

# News from the schemes

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## Hoverfly Recording Scheme

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## Larger Brachycera Recording Scheme

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## Cranefly Recording Scheme

### Newsletter 11 Spr 2002

Seemingly you are all demanding that I should be manacled and caged until British Craneflies is completed and sitting (hopefully not idly?) on your book-shelves.

If only life were so simple, and the delay is not all my fault. The people to blame are those who are purchasing British Hoverflies at such a rate that the book will be out of print again by mid summer. A straight reprint of an outdated 1983 text, with yet more cumbersome bolt-ons is not acceptable. Thus I plead a cranefly sabbatical for just a few more months (mercifully hoverfly lead editing is off my plate thanks to Stuart Ball & Roger Morris).

Do not despair, there has been progress, including advancing some of the cranefly text. Fortunately CCW has undertaken to process the Welsh data mountain.

Here I simply dust down some notes already at hand, add scene news, and at least keep the ball rolling.

A reminder may be appropriate that John Kramer is now a co-organiser with me for the recording scheme. I hope soon to transfer to him a stock-pile of spare sets of test keys so that he can respond to requests for keys, and he is the person to approach first with the easier requests for help with identifications and advice.

### Current News on tackling the data mountain

Mike Howe is seeing through the processing of Welsh data at CCW (on the back of the Lipsotrix Species Action Plans). A pilot batch of records for a few southern Welsh counties were processed onto Recorder last year, about 5000 records, and a second larger batch was also largely finished that year. In early January 2001, Mike bravely lugged a heavy rucksack of further BRC cards and records sheets from Peterborough to Bangor, including the results of a number of field meetings. That should take 'a little longer' to process as opportunity arises (and same records apart from craneflies on the sheets is also being entered).

There will be a call for any other Welsh data in due course in order to mop up on data held by other recorders, but that will have to await 'the rucksack' being empty. Taken in conjunction with the Welsh Wetlands Survey data (mid 1980s), an atlas for the craneflies of Wales should be possible within say a couple of years.

The prospect that the enormous data mountain for Wales is being tackled is a considerable relief and gives some encouragement that perhaps somehow the 'alpine range' of data for the rest of Britain can be tackled. The Dipterists Forum has backed the priority to sort out the data for this scheme, noting that preparation of a book on craneflies is about to accelerate. John Kramer, in his capacity of Secretary of the Dipterists Forum, is clarifying what is meant by the NBN (National Biodiversity Network) being able to assist in gaining resources to process data and advance schemes (a matter relevant to all schemes)

One job lot is to put on computer the data from the Natural History Museum (material

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checked and accessions identified), which has now been abstracted onto cards (updating and extending abstraction for long-palped craneflies made by Tony Hutson and Dick Vane-Wright in the early 1970s) - John Kramer has offered to take this on.

Fortunately data for some areas is already on computer, including Derbyshire and the Peak District (North Midlands Cranefly Group) and Kent (Laurence Clemons), incorporating back-log data from the national scheme. Also, some individuals have a fair amount of data on computer for their home area and various travels (Ken Merrifield is one such person I know of). This all helps make the target of a GB atlas achievable but there is a long way to go. It would be helpful to know who holds data on computer if it is likely that I remain unaware of this (replies to John Kramer).

The earlier call for help in processing data drew limited response. Perhaps there would be more enthusiasm for data for areas of personal interest.

### Progress with literature abstraction (year dot till 2000)

I am about 95% complete on the main national entomological journals, plus those of the British Ecological Society.

It is mainly a matter of adding data for very large papers and completing the last few years in some cases. Abstracts include ecological and life history information.

In addition much of the Naturalist (Yorkshire Naturalists Union) has been abstracted as 'illegible' written notes, but some still remains to be typed in. Presumably it will have to be a separate operation to format or reenter data onto a Recorder compatible database, but at least the raw information is assembled on computer word files with annotation as regards the frequent horrors of interpreting reliability (timing of splits, apparent det. errors etc.) and current name.

