

Larger Brachycera Recording Scheme

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From the Scheme Organiser

It has been a difficult first half of the year with continued threats to the place I work and job, and then this was completely over-shadowed by family illness. I do apologise if I have not responded as quickly as I would have like with enquiries or inputting data but things are improving now.... so enough of the excuses.

Please continue to send records and articles to my home address. I am still based at Fleetwood Museum for the time being but this could easily change in the autumn.

Records and articles to:

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Continued thanks to Mike Hackston for Newsletter Production
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Asilidae

The Robber fly *Choerades marginatus* (Linn.) in Norfolk

Stuart Paston

Lying in the Ant Valley west of Catfield village, Catfield Hall Estate in East Norfolk comprises around 300 acres of fen, woodland and grazing land. In 2005 the owners sought the help of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society in expanding knowledge of the site's fauna and flora especially in wetland areas where improvement work had been carried out.

As someone who was familiar with the general area outside the estate I welcomed the opportunity this gave for further investigation, especially in relation to hoverflies, and duly made my first visit on 5 July 2005. In bright, warm weather, bramble blossom alongside the fen pathways was proving the main attraction to insects, including many hoverflies, but the day's only notable discovery was made in woodland where, on *Rhododendron* foliage beneath oak trees (TG374210), I captured a female *Choerades marginatus* (Linnaeus), the Golden-haired Robberfly. Another individual was seen close by.

This Notable robberfly is uncommon in Norfolk with, it seems, only three twentieth century records spanning four decades from 1950 to 1991. All are attributable to Ken Durrant the Insect Recorder for NNNS who has been collecting in the county since the twenties.

The records relate to captures at:

Bittering	TF9417	28 June 1950
Roydon Common	TF687224	13 August 1961
Buxton Heath	TG1721	17 July 1991.

The last two sites share a similar mosaic of dry and wet heathland and valley mire with woodland. The specimens - 2 males and 4 females - are in Ken's extensive collection. There are no specimens of *marginatus* in the diptera collection at Norwich Castle Museum.

One further record of interest is that of a pair taken *in copula* by Mike Parker at Redgrave and Lopham Fen SSSI West Suffolk TM0579 on 13 July 2003. This site straddles the Norfolk/Suffolk border.

I am grateful to Simon Hayhow for checking the national database for me and for Ken Durrant for providing additional information including the Buxton Heath record. Thanks also to Tony Irwin for checking the Castle Museum collection. Not least thanks to Mr and Mrs Harris for providing the opportunity to record on their Estate.

Further Notes on the Courtship of *Leptarthrus brevirostris* (Meigen) Simon Hayhow

Both Ian Morgan (1995) and Richard Jones (2000) have reported observations on the courtship behaviour of *Leptarthrus brevirostris*. Recent fieldwork with Barry Brigden at Yealand Hall Allotment SSSI in Lancashire, a site comprising a mosaic of habitats including woodland, scrub and limestone pavement, on 10th June, 2006 in hot and sunny weather produced several sightings of courting pairs. My attention was attracted to circling insects as described by Jones. In each case the female took a prominent position at the tip of a dead or bare piece of vegetation in a sunny position on the edge of scrub or woodland. She kept her wings open and still until the male was above when they were quivered. The male made the circular clockwise movement as previously recorded about 8-12 times but with dangling hind legs and the unusual elongated hind tarsi, these occasionally glinting prominently in the strong sunlight, and brushing close to the perched female. In most cases, and this was observed about a dozen times, it did not end in coupling, although on at least one occasion they did fly off in copulatory tandem. I have visited the site and recorded the species, many times but not previously observed this behaviour.

Jones, R. 2000. Courtship behaviour in *Leptarthrus brevirostris* (Meigen) (Diptera, Asilidae) *Dipterists' Digest*, **7(2)**, 83-84.

Morgan, I.K. 1995. Comments on Asilids. *Larger Brachycera Recording Scheme Newsletter*, **13**, 4-5.

