LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

VC55

NEWSLETTER 70

January 2024

Above and right: Sexual generation galls of *Trigonaspis megaptera* on oak trunks at the summit of Bardon Hill. See article on p. 8. Photos: Sue Timms.

Marbled White *Melanargia galathea* at Bloody Oaks Quarry NR, 2 July 2023. Photo: Steve Woodward.

In this edition

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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The editor will be happy to receive articles, short notes and photos (in focus please!) about insects or other invertebrates in Leicestershire and Rutland, also news of members' activities further afield. Photos to be sent separately please at high resolution. Unless otherwise credited, photos are by the author of the article.

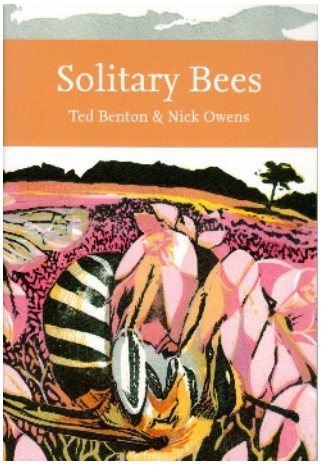
Next Copy Deadline: 5 September 2024

Errata

Two errors crept into my gall midge article in *Newsletter* **69**, page 7. The hotel was Kilworth House (not Kibworth) and the grid reference prefix should be SP, not SK. *Ed.*

Editorial

I am wearing two fleeces and clutching a mug of hot tea - hopefully 19 January will be the last very cold day for a while. Tomorrow I travel to Shrewsbury, returning to the very room where, in 1979, I had my first encounter with dichotomous keys, genitalia determinations, the Heath moth trap and its inventor! This was a Lepidoptera course at Preston Montford Field Centre, run by John Heath and Jim Reid, which steered me in the direction of "proper" recording. Since then my interests have wandered through other orders and I have forgotten most of the moths that I used to know. I was very pleased to have been invited to present a lecture on Leicestershire plants and invertebrates to an audience of Shropshire naturalists. I will enjoy pointing out a few things the we have that they lack!



My bed-time reading has been a New Naturalist volume, S*olitary Bees* by Ted Benton and Nick Owens (2023). Like others in this series, it is a substantial book (596 pages) about the biology of the group concerned, rather than an identification guide. The thoroughness of the research and wealth of original observations are what impressed me about this book. The authors have spent many hours watching each species of bee, for example to see exactly how it collects pollen from the various flowers, which hairs are involved and how it is groomed onto the scopa. Likewise for nectar collection. Co-evolution between flowers and bees is treated in great detail across two chapters. The pros and cons of specialisation (by either flower or bee species) is discussed at length. There are chapters on parasites, ecology and conservation. I cannot write a full review in the time I have available, but it would certainly conclude with a recommendation.

My thanks go to all contributors, two of whom have written about the quest for the same much sought-after moth with a mysterious name, inspired by the illustration in *Moths of the British Isles* by South. Rather than risk upsetting anyone, I have included both accounts!

Steve Woodward
Editor

Box Tree Moth *Cydalima perspectalis*

I first recorded this moth back in 2010 in my native village in the mountains of northern Italy. As it was something new for me, I was quite pleased to have recorded a new species. Unfortunately, in the following years I realised this introduction was bad news - three years after the discovery, almost all the decorative Box trees hedges in the village were destroyed. The moth continues breeding from spring to autumn, and you can find eggs, larvae, pupae and adults at the same time. Just let's hope it does not get as bad as this here in England.

[Since its 2007 arrival in Britain, the moth is now widespread in England and has reached Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - Ed.]

Above: dark and normal forms of the Box Tree Moth. Right, top: Feeding larvae. Right, bottom: damaged box hedges in the cemetery at Falmenta, northern Italy. Photos: Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS.

Gianpiero Ferrari

A Cluster of Flies

'Clusterfly' is the common name for any fly in the *Pollenia* genus. They get this name from their habit of over-wintering in sizeable aggregations. As a group, these flies are extremely common and are most likely living in your house right now. They seek shelter in houses, out-buildings and window frames during the winter, managing to get into lofts and cracks and crevices that offer protection from the frost. They become active on warm days and may be found around windows as they sometimes find their way into living spaces. They do no harm but, like just about all flies, are not generally welcomed!

Fig. 1. Most *Pollenia* species look very similar but are usually recognisable by the golden hairs on the thorax.

There are eight UK *Pollenia* species and the genus can be easily recognised by the shaggy coat of golden hairs covering the thorax (Fig. 1). These hairs do wear off but even worn specimens usually retain a few. Taxonomically, they were recently reclassified into their own family, Polleniidae, having previously been considered part of the Blow Fly family, Calliphoridae. Unlike the blow flies, which are important forensically, not much is known about the biology of clusterflies. Some of the commoner species are known to be parasites of earthworms. Seven of the species look very similar, with grey-dusted abdomen in addition to the hairy thorax. *P. amentaria* is noticeably different in having an all-black abdomen.

