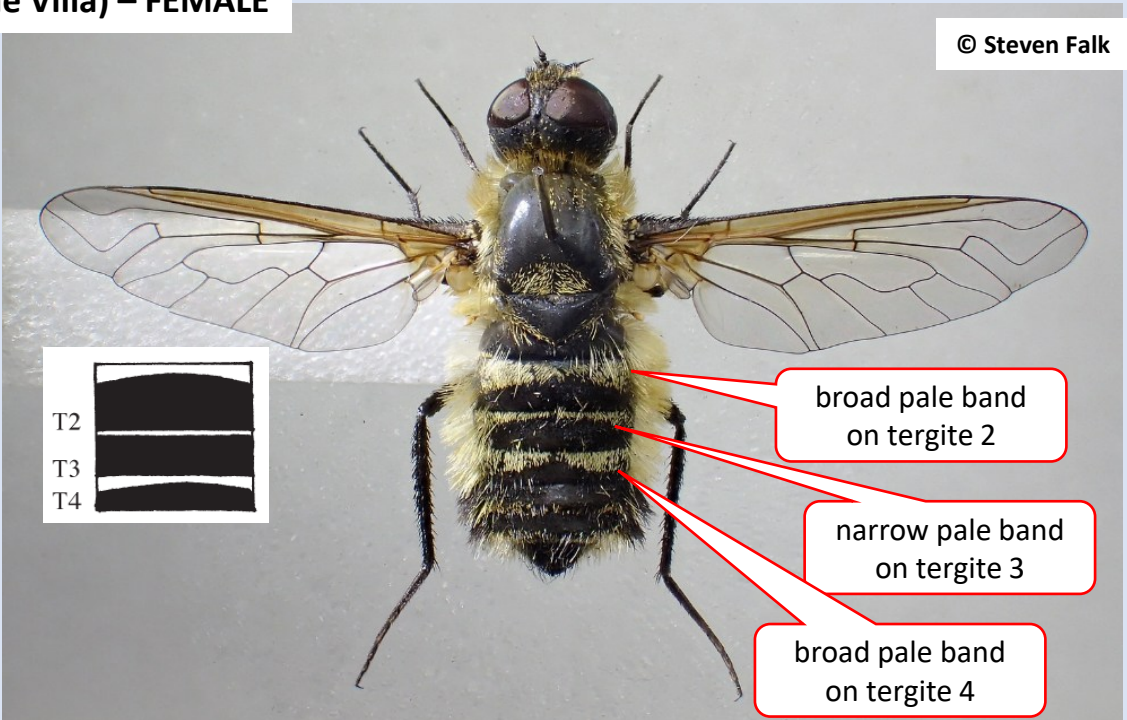


hind tibia with flat scales as long as spines

Usual habitat: coastal sand dunes (a few old records for sandy sites inland)

