



NEWSLETTER 20

February 1998

1997 surprises!

How good was 1997? Certainly virtually no Painted Lady butterflies compared with the previous year. And many of the other butterfly species seemed to have had a very indifferent season (as did many moths). However, some potentially interesting records are being followed up to verify identification before acceptance.

The sight of a White Admiral in the Snarestone area of west Leicestershire raises hopes that this beautiful insect of dappled woodland rides is trying to make a comeback into the county. It was last seen in this part of Leicestershire in 1953 at Burbage Wood but it breeds at several woods only a few miles over the border into Warwickshire. Coupled with the recording of three other specimens at two locations in south Derbyshire, it is possible that this butterfly is benefitting from the warmer summers and is increasing its range in the Midlands.

Another county rarity, the Wood White has been seen (and the record validated) at a south Leicestershire site during May 1997. Apparently there had been an unconfirmed record from the same site the year before! Once familiar with the floppy flight of this insect, there should be no trouble with identification without it having to be netted. The site should be visited when flight times are appropriate although a search for larvae might be an interesting diversion as bird's foot trefoil

and other vetches occur at the location as well as the odd patch of lucerne.

Perhaps the most exciting event of the 1997 butterfly season is the prospect of an extinct (at least to Leicestershire!) species being rediscovered. A well-worn specimen of the Duke of Burgundy Fritillary was reported from a suitable site in Rutland but, again, confirmation is needed of its true breeding status. It has been a long time since it was regarded as a true VC55 species.

Adrian Russell

White admiral

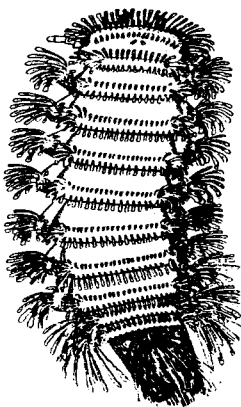


Next copy date: July 15th 1998

Polyxenus lagurus - an ecclesiastical millipede

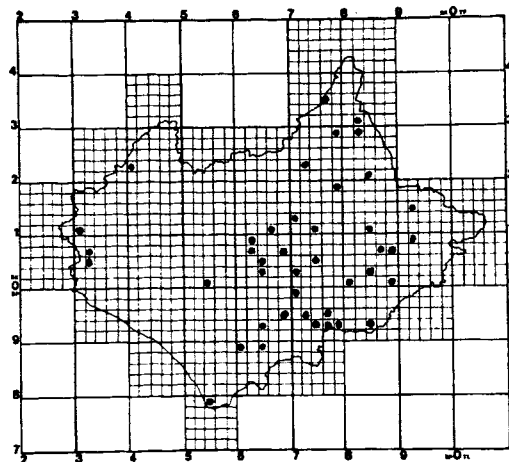
Over the past few years a survey of the lichen flora of Leicestershire's parish churches has been underway. One of the spin-offs from this research has been the pleasure of also recording a wide range of arthropods associated with these buildings.

The millipede, *Polyxenus lagurus*, possesses the fortuitous combination of being the only member of its order in the UK and is also easy to identify. Early into the survey it was soon recognised as a familiar member of that assemblage of organisms that choose to live out their lives on these hallowed walls. It became a regular acquaintance during my monitoring work, one to be eagerly looked for, at times rather to the detriment of my study of the lichens!



Why, may you ask, my fascination with this little millipede? Superficially there seems to be little to warrant it anything other than a passing glance. It's only 2-3mm long and of an unremarkable brown colour. It is only with a hand lens, however, that the real charm of this tiny animal becomes apparent.

In its lilliputian world, it metaphorically "bristles" with character. It also physically bristles with setae, or trichomes, arranged mainly in rows down its body, but also as lateral tufts from each segment. This gives it the appearance of a greek trireme. The nautical analogy is further reflected in its gliding motion when moving across its chosen patch of church masonry. The beaver-like tail, formed by the terminal trichome brushes, is particularly appealing.



