LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

VC55

NEWSLETTER 71

October 2024

Chalcid wasp *Eurytoma brunniventris* scraping material/moisture from the surface of a spring oak bud, having emerged from a gall caused by cynipid wasp *Andricus solitarius*. See article on p. 3. Photo: Chris Leach.

In this edition

LEICESTERSHIRE & RUTLAND ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Affiliated to:
Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust

Chairman &
LRES Occasional Publications Editor:
Ray Morris
16 Hinckley Road, Dadlington
Leics. CV13 6HU
Email: ray@cactusbob.net

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

Treasurer:
vacant
(Acting Treasurer: Ray Morris)

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

Nicola Bashforth
Nicola.bashforth@Btinternet.com

Newsletter Editor:
Steve Woodward
19 Highfield Road, Groby, Leicester LE6 0GU
Email : grobysteve@talktalk.net

Publications downloadable from:
https://www.naturespot.org.uk/content/leicestershire-rutland-entomological-society

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 January 2025

The Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Entomological Society will be holding its exhibition and insect show at Nottingham Trent University, Brackenhurst Campus, Southwell, Notts, NG25 0QF, 9 November 2024.

https://www.danes-insects.org.uk/events.html

Editorial

Many members have noticed a shortage of insects this year, an observation that is backed up by a national survey *Big Butterfly Count 2024*. The survey results were alarming, showing the lowest counts in the survey's 14 year history (see Butterfly Conservation link below). Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* was down 74% from last year and down 59% against the 14 year average. Personally, I have seen only nine individuals in VC55, despite spending a huge amount of time on botanical fieldwork.

My surveys have taken me along many miles of hedgerow. One insect that seems to have done well this year is the Spindle Ermine *Yponomeuta cagnagella*, judging by the extent of larval webs on Spindle bushes in May and June. The white webs were conspicuous from a distance, easily seen from the car. Most of my ten records were from Rutland, as this is where Spindle is more frequent.

I am grateful to the "regular" contributors of articles. I am sure that other readers are making interesting observations - please write them down and send them in.

Reference

https://butterfly-conservation.org/news-and-blog/uk-butterfly-emergency-declared

Steve Woodward
Editor

Some Observations on the chalcid wasp *Eurytoma brunniventris*

Introduction

On a visit to Blaby Oaks (Blaby, Leicestershire) during mid-March 2024, I collected three galls (Fig. 1) caused by the agamic generation of the cynipid wasp *Andricus solitarius* Fonscolombe with the intention of photographing the wasps that emerged to add to the British Plant Gall Society's photographic library. In the event, two insects emerged and neither of these was *A. solitarius*! The third gall has, as yet, to produce anything. The two insects which emerged, on 1 April and the following day, were subsequently identified as *Eurytoma brunniventris* Ratzeburg 1852, a known ectoparasite of a wide range of cynipid gall wasps (Askew, 1961; Askew, 1984; Askew *et al.,* 2013).

Notes about *A. solitarius*

This gall-causing species is reputed to be capable of producing galls on a number of white oak species including *Quercus canariensis, cerris, frainetto, ilex, infectoria* subsp. *veneris, lusitanica, petraea, pubescens, pryenaica, robur* and *suber* (Plant Parasites of Europe @bladmineerders.nl). As far as the author is aware, this gall has been recorded only on *Quercus petraea* and *robur* in Britain. The species has a wide distribution across Western Europe but population densities tend to be low (viz the species name!). Records in the UK are sparse (at the time of writing, the NBN Atlas has only 15 records) probably reflecting difficulties in spotting this inconspicuous gall, the paucity of cecidological recorders and administrative problems associated with the transfer of gall records into the NBN database. Europe-wide, there seems to be 250-350 records of this gall-causer per annum added to the European database with records predominating from The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Austria (Fauna Europaea visited 2 September 2024). Askew *et al.* (2013) list 21 parasites and inquilines in the galls induced by the agamic generation of *Andricus solitarius* although only seven of these (including *E. brunniventis*) have been found associated with these galls in Britain.

Fig. 1. A mature gall of the asexual generation of *Andricus solitarius* on the tip of an oak twig. Compare size and colouring with an uninfected bud (to its left) making the gall difficult to spot.