I became particularly interested in clusterflies during the early spring of 2020 when the first lock-down forced a more detailed exploration of garden wildlife. I noticed many such flies sunning themselves on the white render of my house wall, but despite being extremely common, I could not pin down the species. I had been led to believe that they were most likely to be *P. rudis* (which has been given the rather odd common name of 'Awkward Clusterfly'), as this was far and away the most common species in the genus. But as we all know, it is unsafe to presume! After some searching, I came across an illustrated key to clusterflies in North America and, surprisingly, it covered the eight species found in Britain. Steven Falk had also produced a draft key to blow flies that included the genus. Between these two, it was not too difficult to get to grips with the key identification features needed to determine each species. As with the majority of flies, it is necessary to examine a specimen under a microscope to observe features such as the colour of the spiracles and palps, hairs on the wings and bristles on the thorax and legs. At last, I could put a name to these common insects!

	2004	2008	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
Pollenia		2	2		2	1				1			**8**
Pollenia rudis	1			4	2	5	7	1	2	3	3	5	**33**
Pollenia amentaria								1		1		1	**3**
Pollenia angustigena											1		**1**
Pollenia griseotomentosa				1									**1**

Table 1. Leicestershire & Rutland records up to 2019.

Within a few weeks I was able to identify four *Pollenia* species from my garden, two of which were new to VC55. This reflects the paucity of records for the genus rather than saying anything about my garden or the rarity of the species involved. Indeed, prior to 2020, there were only a total of 46 *Pollenia* records on ORCA, the LRERC database and eight of these were at genus level only (Table 1).

This data did, however, appear to confirm that *P. rudis* was indeed the commonest species in the genus by quite a margin. Since 2020, I have continued an interest in clusterflies and casually sampled flies from around Leicestershire and Rutland. A summary of my records is shown in Table 2.

		2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Pollenia rudis	Awkward Clusterfly	20	9		3	**32**
Pollenia amentaria	Black-bellied Clusterfly				1	**1**
Pollenia angustigena	Narrow-cheeked Clusterfly	10	10	7	6	**33**
Pollenia griseotomentosa	Little Clusterfly				1	**1**
Pollenia pediculata	Tufted Clusterfly	6	3			**9**
Pollenia labialis	Dark-based Clusterfly	1				**1**
Total		**37**	**22**	**7**	**11**	**77**

Table 2. Recent records made by the author.

Interestingly, this data reveals that *P. rudis* is not the commonest, this title should strictly go to *P. angustigena*, although both species are equally common. This finding prompts the question - why are the two datasets so different and in particular why was there only a single record for *P. angustigena* prior to 2020?

One possible explanation is that *P. angustigena* is a new arrival, indeed it was only first recorded in VC55 in 2018. However, this does not hold up when looking at records for this species on the NBN Atlas. There are 412 records (43% of the total) up to the year 2000 and these are widely distributed across England.

A more detailed look at the *P. rudis* records prior to 2020 raises a few doubts. Some of these do not include sufficient evidence for the record to be confirmed. A few have even been determined by national experts based on a photo alone. Whilst *P. rudis* and *P. angustigena* have different leg bristles which can sometimes be seen on a quality image, this character needs to be considered alongside other features to separate them from some of the less common *Pollenia* species. These records without confirmatory evidence should now be considered *Pollenia* sp. (LRERC have been informed). Several of the *P. rudis* records stem from ecological surveys conducted by consultants, as part of planning. These lack any supporting evidence so it is not possible to recheck these.

Removing the doubtful *P. rudis* records pre 2020 does make the species less dominant but it does not resolve the mystery of the 'missing' *P. angustigena* records. It does beg the question as to whether some of the *P. rudis* were incorrectly identified and were in fact *P. angustigena*. They are very similar and perhaps it is just the availability of better keys and ID aids that has enabled the two to be more reliably recorded.

If anyone wants to have a go at identifying clusterflies then a tabular key is available on all of the *Pollenia* species pages on NatureSpot. A similar key (with a few images) is available on the website of the Highland Biological Recording Group (link below). The relatively new RES Handbook *Blow Flies* by Olga Sivell is a superb resource with lots of images to help pin-point the relevant features, although it is not cheap! Steven Falk's draft key predates the RES Handbook but can be downloaded at the link below.

References:

Sivell, O. 2021. Blow Flies, *Royal Entomological Society Handbooks* Vol 10 Part 16.

Starter key to UK Pollenia:
https://www.hbrg.org.uk/FoHW/Pollenia/Key.pdf

Draft Key to British Blow Flies, 2016, Steven Falk:
https://quelestcetanimal-lagalerie.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/testkeytobritishblowflies132016.pdf

Species accounts and distribution maps for all VC55 Pollenia species can be found on NatureSpot.