There are only scattered records of this millipede for Britain but it is certainly not rare in Northamptonshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire. Indeed, having found it last year in East Anglia, Essex and Pembrokeshire, it would appear to be a guaranteed member of the fauna of many south-facing church walls, particularly on the string courses and chamfers. It seems to favour ironstone and limestone but this may merely reflect the increased coverage of lichens on these substrates.

Why this lovely creature has never featured in a nature film is quite inexplicable. Admittedly it's small but it does seem to possess all the characteristics required of a star of the natural history stage. Not least of these being its endearing and uniquely unforgettable looks but also (perhaps as part of a more risqué adult sequence shown after the 9pm watershed!) in its altogether generous sexual endowments - the male possesses paired penises and the female paired vulvae!

Alas poor *Polyxenus*, even with such unusual sexual apparatus, life is not one full of licentious behaviour unworthy of these holy stones, but rather one of abstinence as direct transfer of spermatozoa is not the norm. The male deposits spermatophores onto a web of filaments for the female to subsequently "take on board". To attract the attention of an obviously feeble-minded partner, he constructs a system of threads to act as direction indicators - perhaps a case of steering the bride to the altar?

Does anyone know a film producer short of a few minutes programme time?

Ivan Pedley

1997 garden hoverflies

The hoverfly catch in the Malaise trap in my garden was interesting in 1997 for two reasons. First, the influx, particularly of *Episyrphus balteatus* (Degeer), during the last two weeks of July and the first two weeks of August when 837 of 1,284 hoverflies captured were of this species. Secondly, because of the reappearance of rare species not seen in a long time.

In late September, I caught one individual of *Helophilus trivittatus* (Fab.) which I had not seen since 1973 despite trapping every year. During the summer three *Xanthogramma pedisequum* (Harris) put in an appearance; the hoverfly was first caught in 1972 but then not seen again until 1992 since when a few have been caught each year.

The Malaise trap uses no attractant, merely catching a proportion of those insects that fly into its air space. The absence of a species from catches does not, of course, prove it wasn't in the garden. Nevertheless, absence for 20 or more years from the catch does suggest that these species have disappeared, only to come back again. Both species are described as scarce although widespread. Neither is a typical garden species and their occurrence in my suburban garden confirms my suspicion that hoverflies range freely, probably in search of food.

Jenny Owen

Exhibition notes - 1

[At last November's members' night, a whole range of exhibits were shown to the select few gathered at Holly Hayes. Here Maggie describes the contribution from the Frankum family.]

It was a hotchpot of hoverflies, bumblebees, solitary bees and wasps, sawflies etc collected in my garden during 1997 with one or two species of interest from other times and places. With Neil based elsewhere, the recording of our garden hoverflies has diminished somewhat, so I decided to have a go and familiarise myself with the more obvious ones. On one particularly hot, sunny day in August (13.viii.97), when the garden was alive with hoverflies, I

honed my netting skills and managed to catch and mount a selection of noticeably different ones. I identified the easy ones and left Neil to confirm these and do the rest later (see table).

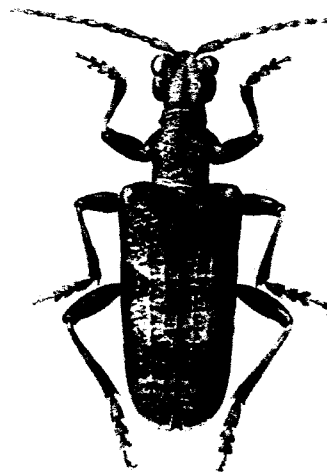
Following two hot sultry days in July (8.vii.97), when the black ants were swarming, it seemed to be wipeout time for the local bumblebees. I went to the shops along Welford Road and the pavements below the lime trees were littered with dead bumblebees - mostly *Bombus lapidarius* and *B terrestris*.