Notes about *E. brunniventris*

Eurytoma brunniventris is a member of the insect superfamily Chalcidoidea Lattreille 1817 (over 1500 species in 88 genera) and is placed in the subfamily Eurytomina Walker 1832 (1366 species in 73 genera). Of these, 31 are parasites of cynipids, seven of which are cynipids which gall oaks (Gomez *et al.*, 2011). *E brunneventris* is reputed to parasitise at least 75 different cynipids including the British species: *A. callidoma, curvator, inflator, kollari, lignicolus, lucidus, quercusradicis, sieboldi, solitarius, testaceipes, Biorhiza pallida, Cynips disticha, divis, longiventris, quercusfolii, Neuroterus albipes, anthracinis, numismalis, quercusbaccarum, tricolor, Plagiotrochus australis* and *Trigospis synaspis* (see Plant Parasites of Europe @ bladmineerders.nl; Askew *et al.*, 2013; Saghae *et al*., 2018).

According to Gomez *et al.* (2011), *E. brunniventris* is not only a generalist with regard to target prey, but is also the only polyphagous chalcid in cynipid galls known to eat gall tissue.

Observations on emergent imagines of the Chalcid wasp *E. brunniventris*

By error, I did not, initially, spot that the imagines that emerged from the collected galls were **not** *A. solitarius* and I simply allowed them access to young, potted oak saplings kept in containment facilities. The emergent imagines immediately migrated to the saplings and began examining the buds. This raised excitement as I thought I was about to witness *A. solitarius* ovipositing. It was only after a USB microscope was set up to video this activity that it became evident that the active insects were not cynipids but were from a different group of hymenopterans – the chalcids. Subsequently, they were identified as *Eurytoma brunniventris* (see photo on front cover). However, this error was not without its benefit since it revealed that the emergent *E. brunniventris* appeared to be desperate for food and moisture as they spent 20-30 minutes, with short breaks, *scraping off the surface of the oak buds*. This activity may not have been previously observed and, fortunately, was videoed. This activity is much clearer in the video (available from the author on request). There was no evidence that the buds were actually bitten. It may be that the jaws are solely, or mainly, used to bore an exit from the gall.

These observations suggest that *E. brunniventris* is not only phytophagus within galls after their insect prey has been consumed but can prolong their lives during the period after they have emerged until they find suitable cynipid prey on which to deposit their ova. This probably contributes significantly to the success of this parasite in being able to find and deposit ova on a wide range of prey whose timing of lifecycle events are different. It may also enable this species to conduct prolonged searches for rare prey species. However, this may be only part of the story. Unpublished molecular data suggest that the "species" identified, on morphological grounds, as *Eurytoma brunniventris* may be a complex of several (six or more) sibling species (Gomez *et al.*, 2011; Hale *et al*., 2004)

Conclusion

Most galls induced by cynipid wasps support a community of other organisms commonly referred to as parasitoids. The communities associated with oak cynipids have received attention. Within these communities, we can identify inquilines (which live on the parenchymatous tissues outside of the gall chamber), lethal inquilines (which live on the "nutritive" tissues within the gall chamber and cause the death of the gall causer through starvation), ectoparasites (whose ova are deposited on the surface of gall causers' ova or larvae and, sometimes, the ova and larvae of other parasites) and endoparasites (in which the parasites deposit their ova in the ova or larvae of gall causers and/or inquilines and other parasites. For examples see Askew, 1961; Askew, 1984 and Redfern, 2011. Some parasitoids are regarded as host-specific feeding on a single of few gall causers or a limited range of other gall inhabitants. *E. brunniventris* does not seem to have such restrictions, having an extremely wide range of prey species including both gall-causers and some other parasitoids. However, it might be that some members of the population currently described as *E. brunniventris* are, in fact, separate species or clans with more restricted prey targets. I can find no evidence of any experiments in which *E. brunniventris* living on one prey species has been offered the opportunity to oviposit on different species. Do the subspecies/clans have different host specificities?

However, the observations made here of post-emergence feeding on plant material seems to offer opportunities for longevity in this "species" thereby enhancing their capability to find and oviposit in a wider range of galls. Whether or not other parasitoids demonstrate similar polyphagous behaviour remains unknown but is the subject of ongoing investigations.

