

NEWSLETTER 66

January 2022



7-spot Ladybird *Coccinella septempunctata* emerging from its pupal case. See article on p. 4. Photo: Kate Nightingale.

In this edition

Caddis at three light traps	3	Book Review - <i>British Craneflies</i>	10
2021 Highlights	4	Book Review - <i>More than Meets the Eye</i>	11
In memoriam	7	Looking for help?	12
A Tale of Two Spiders	8	Indoor Meetings Programme	12
The Wonders of Nature - Hawk-moth caterpillars	9		

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Editorial

Phil Rudkin's article evoked fond memories from long ago of rearing moths from caterpillars. Moths were my introduction to natural history, back in about 1970 when I befriended John Geary. With our home-made Robinson traps, we caught moths in our gardens at Glenfield, then in the morning struggled to identify them with the somewhat blurry pictures in Richard South's two volumes in the old *Wayside and Woodland* series.

The Elephant Hawk-moth is surely one of the most spectacular wild animals to turn up in our gardens, both as an adult and a caterpillar. The fully-grown caterpillar is about the size of my index finger and the front of the body is distinctly narrowed, like the trunk of an elephant. I clearly remember touching one for the first time, being surprised at how cool it was. The abdominal feet have a ring of hooks, so that they "stick" to your hand. I never found Privet Hawk-moths at Glenfield, but Lime and Eyed Hawk-moths were common. I vaguely remember making contact with Leicester Museum, and collecting Eyed Hawk-moth caterpillars to rear - my first meeting with Jan Dawson, I suspect.

Phil's comment about "ravenous" caterpillars reminds me of the Puss Moths that I reared, having caught a gravid female in the trap. I fed them on leaves from a neighbour's Weeping Willow. A few leaves were sufficient at first, but after a few weeks I had to forage an armful of twigs, without being noticed by their owner. The caterpillars are incredible to look at, large, colourful, with an odd pose and a pair of extendable tails. A gland below the face can spit formic acid, so I was careful not to look too closely! Before pupating, the larva chews up some wood, which sets into a very tough cocoon. I cannot now remember how the adult moth, lacking jaws, escapes from its cocoon.

Happy days!

Editor

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 Sep 2022

2021 Highlights from VC55 and Beyond

Our Cropston garden has played host to several uncommon or rarely recorded insect species, and as I've gained a better understanding of key features and habitats, trips further afield have also brought fascinating discoveries. In some years my records show a bias towards flies, bugs or moths, but 2021 was definitely a 'beetle year'. Below are a few local highlights, as well as species recorded in West Cornwall (VC1) and North Devon (VC4), several of which might be found in VC55.

February

A swathe of leaves on our garden Eucalyptus showed dense clusters of rough, blister-like galls on both surfaces, about 1 mm across and each with an obvious exit hole (Fig. 1). Specimens were sent to Chris Leach (British Plant Gall Society) who confirmed the effects of the **Eucalyptus Gall Wasp** *Ophelimus maskelli*, a chalcid wasp native to Australia and now well established in parts of Europe, Asia, Africa and North America; the first confirmed British record was from the London area in 2005. Each gall would have contained a single egg, with the larva pupating inside the gall; adults are up to 1 mm long.



Fig. 1. Galls made by the Eucalyptus Gall Wasp *Ophelimus maskelli*.

May

The bug *Issus coleoptratus* appeared in our garden on several occasions between May and October. My first record was in 2020, confirmed by Tristan Bantock (British Bugs). The numerous branched cross veins in the wings of the adult (Fig. 2), combined with a characteristic frons pattern, aid separation from the much rarer *I. muscaeformis*. *I. coleoptratus* is infrequently recorded, though its foodplants include common woody shrubs and trees.



Fig. 2. Adult of the bug *Issus coleoptratus*.



Fig. 3. *Issus coleoptratus* nymph.

I. coleoptratus nymphs (Fig. 3) secrete brush-like strands of bluish wax from glands at the rear of the abdomen, and they also possess a set of mechanical 'gears' (see Burrows and Sutton, 2013). It is the first description of an animal using such a mechanism to initiate take-off. The hind legs of a juvenile *Issus* can move within 30 microseconds of each other, a phenomenon unexplained by neurological impulses alone. Electron microscopy of the two rear trochantera (upper part of the hindlegs) revealed cog-like structures of cuticular material with intermeshing teeth which, when rotated, triggered a coordinated, vertical jump. Nymphs lose these structures at the final moult, as the hindlegs of the adult make closer contact and generate greater friction.