<i>Syrphus ribesii</i> (m)	<i>Eristalis arbustorum</i> (mf),
<i>Metasyrphus luniger</i> (mf),	<i>Eristalis intricarius</i> (mf) a bumblebee mimic
<i>Metasyrphus corollae</i> (m),	<i>Eristalis tenax</i> (m),
<i>Episyrphus balteatus</i> (m)	<i>Eristalis pertinax</i> (m)
<i>Helophilus pendulus</i> (m),	<i>Syrrita pipiens</i> (f)
<i>Helophilus hybridus</i> (m)	<i>Platycheirus albimanus</i> (m)
<i>Scaeva pyrastris</i> (f)	<i>Myathropa florea</i> (mf)
<i>Xanthogramma pedisequum</i> (8.vii.96)	<i>Episrophe elegans</i> (f, 2.v.97)

Steve & Tracy Hanlon sent me an impressive sawfly from Scotland (that worried the cat!) and this was confirmed by Andrew Halstead as *Cimbex femoratus*. He also identified another sawfly (from Burley Wood) as *Tenthredo livida*. Another species was *Phymatocera aterrima* whose larvae completely decimate the Solomon's Seal plants each year (see LES Newsletter number 7 page 9!). Specimens of various solitary bees and wasps that frequent my garden were also shown: a female *Anthophora plumipes* (the Hairy-footed Flower Bee), furry mason bees that live between the bricks on the west facing wall of the house and several solitary wasps that I hope to identify at some point when I have a suitable key.

Whilst I was chasing around after the hoverflies, I noticed a striking black and yellow wasp lurking around the flower borders - only it was a fly - a *Conops* species whose larvae are internal parasites of bees and wasps!. Finally there was a longhorn beetle (left) from Southey Wood, Northamptonshire, that Derek Lott identified as *Rhagium mordax*.

Maggie Frankum



Exhibition notes - 2

A nest of a leaf cutter bee thought to be *Megachile centuncularis*. It was found during roof replacement at Easton-on-the-Hill, Northamptonshire.

A second nest was one built by an unknown species of potter wasp found on grass in Burley Wood during June. There were several others in the long grass on the ride edge but no insects were visible.

Jean Harvey

The publication of the long-awaited "*The Colour Identification Guide to Caterpillars of the British Isles*", a companion volume to Skinner but also including butterflies, happened at last in 1997. This enabled a check on identities to be made on photographs of larvae taken over the years but never quite sorted out satisfactorily. One was easy - the woolly bear of *Arctia caja* (Garden Tiger) but whilst the moth still turns up regularly to light there is an impression that the larvae are not as commonly seen as when I was a lot younger.

Two other caterpillars now identified were the Green Silver Lines (*Pseudoips fagana*), a fairly chunky green job, and the Lackey (*Malacosoma neustria*) photographed wandering well away from any tent - perhaps on its way to pupate?

Most interesting, and thankfully confirmed by others because of the new Guide, was the larva of the Clouded Magpie (*Abraxas sylvata*) photographed at Ratby Burroughs on 12.vi.86. Perhaps a little early in the year but a definite ID!

Ray Morris

Hobby's hobby!

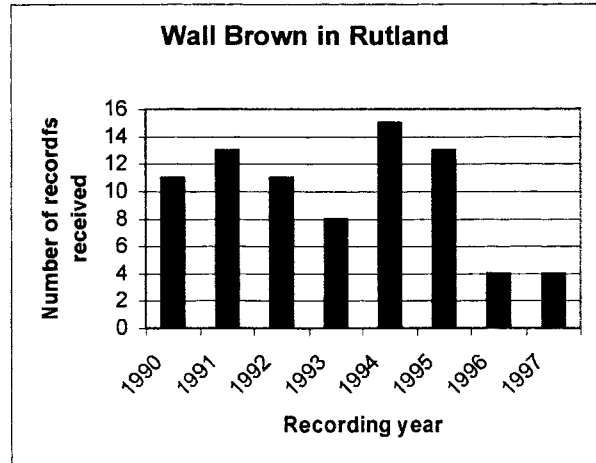
It always pays to read other natural history publications apart from those pertinent to your own special interest! As part of my accumulation of records for south west Leicestershire, I regularly scan the LROS Newsletter for bird sightings reported by recorders who are not involved with the Hinckley NHS.

What did I find in Newsletter 399? A Hobby feeding on Common Damselflies at Quorn Borrow Pit on 4.ix.97! The bird's equivalent of the Little Chef perhaps?