Take care – pale bands on abdomen can wear off with age

© Steven Falk



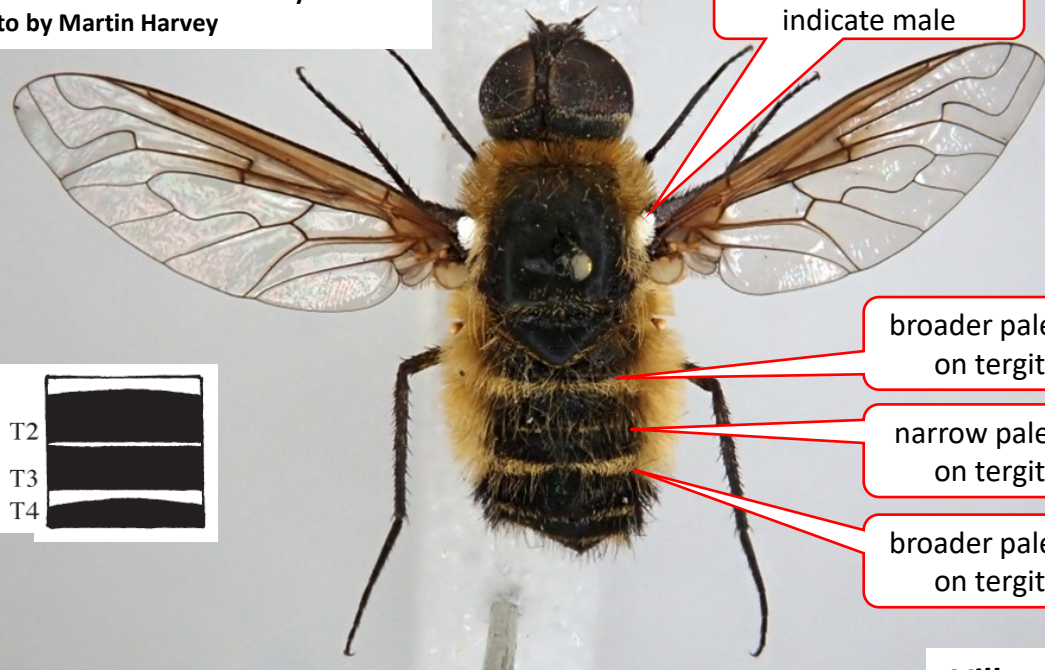
© Steven Falk

broad pale band on tergite 2

narrow pale band on tergite 3

broad pale band on tergite 4





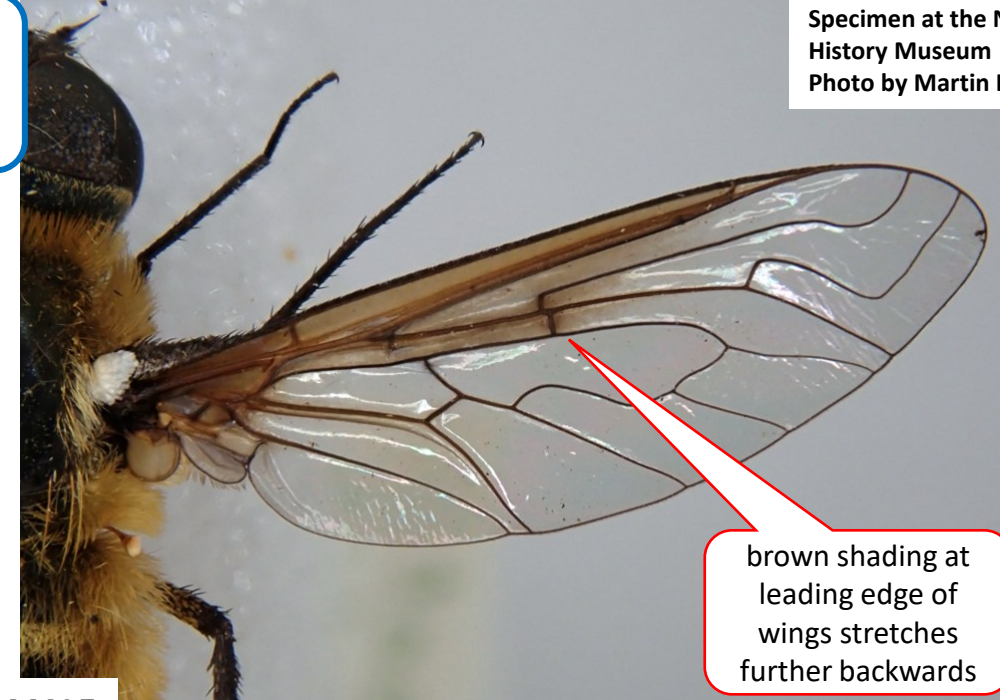
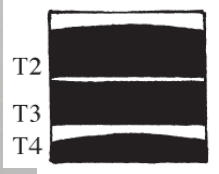
silver-white tegulae indicate male

Take care – white tegulae and pale bands on abdomen can wear off with age

broader pale band on tergite 2

narrow pale band on tergite 3

broader pale band on tergite 4



brown shading at leading edge of wings stretches further backwards

Villa venusta (Heath Villa) – MALE



[Steven Falk link](#)

Not recorded in the UK since 1958, and likely to be extinct

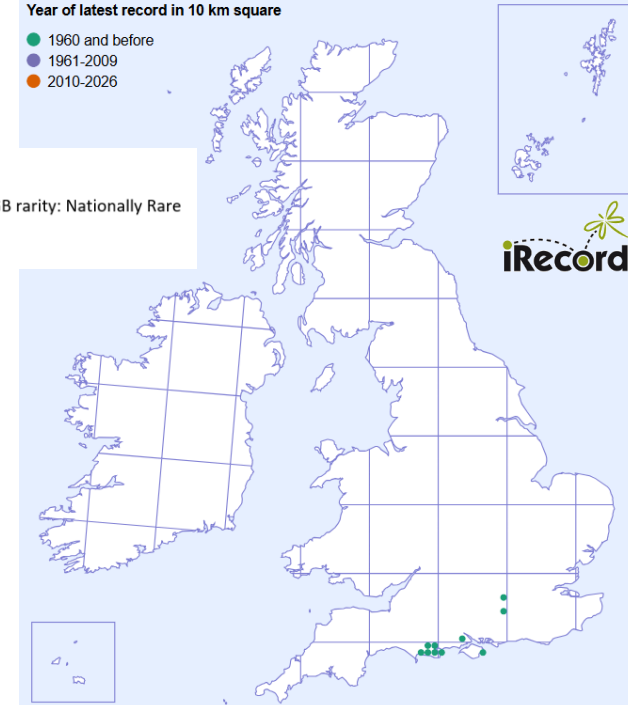
Habitat: used to be found in dry heathlands