A trip to the Lizard Peninsula in Cornwall resulted in a long-awaited encounter with a **Green Tiger Beetle** *Cicindela campestris*, moving very fast, and reluctant to enter the specimen pot (Fig. 4). It is widespread in Britain but classified as 'local', and recent VC55 records include Bradgate Park and Ketton Quarry. The distinctively mottled click beetle *Agrypnus murinus* (Fig. 5) was spotted on several occasions along footpaths, and although mainly a species of coastal habitats, there are scattered records inland, particularly the southern half of the UK. Another coastal specialist,

A Tale of Two Spiders

As with many other taxa, Leicestershire's spiders are showing the impact of changing conditions on our invertebrate fauna. In 2019 I noted the remarkable range expansion of *Agelena labyrinthica* in Leicestershire (Fig. 1, Cann & Cann, 2020). In one year, this species spread from its stronghold in the east of Rutland right across the vice-county to the far west of Leicestershire. While it is difficult to attribute a single cause to this expansion, the warm, dry summer of 2019 and the increased availability of their favoured Orthopteran prey of crickets and grasshoppers seems likely to have made a contribution. Now the wheel has turned and in 2021, *Agelena labyrinthica* seems not to be enjoying our "typical British summer". Leaving aside 2020 when recording effort may have been compromised by Covid-19 restrictions, in 2021 their numbers have plummeted. In 2019 there were 13 records, in 2021 (to 1 September) there were only 2 records. However, on a visit to sunny south Devon in June, I recorded large numbers frolicking in the sunshine.

In contrast, *Enoplognatha latimana* (Fig. 2) seems to be following the same pattern followed earlier by *Agelena*.

First recorded in VC55 in 2019, restricted to just two sites on the eastern edges of Rutland, in 2021 this spider has sprung up at four sites to the west of Leicester (Fig. 3).

Although these are small data sets, the remarkable history of spider recording in VC55 means we can be certain that these are indeed new additions to the County fauna, and in only three years their range within the vice-county has increased significantly. We are seeing much the same change in Hemipterans, although in that taxon the history of recording has been more sparse, making it difficult to be certain of the magnitude of change beyond a constant stream of new arrivals. However, the spiders are sending us a clear message - the times, they are a-changing.

Reference

Cann, A. & Cann, J. (2020) 2019: A Remarkable Year For *Agelena labyrinthica*. figshare. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.11918838.v1>



Fig. 1. *Agelena labyrinthica*.



Fig. 2. *Enoplognatha latimana*.

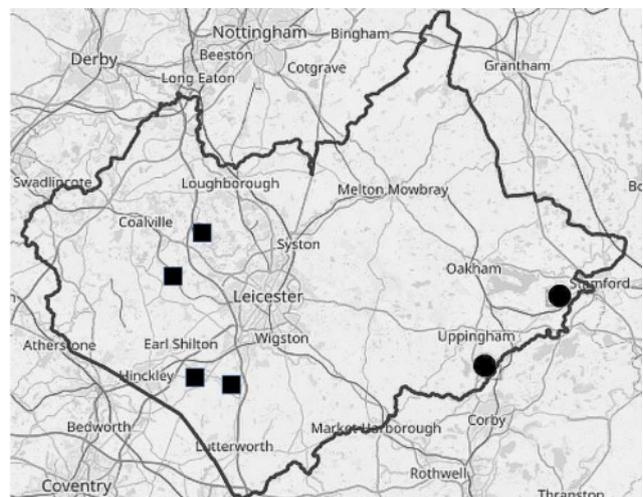


Fig. 3. *Enoplognatha latimana* distribution map. Circles, pre 2021 records; Squares, 2021 records. Data from NatureSpot.

Alan Cann

Book Review - More than Meets the Eye - The Wildlife of Grace Dieu, Leicestershire

by Stephen Woodward & Helen Ikin.
Loughborough Naturalists' Club, 2022

Studying the history and natural history of a site takes tremendous patience as so much information is buried in multiple sources. This latest volume from the Loughborough Naturalists' Club (dedicated to the memory of the county's remarkable naturalist, Peter Gamble) is the latest in the series started many years ago to describe our heritage in the Charnwood area. The authors have been resident in the area for most of their lives and are more than familiar with the wildlife of the county. However, the effort into examining in detail a single area is a challenge that this publication has more than overcome.