Ray Morris

Rutland Walls (the butterflies!)

In response to comments on Wall Brown butterflies in LES Newsletter 19, I looked up RNHS sightings for the nineties. The records received are shown in the figure below.



It would seem that the species is currently in a state of decline!

Jean Harvey

New Woodland Trust reserve turns up hopper

Phil Rudkin and Clive Jones, visiting the Woodland Trust's new acquisition in Rutland, Gorsefield at Oakham, on 7.ix.97, recorded Lesser Marsh Grasshopper (*Chorthippus albomarginatus*). The species was first reported by Steve Grover from the south of the county (Lutterworth area) in 1995 (see LES Newsletter 15, page 15). A year later, the grasshopper was reported from Luffenham Heath Golf Course (Rutland) by Jon Daws (see LES Newsletter 18 page 3). Where will it turn up next?

Correction

In LES Newsletter 19 (page 3) the Brown Hairstreak is noted as a breeding species in VC55! The Gatekeeper is apparently not!

Of course, it's the other way round. Sorry!

Editor

1997 lates and 1998 earlies!

Late moths at Groby

I regularly use a Heath light trap during the winter with the following results this year.

- 1.xi.97 Chestnut (1), Juniper Carpet (3)
- 21.xi.97 Northern Winter (1)
- 27.xi.97 Chestnut (1), Winter (1)
- 6.xii.97 Scarce Umber (1)
- 7.xii.97 Chestnut
- 13.xii.97 Winter (1) (also Peacock butterfly flying in garden during the day)
- 21.xii.97 *Acleris notana*
- 22.xii.97 Mottled Umber (1)

Ivan Pedley

Holly Hayes garden

A walk around Holly Hayes garden, Birstall (SK594086) proved fruitful on 26.ii.98 when specimens of *Episyrphus balteatus* were noted flying round holly in a secluded sunny spot. A narrow-bodied hoverfly with rather elongate wings, *Meliscaeva auricollis*, was flying in good numbers being particularly attracted to the flowering Box. High in the canopy of an early flowering Cherry were a few large species of *Eristalis*. These were not identified to species. The widely distributed Gorse Shield Bug (*Piezodorus lituratus*) was found resting on Rhododendron (identity confirmed by Derek Lott).

Jane McPhail

Knighton garden

In the wake of the storms and snow flurries at the start of the year, 9.i.98 was sunny and warm - a welcome if unseasonal 13°C, just right for the first hoverfly (*Eristalis tenax*) of the year in the garden. Over the next few days, winter temperatures returned and late January was very cold - frozen pond etc. On 27.i.98 another *E tenax* was seen in a fairly exposed position on a north facing wooden fence in Knighton Lane East, caught out by the weather change.

February temperatures once again reached an unseasonal high, 14.5°C on 12.ii.98 with the first Small Tortoiseshell butterfly of the year on the heathers and a queen wasp (*Vespula vulgaris*) walking across the pavement in Craighill Road. Temperatures went up to a remarkable 18°C on

the 13th bringing a Peacock butterfly out of hibernation; and 12°C on the 15th saw the first bumblebee queen (*Bombus terrestris*) in the garden. The almost Spring temperatures remained for the week bringing out two more bumblebee queens (*Bombus pratorum*) (14°C on 20.ii.98) to forage on the heathers and the Stinking Hellebore. No sign of Hairy-footed Bee (*Anthophora plumipes*) yet in the garden but on the same day, round at the local plant nursery on Craighill Road, there were lots of Stinking Hellebore plants for sale providing opportunities for foraging honeybees and a pristine, golden brown male *Anthophora plumipes* on patrol around the mass of flowers.

Maggie Frankum

Extremely early at Barwell!

The small plume moth, *Emmelina monodactyla*, was disturbed from undergrowth when gardening on 10.i.98 whilst *Depressaria cricella* was found flying around the bathroom on 18.ii.98 - only about five months early! (Identity confirmed by Jane McPhail & Adrian Russell). The latter was obviously encouraged to emerge early after pupating in a warm house.

Ray Morris

And elsewhere!

The mild winter has definitely affected emergence patterns as evidenced by comments on the Internet!