References

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Chris Leach

Broughton Astley Garden Moths

Despite a relatively poor year insect wise, there were still some nice highlights for my Broughton Astley Garden:

Adam Poole

Large Emerald (*Geometra papilionaria*) 17.07.24

Black Arches (*Lymantria monacha*) 30.07.24

Dotted Chestnut (*Conistra rubiginea*) 25.03.24

Barred Red (*Hylaea fasciaria*) 17.07.24

New bugs and old: Highlights of Summer 2024

The year 2024 will be remembered by many entomologists as one of the worst, with worryingly low invertebrate numbers in many taxon groups, and the scarcity or absence of some familiar species. Nonetheless, 2024 was a good year for new Vice-county bug records. The 'bug team' of Kate Nightingale, Alan Cann and I (joint VC55 Heteroptera and Auchenorrhyncha co-ordinators) re-found some species not seen in VC55 for many years.

Fig. 1. *Metopoplax ditomoides*. Photo: Kate Nightingale.

Kate had a good start to the season by finding a surprising new Lygaeid bug for VC55 in her sock-drawer – *Metopoplax ditomoides* (Fig. 1). This is more usually found in warm brownfield sites in southern Britain, and its presence in Cropston is a mystery – and despite checking our own sock-drawers, Alan and I drew a blank.

A remarkable recording day for me around Thornton Reservoir demonstrated the value of targeting specific plants. Beating Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) yielded the Mirid bugs *Camptozygum aequale* (Fig. 2), new to VC55 and *Pinalitus rubricatus*, last recorded in 1983. *Atractotomus magnicornis* was beaten from Spruce (*Picea* sp.) and *Macrolophus pygmaeus* was found on Hedge Woundwort (*Stachys sylvatica*) – last recorded in 1999 and 1984 respectively.

Fig. 2. *Camptozygum aequale*

Fig. 3. *Kalama tricornis*

Brownfield land is an excellent habitat for bugs and always worth searching, even on small patches. A scrap of species-rich brownfield at Snibston Colliery Park produced a second record for VC55 - *Chlamydatus pullus,* associated with clovers and other legumes (Fabaceae). Kate and I found large numbers of the little Mirid bug *Halticus luteicollis* at Ketton Quarry and more were found by Alan at Great Merrible Wood. It is a lively species with hind legs modified for jumping, associated with Bedstraw species (*Galium*). Such large numbers are unlikely to have been overlooked, and this must represent a genuinely new colonisation of VC55 by this mainly southern species. Ketton Quarry and Holwell Reserves also produced the Mirid *Hoplomachus thunbergii*, associated with

Fig. 4. *Gastrodes grossipes.* Photo: Alan Cann.

Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*), and the lacebug *Kalama tricornis* (Fig. 3).

New and notable species are not confined to nature reserves; it is always worth looking in town parks and on your local patch. Alan found the Pine cone seed-bug *Gastrodes grossipes* and the attractive *Pilophorus cinnamopterus* (Fig. 5, second VC55 record) at Knighton Park and Attenborough Arboretum respectively, both on Scots Pine.

Fig. 5. *Pilophorus cinnamopterus* Photo: Alan Cann

The gorgeous *Reuteria marquetii* (Fig. 6) was a VC55 first from Lime in Loughborough Cemetery. A fine row of Alders (*Alnus glutinosa*) along the Wood Brook in suburban Loughborough had hundreds of the seed-bug *Arocatus roselii.* Scots Pine on the same site had *Atractotomus parvulus*, also new to VC55, determined by dissection of male genitalia. This rather insignificant grey-brown bug is said to be common in Britain and is probably overlooked in VC55.

The Shore-bug *Saldula pallipes* was found on several sites. It is very similar to the commoner *S. saltatoria*, but with a longer dark stripe on the fore-tibia. The smelly, black mud at the edge of new drainage lagoons is a good place to look for it, scuttling around at speed while hunting small flies.

Fig. 6. *Reuteria marquetii*

Fig. 7. *Campylomma annulicorne*

The Mirid *Campylomma annulicorne* (Fig. 7), new to VC55, was found on Osier (*Salix viminalis*) at Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Wood. Within the Miridae, *Dicyphus* are notoriously difficult to identify; the keys and descriptions call for accurate measurements of tibiae and antennal segments. Determination from dissection of male genitalia is much more reliable and by this means Alan was able to confirm a first VC55 record for *Dicyphus pallidus* from Enchanter's nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*) at Great Merrible Wood. It has rarely been recorded in the UK, but a few days later, Kate and I found more at Ratby Burroughs, on the same host plant. Published sources say it is found on Hedge Woundwort (*Stachys sylvatica,* ref. Skipper, 2013) and *Stachys* spp., *Epilobium* sp. and *Geranium* sp. (ref. Sanchez & Cassis 2018), but as we know, insects rarely read these tomes. It is very similar in general appearance to other *Dicyphus*, but the left male paramere, or clasper, is distinctive in shape.