The volume, which is lavishly illustrated, delves into the historical aspects of the Grace Dieu area by including the Priory remains as well as the development of the Woods and neighbouring areas. The nature of the area (geology, land usage and human activity) has been well-researched and presented in a highly readable format. The main part of the volume, however, is the natural history of the site which shows the amount of work carried out by the authors along with extra help as required. Each aspect of the wildlife - plants, fungi, vertebrates and invertebrates - has been approached in a methodical way including reference to previous work on the site, the survey and identification methodology used and the species recorded. Each section is supported by relevant references and additional notes which serve to support the approach taken. The photographs are, needless to say, excellent! While not intended as a guide to conservation/preservation of the site some consideration is given to these in the summing up of the report. The volume is supported by an extensive literature list and appendices covering the way the survey was planned and carried out, the allocation of compartments to aid the methodology and notes on how records were validated.

Without doubt this epic work, which has been in the pipeline for almost a decade, should be on everyone's shelf as a source of inspiration for carrying out surveys of local areas. Well done Steve and Helen - excellent work!

To be published early February.

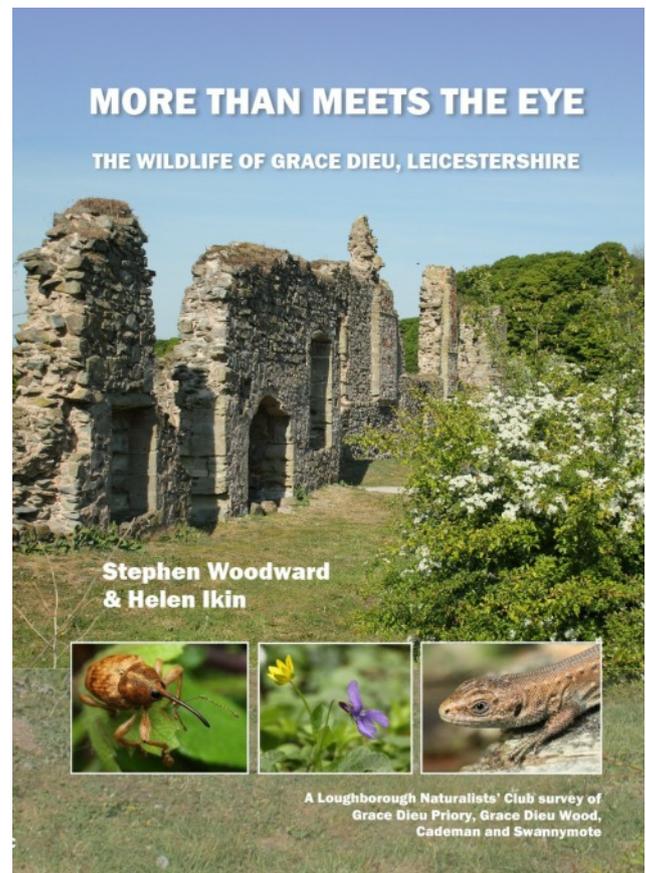
ISBN 978-0-9562815-1-7

A4 softback, full colour throughout, 310 pp, RRP £18.

Internet/Mail order: www.summerfieldbooks.com

The LNC web site <http://www.loughboroughnats.org/> will be updated as and when local outlets are confirmed.

Ray Morris



CONTENTS

Dedication
Acknowledgements
Preface
1. INTRODUCTION
2. LANDSCAPE
3. VASCULAR PLANTS: Flowering plants & ferns
4. BRYOPHYTES: Mosses & liverworts
5. ALGAE & associated groups
6. FUNGI & associated groups
7. LICHENS
8. MAMMALS
9. BIRDS
10. FISH, AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES
11. ODONATA: Dragonflies & damselflies
12. ORTHOPTERA: Grasshoppers & allies
13. HEMIPTERA: Bugs
14. COLEOPTERA: Beetles
15. DIPTERA: Flies
16. HYMENOPTERA: Bees, wasps, ants & sawflies
17. LEPIDOPTERA: Butterflies & moths
18. RIVERFLIES: Mayflies, stoneflies & caddisflies
19. OTHER INSECTS
20. MYRIAPODA: Centipedes & millipedes
21. ARACHNIDA: Spiders & allies
22. CRUSTACEA
23. MOLLUSCA: Slugs & snails
24. OTHER INVERTEBRATES
25. CONCLUSION
GAZETTEER & GLOSSARY
APPENDICES
REFERENCES
INDEX