Ashstead Common, Surrey - 19.ii.98 light trap - numerous *Tortricodes alternella*, unidentified *Acleris* spp, several Yellowhorned (*Achyla flavicornis*), several male March, single Shoulder Stripe, several of both Small Brindled Beauty and Pale Brindled Beauty, a male Oak Beauty, several Spring Usher, both sexes of Dotted Border and one Early. Plus a few Common Quaker, a Clouded Drab, one Hebrew Character and several Satellite! All recorded over two hours (1830-2030) - unbelievable!

And of course the early butterflies: Brimstone (Hertfordshire 13.ii.98, up to 7 seen), Small Tortoiseshell (Bridgnorth 13.ii.98; Ilkley 15.ii.98), Comma (13.ii.98 Bridgnorth; 17.ii.98 Hertford), Peacock (Bridgnorth 13.ii.98) etc etc etc!

So many insects!

When I told someone about the hoverfly influx in the summer of 1997, and quoted the actual number of hoverflies captured in my garden's Malaise trap, they asked me to speculate on the numbers of insects in my garden. By extension, this would indicate how many insects there are in any medium-sized, productive garden. There is necessarily a fair amount of guesswork involved, but informed guesswork, based on what I catch in the Malaise trap.

The trap

The trap is an open sided, tent-like structure of fine netting with a pitched roof rising obliquely to a peak at one end where a collecting jar is attached. It uses no bait or other attractant, simply catching those insects that fly spontaneously into its open sides and then, on encountering a central baffle of netting, fly up and into the collecting jar.

Every week the collecting jar is removed and the captured insects are sorted into various groups. Some of these I identify but the bulk are sent off to colleagues who are specialists in a particular sort of insect. One of the groups that I deal with myself are the hoverflies.



Syrphus ribesii

First - the hoverflies!

From April to September 1997, 3,122 hoverflies were caught in the trap which covers only 2.6 square metres of my garden. The entire garden is 741 square metres, 285x as large; so on this basis the garden in 1997 contained 889,770 hoverflies flying at a metre or lower (the height of the open sides of the trap)! Since only a proportion of insects that enter the trap end up getting caught (an estimated 20% in the case of parasitic wasps), there were many more

hoverflies than this in the garden in 1997 - a million would probably be a conservative estimate!

Of course, not all these were present all the time; some hoverflies are relatively short-lived, others get killed and some leave the garden - but others emerge from pupae and more fly in to the garden. The speculative figure of one million is the total number of *hoverflies* that were present in my garden at one time or another between April and September 1997. These figures demonstrate that running the Malaise trap does not have an impact on insect numbers in the garden. It is simply a useful tool for monitoring what is there.

Then the rest!

I have actual Malaise trap numbers for the same period for three other insect groups: butterflies, bumblebees and ladybirds. The trap caught 25 butterflies giving a garden total of 7,125. The 285 bumblebees gives a total of 81,225 while a total of 75,525 ladybirds is based on 265 ladybirds trapped. The butterfly number is almost certainly an underestimate because, being strong fliers, they are less likely to get caught in the trap as they can find a way out.

For other groups, the numbers are less accurate being based on my assessment of how many beetles, say, are in the cumulative beetle jar waiting to go to a specialist. Nevertheless, I can come up with some figures for the same time period. I estimate there were at least 57,000 bugs (Hemiptera), 11,400 lacewings, 22,800 moths, 142,500 sawflies, 102,600 solitary and social wasps, 85,000 solitary bees, 228,000 beetles (other than ladybirds) and a staggering 14,820,000 two-winged flies (Diptera) additional to the hoverflies.

Only a cool 17 million!

The figures I have given add up to over 16 million. Allowing for other insect groups such as the tiny parasitic wasps, for insects that escape from the Malaise trap and those that never entered the trap because they flew higher than the 1 metre sides, a very conservative estimate of the total number of insects in or visiting my garden in the summer of 1997 is 17 million. There's a thought!

Jenny Owen

[From an article in "Organic Gardening"]

Dragonfly recording push!