Fig. 8. *Eurybregma nigrolineata*

Finally, some new and notable leafhoppers were recorded; a selection of notable records are below. Very few naturalists look at these appealing little bugs, and they are under-recorded as a group; identification can be tricky, requiring genitalia dissection of males.

Megamelus notula – a planthopper (Delphacidae) of marshland, at several wet, sedge-rich sites.

Viridicerus ustulatus – a leafhopper (Cicadellidae) on Poplar in Shady Lane Arboretum in Leicester; a relative newcomer to the UK.

Eurybregma nigrolineata – another planthopper (Delphacidae); males and females found at Glenfield and Sence Valley.

Paralimnus phragmitis – a leafhopper (Cicadellidae); several found on Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) at Albert Village lake.

Trigonocranus emmeae – the small patch of brownfield land by the carpark at Snibston produced this remarkable and nationally scarce lacehopper (Cixiidae). The brachypterous nymphs are without pigment and have reduced eyes; they live underground, typically in on brownfield sites, and are rarely seen. I was lucky enough to be there waiting for my partner Evan to emerge from work when the winged adult lacehoppers emerged from the rubbly soil, on cue!

All records are on NatureSpot, with details and photographs. https://www.naturespot.org.uk/
For more information on species, refer to the relevant page on NatureSpot or British Bugs website
https://www.britishbugs.org.uk/index.html

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Acknowledgments

Jim Flanagan and Alan Stewart of the national recording schemes for Plant bugs and Allies and Auchenorrhyncha respectively, for advice and verification of records; Kirsty Gamble at LRERC, for access to archive records and data.

Sue Timms

Weevil *Orchestes betuleti* larvae found in elm leaf

On 26 August 2024 I was recording leaf mines in the small Leicestershire village of Willoughby Waterleys. One mine that I found on elm looked like a weevil mine, and at the time I was only aware of *Orchestes alni* that mined elm. Fortunately, I decided to send my pictures to Rob Edmunds of British Leaf miners website for his opinion. His reply surprised me - he thought it may be the mine of *Orchestes betuleti* a species added to the British list by Mark Gurney in Bedfordshire in 2023. The problem at that stage was that the species had not been recorded in Britain as a leaf mine and the mine really needed to be tenanted in order to be sure of the species.

I put the mined leaf into a pot and on 31 August two adult weevils emerged. As the adult measures only about 2.5 mm it was too small for my photographic skills, but I posted a specimen to Graham Finch our VC55 County Coleoptera Recorder for confirmation of the species and he very kindly provided me with the images of the adult used to illustrate this article.

It is new for VC55 and in Britain it has only been recorded previously in Bedfordshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire as an adult. We are not aware of any previous British leaf mine records for this species.

Adult *Orchestes betuleti*.
Photo: Graham Finch

Graham Calow

Killer Shrimp!

According to the media, any invertebrate new to the UK is a Killer! (with compulsory exclamation mark).

Fig. 1. *Dikerogammarus villosus*.

On 9 Jun 2024 I found a single specimen of *Dikerogammarus villosus* (Fig. 1) in the River Soar near Leicester. Popularly known as the "Killer Shrimp", this species was first identified in the UK in 2010. It is true that this is a voracious predator, killing invertebrates and small fish. It is also a highly successful colonizer, having swept across Europe from its origin in eastern Europe. This is not the first time this has happened, other Gammarids have colonized the UK in successive waves, e.g. *Gammarus pulex* and *Crangonyx pseudogracilis*. A closely related species, *Dikerogammarus haemobaphes*, is well established along the Soar, but my recent find is the first VC55 record for *D. villosus*, which has been demonized even more than its congeners (Killer!). Papers published in the years after its UK arrival predicted dire consequences, including problems with biotic indices for water quality assessment - after the Killer Shrimp has eaten everything else (Ref. 1).