Rhagionidae

***Rhagio strigosus* in abundance in Oxfordshire**

Martin Harvey

In 1998-2000 Malcolm Storey and I found the Red Data Book species *Rhagio strigosus* (Rhagionidae) in good numbers at various sites in south Oxfordshire and central Berkshire. At about the same time it was recorded near Leatherhead in Surrey (Graham Collins, pers. comm.). In July 2005, I was staying with friends in south Oxfordshire and again found *R. strigosus*, in very large numbers.

Most of the sites from a few years ago seem to be linked to ancient woodland and/or ancient boundaries with large trees, where male *R. strigosus* could be seen sitting head-down on tree-trunks, especially those that caught the late evening sun. The Oxfordshire site this year was a telegraph pole in the middle of a large rape field! Well over a hundred male flies were congregating on this pole, which again was catching the late evening sunshine, and similar telegraph poles in an adjacent field looked to have similar numbers of flies.

The following are some rather *ad hoc* suggestions as to where to look and how to find it:

- On chalk; the only records I am aware of are from six 10-km squares on the Berkshire/Oxfordshire border, and a couple of sites in Surrey

- The Oxfordshire telegraph pole at which it was abundant this year is near Huntercombe End, on a public footpath at SU685874
- The flight period according to my records starts in June, peaks in mid-July, and then extends into early September, so there's still time to look this year
- In or at the edge of woodlands or hedges, with large trees that catch the sun (especially in the evening); or on telegraph poles in fields (possibly they still need to be reasonably near woodland)
- Males congregate in large numbers on suitable tree trunks/telegraph poles (I haven't noticed *R. scolopaceus* behaving in this way)
- Males seem to have a tendency to land one's bare arms or legs, at least when the flies are present in good numbers (again, I've never known *R. scolopaceus* to do this)

Many of my sightings have been made in the evenings while walking my dog, and in my part of Oxfordshire in July 2005 *R. strigosus* was the most abundant and obvious dipteran to be seen in these circumstances! Was it having a good year? Is it really confined to such a small part of the country? I intend to write up these observations in more detail to submit to Dipterists Digest, and I'd be pleased to hear from anyone else who has found *R. strigosus* or has any information on its ecology.

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Stratiomyidae

Stratiomyidae from agricultural ditches in Leicestershire Robert Aquilina

Pond Conservation is involved in an ongoing project to research the value of agricultural ditches for birds, funded by DEFRA. In particular we are looking at the emergent insect populations from sections of ditches that have been dammed to retain water longer and comparing them to control sections. Altogether 32 ditches within SK70 in Leicestershire, were sampled using ten emergence traps in each ditch with a total of nine visits to each trap at fortnightly intervals from April to August.

Half the ditches were bordering arable fields and half pastoral fields; otherwise the ditches were similar in having a hedge on one side, although differing in width, depth and aspect. The large number of samples collected were sorted into size classes in order to estimate biomass although some family level identification was carried out (38 Diptera families recorded). Diptera were numerically dominant over the purely aquatic taxa (Stoneflies, Caddis, Mayflies, Odonates), with Nematocera being dominant over Brachycera (etc).

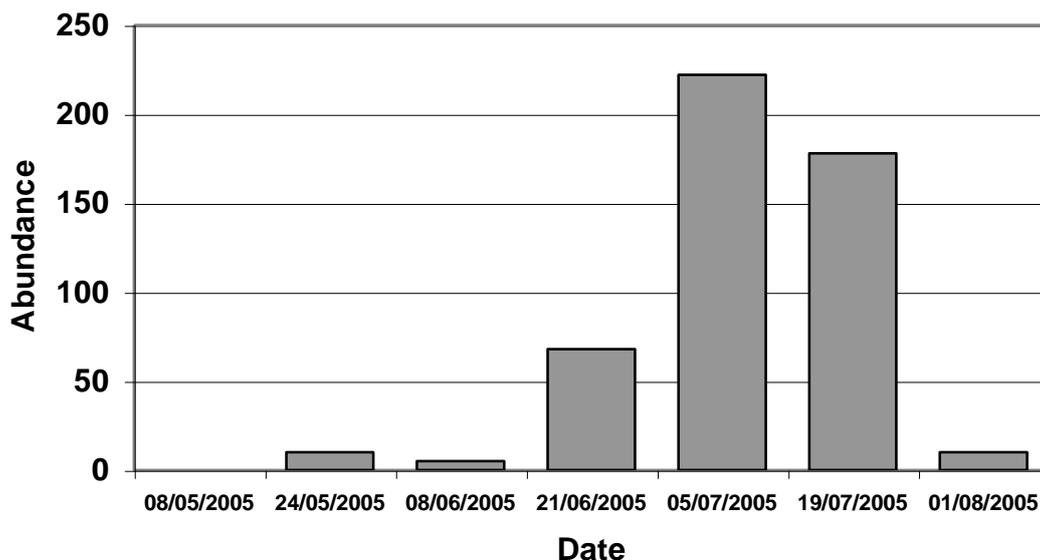
Soldierflies were extracted and identified to species, and the results are tabulated below.

