

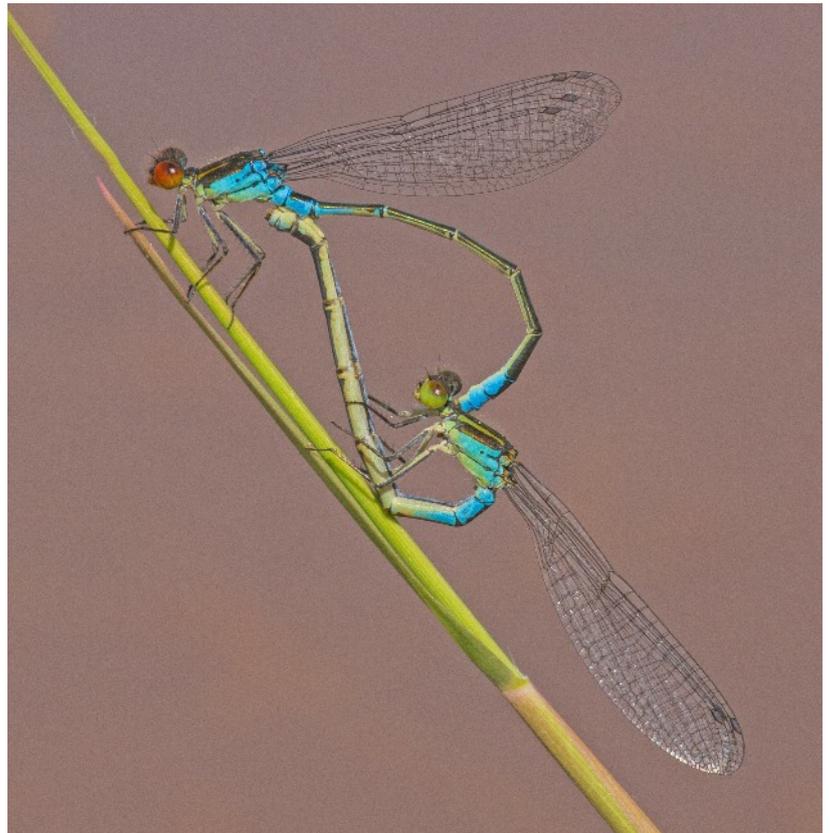
NEWSLETTER 64

January 2021

Dragonflies in Leicestershire and Rutland 2020

2020 will long remain in the memory as an exceptional year in many ways, and this description certainly holds true in terms of dragonfly recording in VC55. A period of unusually favourable early-season weather coincided with a large number of recorders having much more time on their hands than usual, either agreeably or imposed under duress! Overlay this onto an Odonata population which included a handful of new colonists and several other species with clearly expanding populations and the result is what can only be described as a season of dragonfly revelation.

Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense* was the first species to hit the headlines, as more and more sightings materialised



Small Red-eyed Damselfly, Measham, Leicestershire, August 2020.

In this edition

Dragonflies in Leicestershire and Rutland 2020	1
New planthopper <i>Florodelphax leptosoma</i>	4
Are there crypt keepers raiding our oak galls?	5
Fungus Beetles – a novice’s experience	6
Oh Deer	7
True Bugs (Hemiptera: Heteroptera) of Leics & Rutland	8
Tropical treats	11
2020 wildlife recording at Charnwood Lodge	12
Update on adult caddis recording in VC55	15
Indoor Meetings Programme	16

from previously unrecorded localities. Between the end of 2019 and the end of 2020 this species demonstrated a 28% population increase in terms of 1 km grid squares occupied. Although the increased-observer factor must be considered, an ongoing range expansion of this species seems beyond doubt.

The warm and dry spring weather also enabled focused recording efforts to establish a much better understanding of the VC55 populations of two new colonists, the Scarce Chaser *Libellula fulva* and Beautiful Demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo*, in the south of

continued on p. 3

LEICESTERSHIRE ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Affiliated to:
Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust

Chairman & LES Occasional Publications Editor:

Ray Morris
16 Hinckley Road, Dadlington
Leics. CV13 6HU
Telephone: 01455 213569
Email: ray@cactusbob.net

Secretary:

Anona Finch
14 Thorndale, Ibstock, Leics. LE67 6JT
Email: finchgraham1@gmail.com

Treasurer:

Dave Budworth
121 Wood Lane, Newhall, Swadlincote
Derbys. DE11 0LX
Telephone: 01283 215188
Email: dbud01@aol.com

Committee Members:

Maggie Frankum
3 Chapel Lane, Knighton, Leicester LE2 3WF
Telephone: 0116 270 5833
Email: maggiefrankum@uwclub.net

Peter Patrick
The Hollies, Holly Street, Stapenhill, Burton on Trent,
Derby DE15 9ET
Telephone: 01283 548704
Email: petebass03@aol.com