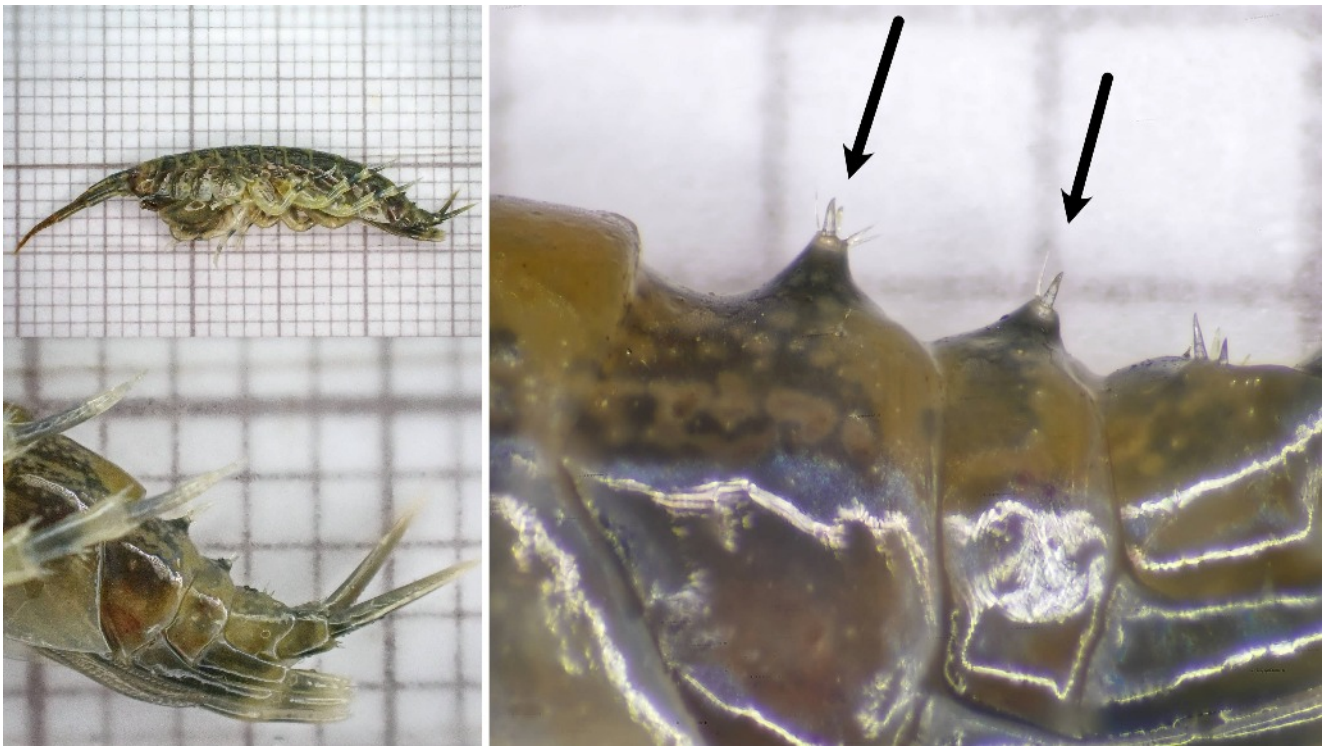

Fig. 2. *Dikerogammarus villosus*, showing features important for identification. The small squares are 1 mm.

D. villosus is certainly tough as old boots - pollution tolerant (which is *very* helpful in British waterways), salt-tolerant and can survive in damp conditions for up to five days, so it can potentially be spread by equipment including fishing gear, nets, boats, kayaks and trailers. And yet, fourteen years after its introduction, the distribution of this species still appears to be relatively restricted - it certainly has not spread as rapidly as first predicted. Part of the reason for this is certainly under-recording - identifying *D. villosus* requires close examination - but is relatively straightforward (Fig. 2, Ref. 2).

Even so, this species has not swept across the country quite as easily as predicted. We need to take sensible biosecurity precautions such as disinfecting nets and equipment - but that does not deal with dispersal by wild birds. Perhaps the Killer Shrimp!, like the Killer Harlequin Ladybird! and the Killer Asian Hornet! - will not be quite as bad as first feared. It is another undesired pressure on aquatic ecosystems, but I am a lot more concerned about pollution than I am about Killer Shrimp!