The final dusting down of this project has been on hold for the last hectic couple of years. Before letting-go of my London base, I diverted priority to abstracting the Natural History Museum collection data (having already done most of the literature abstraction that was dependent of London libraries).

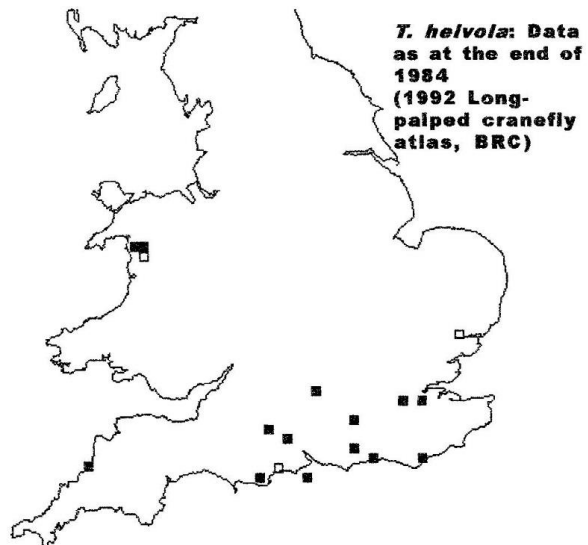
### Advances with mapping distribution

The recording scheme officially started in 1973, though active recording began well before. The Long-palped cranefly atlas, published by BRC in 1992 was based on manually plotted maps submitted to them at the end of 1984. Subsequent to 1984, there is now a further 16 years of data accumulation. By extrapolation, there is probably 70% more data, reflecting perhaps 50% more dots including areas that were previously weakly covered.

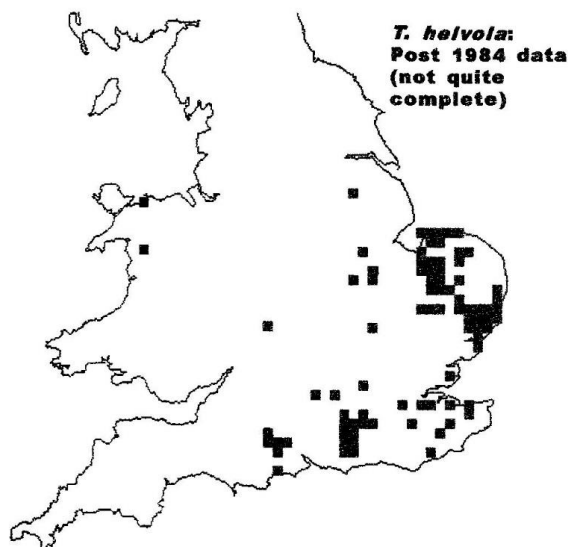
The widespread species have been gaining a better density picture. For seemingly localised or scarce species, there have been same major new insights into distribution patterns, stemming from more recording manpower and opportunity to record at previously missed localities or times of year.

In some cases, having cracked the problem of not knowing the ecology of a species, records start to pile in. A few obvious cases come to mind:-

*Tipula helvola* distribution data is now much improved (see accompanying maps). Why is it that neither Verrall (nor Collin) found it in the Weald ('Tunbridge Wells') or the Newmarket-Breck area (Verrall in particular did a lot of work in revising the British list a hundred years ago)? Why is it that it was so rarely found in the 1960s and 70s? For instance, the Cranefly Recording Scheme meeting in 1975 based at Rogate, West Sussex, had a collecting blitz group of 20 concentrating on craneflies for a week (and including Tony Hutson and Dick-Vane Wright then up to scratch as specialists), yet no records at the right time of year. The Norfolk meeting in the 1990s had no problem finding this species, with even novices coming in with specimens. The current map (at short notice there are some records still to build in, such as near Wrexham) reflects my recording blitzes in East Anglia and the West Weald, where success can usually be achieved on site in the matter of minutes (dryish or moist woodland), but in the Peterborough area it has taken some dogged determination to prove



the presence of the species. My prized record is for the dry edge of Chippenham Fen (a favourite place of Verrall and Collin). I have been amazed at how many other people have been finding the species in the Weald and elsewhere. My feeling is that this southern *Lumatipula*, a specialist on dry soils, has become more plentiful and possibly more widespread, as a result of the warmer weather of recent decades.