David Nicholls

Finding the Flowerbugs

This year the VC55 Bug Team has been hunting down the gaps in the vice-county *Anthocoris* list. *Anthocoris* species are generally known as "flower bugs", and while this reflects the habits of the commonest species which are ubiquitous in spring and summer, the family Anthocoridae is rather more versatile. With 34 species on the UK Checklist, for the purpose of keeping this article within acceptable lengths for our esteemed Editor, I will ignore most of these ubiquitous insects and restrict myself to the genus *Anthocoris* alone (10 resident UK species). With less than 500 VC55 records for these ubiquitous insects prior to 2023 and 85% of these for just one species, *A. nemorum*, this has to be one of the least well recorded genera in the vice-county.

Fig. 1. *Anthocoris minki* (named after Wilhelm Mink, 1807 1883, German entomologist who collected the type specimen).

We began in January when we ticked off *A. butleri* and put a few dots on the map, but then we ran out of Box, the host plant, and had to stop. *A. butleri* feeds largely on the Box Psyllid, *Psylla buxi*, and the apparent host plant restriction is in fact a prey restriction. The same applies to a number of other species, such as *A. sarothamni*, which feeds predominantly on the Broom Psyllid, *Arytaina genistae*. Sue Timms has managed to find this species once to date. As with *A. butleri*, the presence of Broom is a limiting factor for this species in VC55.

Several species of *Anthocoris* are associated with galls, or more accurately, gall-forming aphids. *A. gallarum-ulmi* predates the aphid *Eriosoma ulmi* and is thus associated with aphid-leaf galls of elm. *A. minki* larvae and adults are reliant on *Pemphigus* aphids which cause spiral petiole galls on poplar and develops entirely within the galls (Fig. 1). By collecting tightly closed galls and opening them indoors, contamination with other *Anthocoris* species is avoided although of course the ID still needs to be checked carefully. That would be easier to do if we could find a male, but so far all the VC55 specimens found have been female. To date we have found *A. minki* at four different sites - and now we have just about run out of suitable poplar hybrids, which is not common in VC55 and as an ornamental planting, even more poorly-recorded. By collecting large numbers of galls (those I could reach from the ground) which tend to be very frequent where they occur, I have a found gall occupancy rate of less than 5%, so there is no need to worry about the aphids!

The most significant *Anthocoris*-shaped VC55 gap is now *A. visci*. This species is restricted to Mistletoe and is presumed to consume *Psylla visci*. Although Mistletoe is more frequent in VC55 than previously, accessible Mistletoe less than 50 feet off the ground is as rare as hens teeth. I might buy a drone...

Thanks to my colleagues Sue Timms and Kate Nightingale, and to Jim Flanagan and Tristan Bantock for helpful discussions.

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Alan Cann

Hunting The Snark

The Lewis Carroll poem *The Hunting of the Snark* (Carroll 1876) recounts the extraordinary effort expended in the pursuit of the mythical Snark. In my youth, I came across a plate illustrating the Clifden Nonpareil in a borrowed copy of South (1907) and longed to see a live specimen of this striking moth. Earlier editions of this two-volume set featured much higher quality hand-colored plates, unlike the poor quality of the 1972 reprints where the hind wings only had a light blue wash. Therefore, finding an early edition is essential to grasp why the illustration left such a profound impact.

Thus began my quest for the Snark (also known as the Clifden Nonpareil *Catocola fraxini*) in the 1960s. While not explicitly mentioned by South, it appears that sugaring was the primary method for capturing this often elusive moth. I readily admit that this species is the reason behind my fascination with the sugaring technique. Although I couldn't find a specific reference, I have come across information suggesting that repeated sugaring of the same patches yields better results than isolated nights.

As sightings of the Clifden Nonpareil became more frequent, I decided to elevate the Snark hunt's intensity. Throughout August and September 2023, I set up 12 sugar patches in my garden every night-spanning over 60 successive nights of Snark hunting, utilising approximately three litres of home-brewed sugar. During the day, the Red Admiral was a frequent visitor

Fig. 1. Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*.

Fig. 2. Red Underwing *Catocola nupta*.

(Fig. 1), while at night, the Red Underwing (Fig. 2) made common appearances. Finally, on the night of September 8, the hunt concluded when the Snark, in its haste to reach the sugar, trampled a Copper Underwing (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Clifden Nonpareil *Catocola fraxini*.

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Paul J. Palmer

Gall-hunting on oaks - highlights of 2023

Fig. 1. *Pseudoneuroterus saliens* galls on Turkey Oak.

It is often a good idea to focus your recording on a particular group of species, and last year I was determined to fill some gaps in my knowledge by searching for some of the less common galls caused by Cynipid wasps on Turkey Oak *Quercus cerris* and English Oak *Quercus robur*.