Newsletter Editor:

Steve Woodward
19 Highfield Road, Groby, Leicester LE6 0GU
Telephone: 0116 287 1679
Email: grobysteve@talktalk.net

Publications downloadable from:

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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 2021

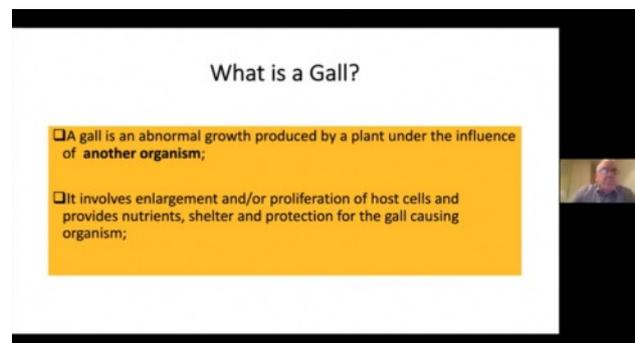
“You’re still on mute”

When I was a child, Zoom was an ice-lolly in the shape of a space-rocket. These days it is a facility on the internet for virtual meetings, widely used by locked-down business but also by natural history societies for broadcasting lectures. Anyone with a screen and a connection can log in, having first received an invitation link from the organiser.

The first few minutes of a Zoom meeting are often chaotic, as newcomers struggle to find the controls – and need to be prompted to switch on their microphones – but things generally settle down and it works well. One big advantage over an in-person performance is that lecture attendees can sneak out to make a cuppa or (dare I say it) drop out un-noticed if the presentation does not live up to expectations.

This was certainly not the case for Chris Leach’s excellent talk to the Leicester Lit. and Phil. Society (Natural History Section) on 6 January entitled *The challenging world of plant galls*. One of the topics covered in the talk appears on page 5. The Section has kindly made a recording of the talk available:

<https://youtu.be/ceO5IHbpvbc>



For more information about their other meetings, see:

<https://www.leicesterlitandphil.org.uk/natural-history-section/>

LES Members have once again answered my plea for articles and I am grateful to all contributors. It is heartening to see that we have some active and observant members, covering a range of insect orders, who are prepared to write down their experiences for all to enjoy.

Editor

continued from p. 1

VC55. The distribution of the Scarce Chaser was plotted along the River Welland and, although more work remains to be done, it is apparent that its distribution is restricted to certain favourable sections of the river and it is certainly absent from many narrow and fast-flowing legs. Similarly, the Beautiful Demoiselle is tied to the relatively few suitable sections of the rivers Welland, Avon and Swift and therefore exhibits a very patchy distribution. Concerted observer effort did, however, pay dividends and between the end of 2019 and the end of 2020 this species demonstrated a 67% population increase in terms of 1 km grid squares occupied; there are now 15 occupied squares on the three rivers.

Another significant upsurge in records was witnessed with the Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma viridulum*, which really seemed to come to the fore in 2020 as the species' status leapt from something of a scarce and erratically distributed resident to the most common late summer species at a significant number of sites. Between the end of 2019 and the end of 2020 this species demonstrated a 40% population increase in



Scarce Chaser, River Soar June 2020.



Willow Emerald ovipositing scars in willow branch. These distinctive linear or spiral markings are formed after eggs are laid directly into branches (usually willow) overhanging water, and galls develop. The galls are especially easy to find in the winter months then, in the following spring, the larvae hatch and fall to the water to develop within three months to adult emergence.



Willow Emerald, Eye Brook, Sept 2020.

terms of 1 km grid squares occupied. The most recent arrival to VC55, the Willow Emerald *Chalcolestes viridis*, also made its presence felt with some force, with recorded sites rising from two to six and with three-figure counts being made at Melton Mowbray Country Park; it seems inevitable the expansion of this species is set to continue with some vigour.

The species with the most enigmatic distribution in VC55 is the Common Hawker *Aeshna juncea*, which has for the last ten years retained a toe-hold in the sub-optimal habitat of remnant lowland



Common Hawker, Albert Village, Leicestershire, August 2020.

heaths in the north west of Leicestershire. After a recording absence of three years it was fantastic to chance upon a pristine adult close to a likely breeding pool at Albert Village, renewing confidence that our scarcest resident is still alive and well in VC55.

Two other events worthy of mention in this 2020 summary were the creation of a Leicestershire and Rutland Dragonfly Facebook Group, which has served as a great conduit for information and a general stimulant of wider dragonfly interest, and also the publication of a fully revised VC55 Dragonfly Checklist, which is hosted on the NatureSpot website. I would conclude by thanking the small but diligent band of VC55 recorders for their continued support in plotting the ever-changing distributions of our Odonata population during a particularly fascinating period of change.

