

***Anthrax anthrax* (Schrank) (Diptera, Bombyliidae) found in Britain**

— On 5 August 2016, RM found and photographed an unfamiliar and distinctive fly in his garden in Sutton, Cambridgeshire (V.C. 29, TL444787). The fly (Fig. 1) was sitting on a birch log in a 'bee hotel' and was seen at about 1.30p.m. Although it remained in place for about ten minutes while photographs were taken, it then flew off before it could be netted. The photographs were circulated via Twitter, and were identified as the bee-fly *Anthrax anthrax* (Schrank, 1781), a determination subsequently confirmed by David Gibbs.



Fig. 1. *Anthrax anthrax* from Sutton, Cambridgeshire, 2016 (© Rob Mills).

Specimens of *Anthrax anthrax* reputed to be from Britain exist, labelled as having been found in Leicestershire in 1929 and 1930, but their provenance is doubted. These dubious specimens are described in A.E. Stubbs and M. Drake (2014. *British Soldierflies and their allies: an illustrated guide to their identification and ecology*. British Entomological and Natural History Society), and the species is listed as "Excluded" in the British checklist (Chandler, P.J. (Ed.) 1998. Checklists of Insects of the British Isles (New Series) Part 1: Diptera. *Handbooks for the Identification of British Insects* **12**, 1-234).

The bee hotel in Sutton had been constructed in spring 2015, and consists of a wooden framework containing a mix of birch logs with drilled holes, and bamboo tubes (Fig. 2). It is positioned at about 1.5 metres height on a south-facing wall, close to plentiful nectar plants in the surrounding garden. Nesting bees took up residence shortly after construction, including the common red mason bee *Osmia bicornis* (Linnaeus, 1758), along with *O. caerulea* (Linnaeus, 1758) and species of *Megachile* and *Hylaeus*. *Anthrax anthrax* has larvae that are parasitoids of various hole-nesting bees, including *O. bicornis*.

In the Netherlands *Anthrax anthrax* has been spreading in recent years and has become much more frequent, especially in urban areas. This is believed to be associated with the

increasing popularity of bee hotels, providing new nesting opportunities for solitary bees and their parasitoids (John Smit *pers. comm.* and see www.naturetoday.com/intl/nl/nature-reports/message/?msg=18653). The bee-fly is widespread in continental Europe (www.faunaeur.org/full_results.php?id=130025) and, if it does become established in Britain, could become a familiar sight in many gardens.



Fig. 2. The bee hotel in Sutton to which *Anthrax anthrax* was attracted (© Rob Mills).

The rather alarming name “anthrax” derives from the Greek word for “coal”, and refers to the dark colour of the bee-fly’s body and wings (in the context of anthrax as a bacterial infection the name refers to the dark skin lesions that can occur). We propose “Anthracite Bee-fly” as a suitable English name for this species, as it both describes the colour and helps explain the innocuous derivation of the scientific name.

We are grateful to David Gibbs for confirming the species determination based on the photographs, and to John Smit for information on the occurrence of *Anthrax anthrax* in the Netherlands – **ROB MILLS**, 12 Stewards Close, Sutton, Ely, Cambridgeshire, CB6 2NQ **and** **MARTIN C. HARVEY**, Evermor, Bridge Street, Great Kimble, Aylesbury, HP17 9TN; kitenetter@googlemail.com