Photographs of the species described below can be found on NatureSpot.
https://www.naturespot.org.uk/gallery/gall-wasps

Life cycles of gall-wasps on oak

The oak gall-wasps have complicated life cycles with alternating sexual/asexual generations, or 'cyclical parthenogenesis'. Typically, the gall formed by the females of the sexual generation appears in spring/early summer, and is on a different part of the oak to the later asexual (or agamic) generation. In many species, the sexual galls are recorded less often than the asexual galls, which are often larger and persist longer. Often the two types of gall are a very different shape, and originally some were thought to be different species; in some species, the sexual gall has not been found. The first generation sexual gall is produced in spring by an asexual female that lays eggs parthenogenetically, without them being fertilised by a male. The females are of two kinds; those that lay eggs which produce male wasps, and those that produce females. From this gall, the second generation of sexual wasps emerges, both male and female; these mate, and the females then produce the asexual galls later in the year.

Occasionally, the sexual galls are on Turkey Oak and the agamic on a native oak - e.g. *Andricus kollari*, the Marble gall. *A. kollari* was deliberately introduced in the 1830s as a source of tannin to use in ink-making, but the other species are recent colonisers of the UK. They can spread rapidly north and west through the UK from their first recorded site, usually in the south-east. The most recent colonisers are *Pseudoneuroterus saliens* (UK 2006, Fig. 1), *Andricus gemmeus* (UK 2008, Fig. 10), and *Andricus infectorius* (UK 2013, Fig. 5), the former two species now well established in VC55, and the latter having been discovered in a few Charnwood Forest sites.

Spring and early summer galls on buds and catkins

Late spring is the time to hunt for galls on oak buds and catkins caused by the sexual generation of gall-wasps. These are often overlooked. Tiny galls formed on Turkey Oak buds can be found by diligent searching. These are the sexual galls of one of three species: *Andricus lignicola*, *A. corruptrix* and *A. kollari* - but are too similar to identify with confidence.

On Turkey Oak catkins, I soon found the bright red *Andricus grossulariae* galls. Much harder to find are the tiny sexual galls of *A. quercuscalicis*, less than 2 mm long and well-hidden in catkins. Galls were hard to find on the catkins of English Oak. I did find one tree on the Warren Hills with *A. quadrilineatus* galls (Fig. 2); a first for VC55. I searched in vain for

Fig. 2. The green ovoid gall on the English Oak catkin is caused by *Andricus quadrilineatus*.

Fig. 3. *Andricus quercuscorticis* old galls on oak trunk.

Neuroterus politus, which I had found in 2021 at Bagworth Heath. I failed to find the one I really wanted to see - the Cotton Wool Gall, formed on catkins by the sexual generation of *Andricus quercusramuli.* This was last recorded in VC55 by Barbara Cooper in Long Clawson, and it seems to be rare in our area.

Sexual galls of *Pseudoneuroterus saliens* were found on a veteran Turkey Oak in Cotesbach, looking like scarlet sea anemones perched on the female catkins.

Early summer galls on Oak trunks and roots

In early summer I turned my attention to a different part of the tree. A highlight of the year in May was the astonishing number of the sexual generation galls of *Trigonaspis megaptera* on the trunks of oaks on the summit of Bardon Hill (front cover), first found as a few isolated examples by Melinda and Tim Bell in 2021. The bright red colours made them easy to spot at eye-level and lower down on oak trunks. I was pleased to re-find them in Lady Hay Wood, Groby, where they were recorded on a Lit and Phil excursion in 2015 and determined by Maggie Frankum.

Andricus quercusradicis, the asexual truffle gall, was a welcome re-find at Ulverscroft in May. It was recorded there by Peter Shirley in 1985, and a small colony was still present. I also found this at Bagworth Heath, Lady Hay and Swithland Woods - but it is difficult to find; expect to crawl on hands and knees! *Andricus quercuscorticis* (Fig. 3) is an elusive gall on oak trunks, often favouring the callus-rimmed wounds and scars. It is never very common, but the old agamic galls were found in June in the Outwoods and few other sites. The agamic galls of *A. sieboldii* (Fig. 4, formerly *A. testaceipes*) are also very elusive, and said to like saplings and small branches low to the ground. A 2018 record by Annie Smith on Warren Hills is the first for VC55, but despite searching I failed to re-find it. However, in May last year I found a second - just one galled sapling at Bagworth Heath. Later in the year it is gets covered by long grass and is even harder to spot.

Fig. 4. The agamic galls of *Andricus sieboldii*.

Summer and autumn galls on oak leaves

Late summer and early autumn is the peak gall-hunting season, when many of the larger, asexual galls appear. Artichoke and Cola-nut galls, formed by the asexual generation of *A. foecundatrix* and *A. lignicola* respectively, were often abundant, but I recorded relatively few of the common Marble gall *A. kollari* and Ram's-horn galls *A. aries* compared to previous years.