The first maps of dragonfly distribution in Leicestershire and Rutland were produced by Howard Mendel (now at Ipswich) in 1977. An update was provided by the excellent little booklet written and illustrated by Steve Grover and Helen Ikin in 1994 ("*Leicestershire Dragonflies*" published by the Leicestershire Museums Service). It is planned to further update the distribution maps in the spring of 1998 using the new data handling facilities at Holly Hayes, Birstall. The original 1993 data set of 5,254 records has since expanded to well over 9,000 thanks to the efforts of local entomologists.

When we look at a map of VC55, we see that it is completely covered by a dendritic pattern of brooks and rivers. In addition, there are the canals, ponds, lakes and reservoirs. No 5km square is without its aquatic habitats. A similar map showing the distribution of our dragonfly species, however, looks empty by comparison especially if only records from the last decade are plotted. The chief reason for this is probably the absence of recorders. With the exception of the areas covered by Fred Smith and the formidable team from the Loughborough Naturalists' Club, much of the county remains in dire need of attention.

So what needs recording? Where and when? The proposed up-dated distribution maps (to appear in the next issue of the *Leicestershire Recorder*) will provide plenty of ideas. One example is the White-legged Damselfly (*Platycnemis pennipes*) which is at the northern edge of its distribution in the county. As its name implies, the identification of this damselfly is made easy at close range by its distinctive white legs with their unusually broad tibiae. In recent years this species has been found at a few well scattered localities during June and July. It occurs along the Grand Union Canal from North Kilworth to Market Harborough - so why not along other stretches of the Grand Union or other Leicestershire canals? It breeds along the River Eye, so why not along other similar local rivers?

The answers to these questions might provide some useful information to help to conserve this seemingly very local species. Similar observations are needed for all our other local species. Evidence of breeding, such as ovipositing, copulation, territorial behaviour, identified nymphs or exuvia (cast off skins) would be especially valuable. If you are seeking worthwhile and interesting project for the 1998 season look no further!

John Kramer

Platycnemis pennipes
(White-legged damselfly)



Summer programme 1998

Please check with the leader that the meeting is still on before you turn up. The meetings will start on site at 10 a.m.

April 26th **Laughton Hills** lead by Darwyn Sumner (0116-267-1950 ext 24)
Woodland, grassland and canal on south facing slopes.
Meet at woodland edge on the east side of the minor road between Laughton and Theddingworth (SP661877).

May 31st **Eaton** lead by John Mousley (0116-167-1950 ext 22)
Dry grassland SSSI with small stream and marsh.
Meet on minor road from Eastwell to Belvoir (SK793310)

June 7th **Rolleston** lead by John Mousley
Wet woodland and tall herb.
Meet on the bridle way southeast out of Rolleston village (SK773004)

July 5th **Stoke Dry Wood and Eye Brook Reservoir** lead by John Mousley
Ancient woodland with gnat dingle, pollards on sunny (fingers crossed!) edge followed by reservoir edge).
Meet on bridle way off minor road north east from Stoke Dry (SK022104)

July 25th **Ashby Canal and Shenton Cutting/Ambion Wood** lead by Ray Morris & Jane McPhail (01455-842145)
Joint meeting with the East Midlands branch of Butterfly Conservation to check out last year's report of White Admiral near Snarestone and to look for hairstreaks at the previous County Trust reserve at Shenton.
Meet in the car park of the Globe Inn at Snarestone (SK343094) to walk along canal. After lunch (?at the Globe!) meet at Shenton Station car park (SK397004)

➡ *This is a Saturday event starting at 10.30 a.m.*

July 26th **Ratcliffe Culey** lead by Steve Grover (0116-265-1950 ext 28)
River Sence in the west of the county, an area which is severely under-recorded.
Meet on fotpath north from minor road between Pinwall and Ratcliffe Culey (SP322995)



It would be appreciated if all records made at these field meetings were copied to the leader so that they can be added to the county data bank.

A second copy, which would facilitate early publication of any interesting findings, should be sent to Ray Morris (along with any other contributions!) at 142 Hinckley Road, Barwell LE9 8DN or if you wish by email to wmorris@microbe.demon.co.uk