

Kelp flies – the ugly squad

Compiled by Donald Smith, December 2020



Coelopa frigida
(Coelopidae)



Coelopa pilipes
(Coelopidae)



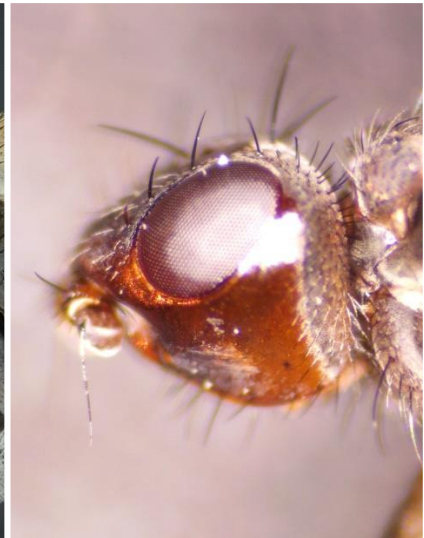
Malacomyia sciomyzina
(Coelopidae)



Heterocheila buccata
(Heterocheilidae)



Helcomyza ustulata
(Helcomyzidae)



Orygma luctuosum
(Sepsidae – not a kelp fly)

One is supposed to forgive family faults – but it is difficult to see the faces of the kelp flies as anything but ugly! The three UK species in the family Coelopidae all have monstrous Desperate Dan style jutting chins, studded with fearsomely coarse bristles in the case of *Coelopa frigida*, only slightly less unkempt for the fuzzy-faced *Coelopa pilipes*, while the more jauntily coloured *Malacomyia sciomyzina* sports several days of stubble. The other UK kelp flies (*Heterocheila buccata* in the family Heterocheilidae, and *Helcomyza ustulata* in the family Helcomyzidae) are flat-faced, but their smoother, sagging jowls are topped by goggle eyes giving them both a slightly puzzled look. Another big brute of the seashore, *Orygma luctuosum* (in the family Sepsidae so covered by a different Recording Scheme), almost manages to look cute in comparison with its shiny brown jowls and triangular profile.

However, in their favour, all five species of kelp fly can be found almost anywhere along the coastline of the British Isles and are present all year round. All you need is to turn over a pile of rotting seaweed at the high tide line and you will see them scuttling downwards. Getting a good look at them or catching them proves messier, but they are relatively easy to identify, even from photographs – an illustrated key is coming soon. Please send any records to [iRecord](https://www.record.org.uk/) or directly to the Kelp fly Recording Scheme at KelpflyRS@gmail.com.