2023 was a better year, at last, for two of the most attractive pea-galls - *Cynips longiventris* and *C. divisa*, found in several sites in late summer and autumn. Cherry gall, *C. quercusfolii*, were as common as ever, but I was delighted to find a few *C. disticha* at Swithland Wood. This is quite a scarce gall, and the first VC55 record. Cutting through the gall revealed the double larval chamber inside. Nearby were a few *Andricus infectorius* galls (Fig. 5) - a new site in VC55 for this recent coloniser.


Fig. 5. *Andricus infectorius* gall.


Fig. 6. *Andricus solitarius* gall.


Fig. 7. *Andricus glandulae* gall.

Many gall-hunters noted that 2023 was a poor year for the familiar Spangle, Smooth Spangle, Silk-button and Oyster galls (*Neuroterus quercusbaccarum, albipes*, *numismalis* and *anthracinus*). In recent years these have been very common indeed. Whilst the galls were around this year - at least in my NW area - numbers were low, especially of the Silk-button Gall and the sexual form of Spangle galls, often known as Currant galls. It is to be hoped that this is a natural oscillation in the populations. Many Spangle Galls were harbouring the inquiline wasp *Parallelipedus galliperda*; the bright orange larvae is easily found under the gall.


Fig. 8. *Andricus corruptrix* gall.

Although the *Neuroterus* species may have had a bad year, the asexual galls of *Pseudoneuroterus saliens* (Fig. 1) were common on Turkey Oaks in Charnwood Forest. Spindle or Cornish pasty shaped, the asexual galls can be found on leaf petioles, midribs or buds. This year, many were coloured red. *Saliens* is the Latin word for jumping - and, very surprisingly, the galls can indeed jump, caused by the twitching of the larva inside.

Autumn galls on acorns, catkins and buds

The attractive asexual galls of *Andricus grossulariae* (Fig. 9) were fairly common later in the year on catkins and acorn cups, and fallen galls could be found in late autumn on the ground beneath oaks. They can be confused with *Andricus quercuscalicis*, the common Knopper Galls, but are smaller and with flattened projections. If in doubt, cut through the gall; *A. quercuscalicis* has one larval chamber; *A. grossulariae* has several.


Fig. 9. Gall of *Andricus grossulariae* on acorn cup.

Agamic galls on oaks buds are often overlooked, but some species may be quite common. The rusty brown furry *Andricus solitarius* (Fig. 6) and shiny green pea-sized *Andricus inflator* were often found on oak buds in late summer, often in new plantations, whereas I only found the pear-shaped silky *Andricus glandulae* in old woodlands (Fig. 7). *Andricus corruptrix* asexual galls are swellings on buds, often in fours with a small rosette in the middle (Fig. 8). They are quite inconspicuous, but I found them quite often and I suspect they are under-recorded.


Fig. 10 *Andricus gemmeus* galls on oak trunk.

Andricus seminationis is said to be scarce, but was found at Staunton Harold and Willesley Wood - the attractive little galls are very similar to *A. callidoma* or *malpighii*, but occur on catkins, not buds. The asexual galls of the latter two species are very difficult to tell apart, and the insect has to be reared to identify them.

Autumn galls on oak trunks and branches

2023 was a splendid year for the tiny *Andricus gemmeus* galls on oak trunks, often found amongst epicormic buds on burrs of old trunks (Fig. 10). It was first recorded in the UK in 2008, and spread rapidly north and west, but we have very few records for it in VC55. However, this year Melinda and Tim Bell found a large number at Bardon Hill in September and it was subsequently found on many sites. By November, the galls had dropped off into leaf litter, where the adults complete their life-cycle to emerge the following summer.

As an end-note to a very rewarding year of gall hunting, I finally tracked down the small collection of freeze-dried Cynipid galls in the Collections and Resources Centre, Barrow upon Soar. The galls are beautifully displayed and labelled - and the collection includes the elusive Cotton-wool Gall *Andricus quercusramuli* and *Trigonaspis megaptera* both from Don Hall-Smith in Evington, in 1981 and 1988 respectively. Maybe I will be hunting in Evington next year!

Acknowledgements:

Kirsty Gamble at Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre (LRERC) - for access to the Orca database and document archives.

Min and Tim Bell - for sharing many gall finds, and for accompanying me on gall-hunting trips.

Jan Dawson - for alerting me to the existence of the Museum's gall collection.

Alison Clague and Lynsey Swift at the Leicestershire Museums Service - for access to the Collections and Resources Centre, Barrow upon Soar, and for their help in tracking down galls specimens.