Continental authors regard this taxon as synonymous with *Villa fasciata*

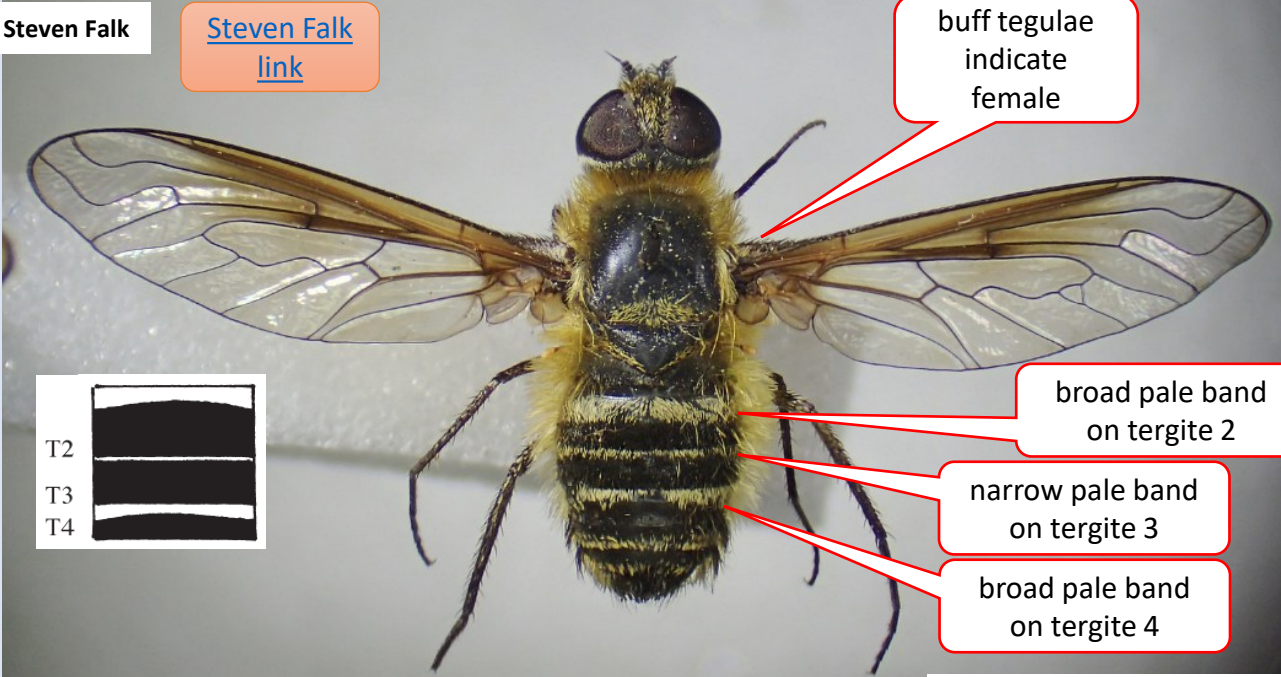
Year of latest record in 10 km square

- 1960 and before
- 1961-2009
- 2010-2026

- ID difficulty: 4
- Flight period: mid Jul to late Aug
- GB threat: Critically Endangered • GB rarity: Nationally Rare
- southern England
- dry heathland



[Steven Falk link](#)



Specimen at the Natural History Museum
Photo by Martin Harvey

***Villa venusta* (Heath Villa) – FEMALE**

Not recorded in the UK since 1958, and likely to be extinct

Take care – pale bands on abdomen can wear off with age

Habitat: used to be found in dry heathlands

additional image of live bee-fly on [Diptera.info](#)



brown shading at leading edge of wings stretches further backwards

Specimen at the Natural History Museum
Photo by Martin Harvey

Continental authors regard this taxon as synonymous with *Villa fasciata*