These maps illustrate the marked improvement in distribution data for *T. helvola*, a species of dry and moist woodland, mainly on sandy soils. The sandy Drift districts of Norfolk and Suffolk prove to be a previously unrecognised stronghold. Sandy areas in the Weald are also favourable. It seems likely that this species has thrived in the warmer climate of recent decades and became easier to find by novices and specialists alike. See main text for further details. *Prionocera subserricornis* ecology is now known - deep shade alder-lined ditches full of peaty slurr (why bother with jargon, and I suspect there is no better technical term). This very great Norfolk rarity is now known to occur in a scatter of localities across to the Cheshire Plain in the West Midlands. *Ctenophora flaveolata* has been turning up far more widely than expected in the south and Wales, but is still a rarely recorded beast. It was bred from pupae in a very rotten fallen truck in Devon, the first break-through on its ecology- tantalisingly larvae still unknown/undescribed !

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#### Stilt & Stalk Fly

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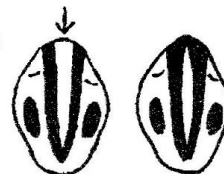
## Forum News

## IDENTIFICATION HINTS

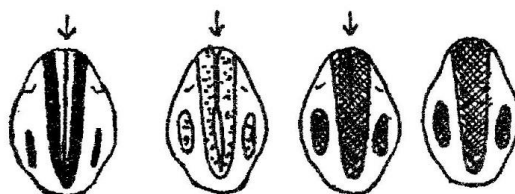
Identification hints 1 - key to subgenera of *Tipula*

Couplet 9 seem to have been causing anguish. In the version below, 9a now includes the case where the median stripes are mainly separated but meet at the front margin, and 9b text has been clarified and the left figure touched up. Hopefully this now works in all circumstances, but if not, then please say.

- 9 ----- Praescutum (top or thorax) with a pale median line clearly separating the subdorsal stripes at least in the front three quarters, though may meet at front



- Praescutum dark on median line, either with a thin median dark line (at least locally developed, partially or intermittently or as a broad dark median stripe)

Identification hints 2 - *Dicranomyia* with a dark stigma

Note that *D. autumnalis* with a very dark stigma can be misidentified as *D. nigristigma*. The males of both species have a long beak to the styles of the genitalia, with a pair of widely spaced spines. However, the beak is simple on *autumnalis* but complex in *nigristigma* (see test key illustrations). Errors in using the key may occur when dried specimens of *autumnalis* have the ventral genital process angled horizontally rather than angled downwards.

Identification hints 3 - *Tricyphona*

There were some errors in the NHM collection so some further notes may be helpful, including characters for female ovipositors.

In *immaculata*, the ovipositor is relative short, gently curving up soon after the base. In this common species, the thorax has a broad dark median stripe, even when viewed from in front.

The other 2 species, *schummeli* and *unicolor* have a much longer ovipositor, being fairly straight for some distance before curving up. These species have the dark median thoracic stripe divided by a thin axial line of grey dust, most obvious when seen from in front.

In *schummeli*, the central dark stripes are black and particularly shining, and the abdomen has blackish sand-shining sternites. The fused section of  $R_{4+5}$  is of course particularly short in this species.

In *unicolor*, the central dark stripes are dull with heavy dusting and the sternites and also very dull dusted.

To my surprise, the NHM has a female *unicolor* from Chippenham Fen (1965) and another from the Norfolk Broads (1966). The ecology of this elusive species is very poorly known, most previous records being from Scotland.

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