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Sue Timms

The Locust Blowfly

The Locust Blowfly *Stomorhina lunata* is a smart-looking insect with silver or golden lunules on the abdomen, a metallic stripy thorax and stripy eyes. It has a pronounced snout which is one feature that has led to it being reclassified from Calliphoridae to Rhiniidae.

David Gould recorded the first specimen for VC55 in 2017 from Narborough Bog. Four other records since then are listed on ORCA and I found a further specimen in October 2023 at Rutland Water.

The books tell us that it is a parasite of locust eggs and that UK sightings are all considered migrants. However, records nationally have been increasing and it is regularly found, even in Scotland. A few sites have recorded the species annually over successive years, strongly suggesting it is a resident and breeding there. Speculation is mounting that it has changed its larval host, most likely to one or more UK grasshopper species. It does appear to be yet another example of distribution expansion resulting from a change in dietary preference.

Locust Blowfly *Stomorhina lunata*. Photo: David Gould.

NatureSpot - species account and distribution maps: https://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/locust-blowfly

David Nicholls

Spotted Bee-Burglar

An interesting fly turned up in my garden during July - a species I hadn't seen before. It turned out to be Miltogramma punctata, which has the memorable common name of Spotted Bee-Burglar, and was a new species for VC55. It is an unusual member of the Sarcophagidae family, the Flesh Flies which typically breed on carrion, but in this case the larvae feed in the nests of bees and wasps, 'stealing' the food brought in by the workers. The adults feed on nectar so can be found visiting flowers.

NatureSpot – species account and distribution maps: https://www.naturespot.org.uk/species/miltogramma-punctata

Miltogramma punctata Spotted Bee-Burglar.

David Nicholls

Broughton Astley - without equal or beyond compare

Back in the early 90's when Dad and I were just starting out recording moths, we were fascinated by all of the species when looking through the identification books. Back then we were using Richard South's two volume *Moths of the British Isles* and then later Bernard Skinner's *Colour Identification Guide to Moths of the British Isles*.

Fig. 1 (left): Clifden Nonpareil *Catocola fraxini*. Fig. 2 (above): Grass Rivulet *Perizoma albulata*. Fig. 3 (right): Toadflax Brocade.

One species that always caught our eye, not only for its striking underwings but also for it's very fancy name was the Clifden Nonpareil *Catocala fraxini*. Only in our wildest dreams did we ever expect to catch one, especially considering how rare it was back then with only the occasional migrant turning up in the UK.

Fast forward to 04 September 2023 … I couldn't quite believe it, but there on a ballast brick in the bottom of my 40 W actinic trap was a near pristine Clifden Nonpareil! (Fig. 1). A huge moth, dwarfing the similar Red Underwing. The flash of blue from its underwings almost sent a shiver through me, still in a daze I had actually caught one. Such a delight to get the chance to see one of a recorder's holy grail of moths and it most definitely lived up to its name's translation of *Without equal or beyond compare*.

2023 has been quite a year for highlights in my Broughton Astley garden (SP5293). New for me and the garden were: Grass Rivulet *Perizoma albulata* (Fig. 2) on 24 May, Toadflax Brocade *Calophasia lunula* (Fig. 3) on 30 May, Pinion-Streaked Snout *Schrankia costaestrigalis* (Fig. 4) on 20 June, *Dichomeris marginella* (Fig. 5) on 23 June, Webb's Wainscot *Globia sparganii* (Fig. 6) on 2 September, Dark Spectacle *Abrostola triplasia* (Fig. 7) on 9 September & *Palpita vitrealis on* 24 September.

Also of note were Mullein *Cucullia verbasci* on 5 June, of which I hardly ever see the adult. Small Angle Shades *Euplexia lucipara* on 21 June, the first I have seen in many years. Dewick's Plusia *Macdunnoughia confusa* (Fig. 8) on 13 September, once a rare moth, has now been fairly frequent to pheromone and light traps over the last few years. Box-Tree Moth *Cydalima perspectalis* 16 September of which numbers have sky-rocketed this year, considering it was a relatively rare moth about five years ago. Amongst the hordes of white Box-Tree moths I had the pleasure of catching

Fig. 4. Pinion-Streaked Snout *Schrankia costaestrigalis*.

Fig. 5. *Dichomeris marginella*.

Fig. 6. Webb's Wainscot *Globia sparganii*.

Fig. 7. Dark Spectacle *Abrostola triplasia*.

Fig. 8. Dewick's Plusia *Macdunnoughia confusa*.

Fig. 9. Plant bug *Psallus mollis*.

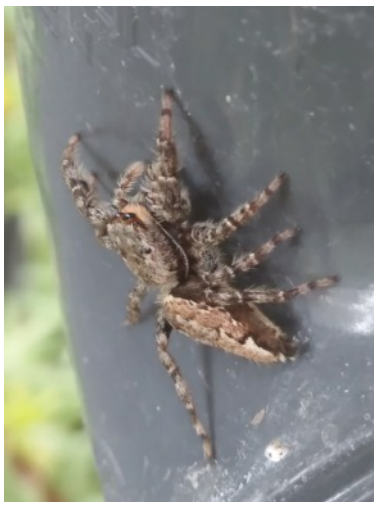


Fig. 10. Fencepost Jumping Spider *Marpissa muscosa*.

the less frequent dark form, which looks almost chocolatey in appearance (see p. 3).