Species	Status	Total
<i>Beris chalybata</i>		16
<i>Beris geniculata</i>		10
<i>Beris vallata</i>		425
<i>Chloromyia formosa</i>		5
<i>Chorisops tibialis</i>		3
<i>Microchrysa flavicornis</i>		3
<i>Microchrysa polita</i>		1
<i>Oplodontha viridula</i>	Local	1
<i>Oxycera morrisii</i>	Notable b.	1
<i>Oxycera rara</i>	Local	1
<i>Oxycera terminata</i>	RDB2	3
<i>Pachygaster leachii</i>	Local	16
Total		485

Stratiomyid emergence was spread between the end of May and beginning of August with the peak in July (see graph below).

These ditches appear to offer habitat for both the aquatic and terrestrial Stratiomyidae with some 'woodland' species turning up albeit in low numbers. The presence of *Oxycera terminata* is particularly interesting as it is believed to a first record for Leicestershire, although Drake (1991) gives Rockingham Forest in Northamptonshire (18 km. away) as one of only three known populations. However this site is not reported in the RDB for Insects (1988).

The number of dipteran families recorded overall as well as the Stratiomyidae species found suggest that agricultural drainage ditches may offer an interesting habitat to explore further.



Total number of Stratiomyidae caught in emergence traps by visit

References

- Drake (1991) Provisional Atlas of the Larger Brachycera (Diptera) of Britain and Ireland.
NERC
JNCC (1988) British Red Data Books 2 Insects.

Tabanidae

Horsefly 'red-letter' Day

D. P. Lester

On 10th July 2005 Jo Parmenter and I had one of the lucky horsefly days described on page 346 of Stubbs & Drake. In the mid morning, at Upton Fen in Norfolk, upon arriving at the car park, we were approached by more horseflies than I had ever seen before. They were particularly interested in the Land Rover, and the easiest way to capture them was for me to be shut into the vehicle with a pot. Having caught 6 *H. distinguenda*, 1 *H. bimaculata*, 1 *H. muehlfeldi* and 5 *C. viduatus*, all females, we then walked around the reserve and found that they were equally numerous in the fen. For the first time in my life I was bitten by a *Hybomitra* as well as the usual clegs and *Chrysops*. We caught 5 more *H. distinguenda*, 2 more *H. muehlfeldi*, 7 more *C. viduata*, 2 *C. relictus* and noted the usual numerous *H. pluvialis*. These were all females. We also caught 1 male *T. bromius* and saw 2 female *T. autumnalis*. We could have caught many more but decided this was a reasonable sample.

In the late afternoon, we went out onto the Halvergate Marshes at Wickhampton. We began to see a few *Tabanus autumnalis* basking on wooden posts out on the marshes. As we left the marsh, we stopped to look at Wickhampton Church. There we encountered 14 individuals of *Tabanus autumnalis*, soaking up the late afternoon sunshine mainly on the church tower. As we made our way home towards Reedham, we saw more individuals sunning on telegraph poles and tree trunks, counting at least 47 over a distance of 2 miles. The final sightings of the day were at Reedham Railway Bridge, where 3 more were soaking up warmth from the black coping bricks of the parapets, which were hot to the touch.

The following week, we went again to Wickhampton and found smaller numbers of *Tabanus autumnalis* in more or less the same locations. At Reedham Church, 18 individuals were spotted, sunning themselves on the west-facing walls just before seven in the evening.