References

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Alan Cann

Gall midge *Dasineura sisymbrii* on Medium-flowered Winter-cress

On my botanical surveys, arable margins often produce Winter-cress *Barbarea vulgaris*. Less frequently, the plant turns out to be *B. intermedia* (best distinguished by the fruits, and in this case confirmed by Vice-county Recorder Geoffrey Hall). So it was at Whissendine SK8314 on 3 August, where most of many plants looked deformed, with the flowers replaced by globular swellings. Dissection revealed orange maggots and pupae inside, so I consulted *British Plant Galls* (Redfern, *et. al.*, 2023) and found a matching description of the gall and the larva: *Dasineura sisymbrii* (Cecidomyiidae) but listed under *B. vulgaris*. *B. intermedia* is not mentioned specifically as a host, but this midge does occur on *Sisymbrium, Rorripa* and a few others in the Brassicaceae family so it is evidently not fussy. As with many galls, the causer would need to be reared to be 100% sure, but this species seems most likely. The NBN Atlas shows very few records.

Reference

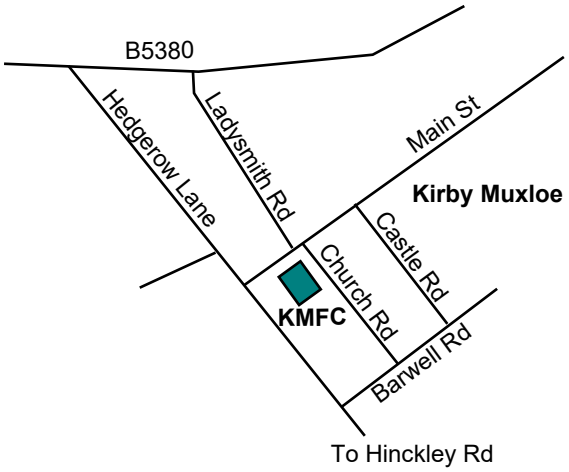
Redfern, M., Shirley, P. & Bloxham, M. 2023. *British Plant Galls*. Field Studies Council.

Steve Woodward

2024-5 Indoor Meetings Programme

NB New venue for forthcoming meetings

We are returning to Kirby Muxloe Free Church, in the same room as we used a couple of years ago: entry this time will be solely by walking past the main entrance (which we used before) to the side door and up a few steps. The room is just down the corridor.



Guests are welcome to join us at meetings.

Thursday 12 September 2024, 7.00-9.30 pm - *Member's Evening*

Thursday 17 October 2024, 7.00-9.30 pm - Ray Morris, *Gall Midges*

Thursday 14 November 2024, 7.00-9.30 pm - Dave Nicholls, *Sawflies*

FRIDAY 13 December, via Zoom - Kevin Rowley, Aquatic Bug Recorder for Northamptonshire, *Aquatic Invertebrates*, 7.30 pm

Kevin Rowley has recently taken over the Aquatic Heteroptera Recording Scheme from Tony Cook. He will discuss the water bug group including species, identification, behaviour and preferences as well as the many factors affecting them with climate change, range changes, habitat changes and recording approaches.

Thursday 16 January via Zoom - Martin Harvey, *Soldierflies and allies in Leicestershire and beyond*, 7.30 pm

Soldierflies, robberflies, bee-flies and horseflies are the focus of the National Recording Scheme for Soldierflies and Allies. This talk will introduce the flies and their natural history, including some of the special species that can be found in Leicestershire and Rutland. Martin Harvey is an entomologist and biological recorder based at the UKCEH Biological Records Centre, where he works on projects including the iRecord online recording system, liaison with national recording schemes, and the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme. He also teaches for the Field Studies Council. As a volunteer Martin runs the national Soldierflies and Allies Recording Scheme, and is County Moth Recorder for Berkshire vice-county.

WEDNESDAY 5 February 2025, 7.30 pm - *Ants - Ecology and Behaviour*, Brian Eversham, Chief Executive, Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

Joint Meeting with Leicester Literary & Philosophical Society Natural History Section. Quaker Meeting House, 16 Queens Road, Leicester LE2 1WP.

An introduction to the British ants, their habitats and behaviour. The most accessible and easily identified of the social insects, with only about 50 species, a handful of which can be found in most gardens, this is a group anyone can get to know, and can add to our understanding.

Thursday 20 February 2025, 7.00-9.30 pm - Alan Cann, *Harvestmen*.

Thursday 20 March 2025, 7.00-9.30 pm - Sue Timms & Kate Nightingale, *VC55 Bug Checklists*.

Thursday April 24th 2025, 7.00-9.30 pm - *AGM & Member's Evening*

Alan Cann
Secretary