Aside from moths, I also recorded two VC55 firsts. The plant bug *Psallus mollis* (Fig. 9) was confirmed by Alan Cann was caught on 17 June in my MV moth trap and the charming little Fencepost Jumping Spider *Marpissa muscosa* (Fig. 10) on 28 May which my girlfriend spotted (I've trained her well!) while we were at Sharnford Garden Centre.

Adam Poole

Pan traps

Pan traps (alias water traps) are intended to catch flying insects that are attracted to colourful flowers. A pot containing water is brightly painted on the inside, ideally with paint that fluoresces in UV light, so that it distracts the insect. Three colours have been found to be particularly effective: yellow, blue and white. A drop of detergent in the water will make escape less likely. Raising the traps to the height of nearby flowers also helps.

I have tried to make such traps myself, but it has proved more difficult than I expected. I struggled to find pots of the right shape and size that were robust enough for field use, and which would take the UV paint. Supporting them above ground level was another challenge.

At the DANES exhibition last year, I saw well-designed traps for sale by ArthroPods. The pot-supporting rings fold in for transit and the pot height can be adjusted. I ordered a couple (£35 each) and look forward to trying them out this spring.

www.arthropods.co.uk

Steve Woodward

Experiments with a Berlese Funnel

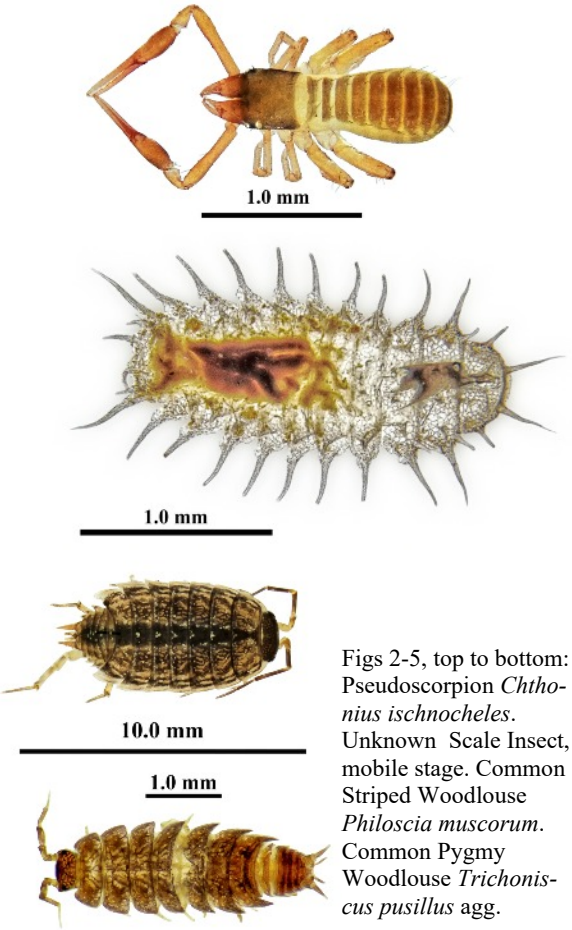
Trying to figure out what to call a Berlese (or Tullgren) Funnel takes more time than describing what it does. It is an apparatus for collecting microfauna from soil or leaf litter samples. The history is hard to pin down, but the earliest mention seems to be from Berlese (1905) and Tullgren (1917). It appears that Berlese was the first to describe the apparatus, using a water bath as a heater. Tullgren later simplified the overall arrangement by substituting an electric lamp as a source of heat. For now, I'm going to stick with "Berlese Funnel".

The general principle involves providing a funnel with a fine-mesh lid, an inner coarse mesh upon which the sample material is laid, and a slippery funnel leading to a receptacle with a liquid preserving agent. The use of a lamp to warm and dry the sample is an optional extra in these days of high energy costs, especially if you keep the apparatus in a warm, dry place. In my setup, I placed the apparatus in the greenhouse with a small lamp to dry the material (Fig. 1) and a tube filled with 100% Mono Propylene Glycol (MPG) to catch the microfauna. I'm a fan of MPG as it is a good preservative, slow to evaporate, non-toxic, preserves colours, and keeps specimens fairly supple. I found that most of the catch appeared after three days, and little ever appeared after a week.

Fig. 1. Berlese Funnel set up in the greenhouse.

For my experimental trial, all the material came from locations on the nature reserve at Rutland Water: So what did I find?