Ian Merrill

***Florodelphax leptosoma*
– a new planthopper for VC55**

I recently picked up a useful field tip. If you're like me, there are certain species which you know well but can never remember the names of. The trick is to assign them a name you can remember, then look them up when you get home.

Among the hoppers (Auchenorrhyncha), the Planthoppers are easy to assign to the family Delphacidae (characterised by a large, apical movable spur on the hind tibiae), but mostly tricky to identify to species level. One exception is *Conomelus anceps*, which I find at almost every site I visit - but can never remember the name of. I have been able to resolve this difficult by christening them "Minions" (see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minions_\(Despicable_Me\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minions_(Despicable_Me))). Problem solved.

On a recent trip to New Lount, a few small dark Minions stood out from the crowd in the tray. On examination, these turned out to be *Florodelphax leptosoma* (confirmed by Alan Stewart).

This is a fairly common species found in a wide range of wetland habitats across the UK, but the fact that it has never been recorded previously in VC55 points to how seriously under-recorded the Auchenorrhyncha are as a group.

Alan Cann



Fig. 1 *Conomelus anceps*



Fig. 2: *Florodelphax leptosoma*

Chilopoda:- Helen Ikin, 237 Forest Road, Woodhouse, Woodhouse Eaves, Leics LE12 8TZ. 01509 890102. helen.canids@btinternet.com

Coleoptera:- Graham Finch, 14 Thorndale, Ibstock, Leics. LE67 6JT: finchgraham1@gmail.com

Collembola: Alan Cann, 17 Overdale Road, Leicester LE2 3YJ. alan.cann@gmail.com Online identification guides: <https://collembolla.blogspot.com/p/identification-guides.html>

Diplopoda:- Helen Ikin (see Chilopoda).

Diptera (Some families):- Ray Morris (see page 2).

Diptera (Nematocera - Mosquitoes, Blackflies & Craneflies):- John Kramer, 31 Ash Tree Road, Oadby, Leicester LE2 5TE. 0116 271 6499. john.kramer@btinternet.com

Hymenoptera (Symphyta - Sawflies):- Dave Nicholls, 69-71 Church Lane, Ratby, LE6 0JF. davidnicholls125@gmail.com

Hymenoptera (Bumblebees):- Maggie Frankum, see page 2.

Hymenoptera (Other aculeates - Bees, Wasps & Ants):- Helen Ikin (see Chilopoda).

Hemiptera:- Dave Budworth, see page 2.

Isopoda (Woodlice):- Helen Ikin (see Chilopoda).

Lepidoptera:- County Moth Recorder Team:- VC55CMR@gmail.com

Mecoptera, Neuroptera, Plecoptera :- Steve Woodward, see page 2.

Mollusca: - Dave Nicholls (see Hymenoptera (Symphyta)).

Odonata:- Ian Merrill i.merrill@btopenworld.com

Orthoptera:- Helen Ikin, see Chilopoda.

Plant Galls:- Maggie Frankum, see page 2.

Psocoptera:- Helen Ikin, see Chilopoda.

Thysanoptera: - Ivan Pedley, see Arachnids - Mites.

Trichoptera (adults):- Ray Morris, see page 2.

2021-2022 Indoor Meetings Programme

It will not have missed your notice that the indoor programme 2020-2021 has been curtailed by the present pandemic!

However, we live in hope that our 2021-2022 winter indoor session will be able to go ahead and the dates below have been provisionally booked at Kirby Muxloe Free Church.

At this time, no programme has been arranged and it is likely that if the present situation continues sessions may have to be by video link. Accordingly we will ask potential speakers if they are willing to give their presentations either in the flesh or by Zoom - either way this will allow the LES to function more normally! If by video then bring your own chocolate digestives!

Any offers/suggestions for contributions to the programme should be sent to our Secretary, Anona Finch. Dates provisionally booked, all Thursdays:

21 October 2021 - Members' contributions

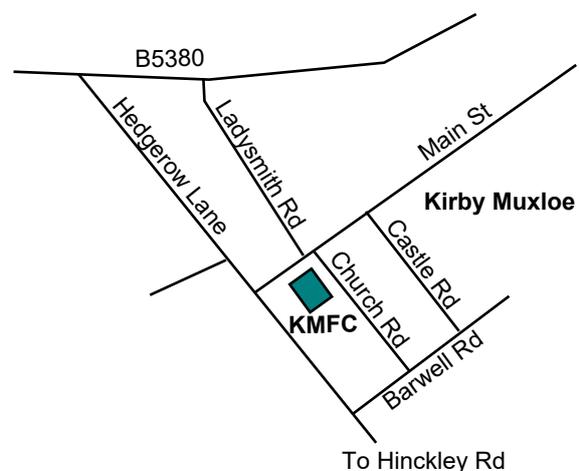
18 November

16 December

20 January 2022 - AGM

17 February

17 March



Ray Morris, LES Chair