My favourite and a personal first was the Pseudoscorpion *Chthonius ischnocheles* (Common Chthonid), Fig. 2. It turned out that the keys to woodlice are quite easy to use so Figs 3 and 4 show the Common Pygmy Woodlouse *Trichoniscus pusillus* agg. and Common Striped Woodlouse *Philoscia muscorum*. All the by-catch was separated and logged and, thanks to Graham Finch, I have a list of the beetles too. Of note were *Ochthebius pusillus* with just one previous record in 1936, and *Dacrila fallax* with just three previous records, with the last Rutland Water record in 2021.



Figs 2-5, top to bottom: Pseudoscorpion *Chthonius ischnocheles*. Unknown Scale Insect, mobile stage. Common Striped Woodlouse *Philoscia muscorum*. Common Pygmy Woodlouse *Trichoniscus pusillus* agg.

After this encouraging start I shall be expanding use of the Berlese Funnel in 2024.

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Tullgren, A. 1917. En Enkel Apprat För Automatiskt Vittjande Av Sällgods. *Entomologisk Tidskrift* **38**: 97-100. https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/42375#page/124/mode/1up.

Paul J. Palmer

Looking for help?

The following are willing to act as an initial point of contact for providing advice and information to members.

Arachnids (Mites & Ticks):- Ivan Pedley, 48 Woodlands Drive, Groby, Leicester LE6 0BQ. 0116 287 6886. ivan.pedley@gmail.com

Arachnids (Opiliones, Harvestmen): - Ray Morris, see page 2.

Arachnids (Spiders):- Paul Palmer palmerpjp@gmail.com

Biological Recording:- LRERC; Room 400, County Hall, Glenfield LE3 8RA. 0116 3054108.

Chilopoda:- Helen Ikin, 237 Forest Road, Woodhouse, Woodhouse Eaves, Leics LE12 8TZ. 01509 890102. helen.canids@btinternet.com

Coleoptera:- Graham Finch, 14 Thorndale, Ibstock, Leics. LE67 6JT: finchgraham1@gmail.com

Collembola: Alan Cann, 17 Overdale Road, Leicester LE2 3YJ. alan.cann@gmail.com Online identification guides: https://collembolla.blogspot.com/p/identification-guides.html

Diplopoda:- Helen Ikin (see Chilopoda).

Diptera (Some families):- Ray Morris (see page 2).

Diptera (Nematocera - Mosquitoes, Blackflies & Craneflies):- John Kramer, 31 Ash Tree Road, Oadby, Leicester LE2 5TE. 0116 271 6499. john.kramer@btinternet.com

Hymenoptera (Symphyta - Sawflies):- Dave Nicholls, 69-71 Church Lane, Ratby, LE6 0JF. davidnicholls125@gmail.com

Hymenoptera (Bumblebees):- vacant.

Hymenoptera (Other aculeates - Bees, Wasps & Ants):- Helen Ikin (see Chilopoda).

Hemiptera:- Alan Cann, 17 Overdale Road, Leicester LE2 3YJ. alan.cann@gmail.com

Sue Timms, 17 The Square, Bagworth, Leics. LE67 1DQ. sue.timms@clara.co.uk

Kate Nightingale, 12 Latimer Road, Cropston, Leics. LE7 7GN. kate.h.nightingale@gmail.com

Isopoda (Woodlice):- Helen Ikin (see Chilopoda).

Lepidoptera:- County Moth Recorder Team:- VC55CMR@gmail.com

Mecoptera, Neuroptera, Plecoptera :- Steve Woodward, see page 2.

Mollusca: - Dave Nicholls (see Hymenoptera (Symphyta)).

Odonata:- Ian Merrill i.merrill@btopenworld.com

Orthoptera:- Helen Ikin, see Chilopoda.

Psocoptera:- Helen Ikin, see Chilopoda.

Thysanoptera: - Ivan Pedley, see Arachnids - Mites.

Trichoptera (adults):- Ray Morris, see page 2.

2024 Indoor Meetings Programme

NB New venue for forthcoming meetings

Due to the closure of St Bart's Community Hall for repairs, the Committee has arranged an alternative venue for our forthcoming meetings in January, February and March. We hope to be back in St Bart's Community Hall in the autumn. We will be meeting in Leicester Forest East Parish Hall, 112 Kings Drive, Leicester Forest East, Leicester LE3 3JB (SK53350279). The Hall is sizeable, has good facilities, is easy to reach and there is lots of parking.

Please arrive promptly - we will be starting at 7 pm rather than 7.30 because our booking is shorter than our usual times.

Guests are welcome to join us at meetings.

- Friday January 19 - Ivan Pedley - *Sardinian Arthropods*
- Friday February 16 - Sue Timms & Hazel Graves - *Mines and Galls*
- Friday March 15 - AGM & Members' Evening

Alan Cann
Secretary