

# NEWSLETTER 59

September 2018



**Ermine ID gets harder!** See p. 6



**Towards a VC55 Springtail Atlas**

## In this edition

Towards a VC55 Springtail Atlas	1
Beetle <i>Silpha laevigata</i> re-found after 31 years	4
Spider Wasp <i>Priocnemis fennica</i> at Shenton	4
Mosquitoes at Rutland Water	5
The Small Ermine Moths ( <i>Yponomeuta</i> )	6
Caddis in 2018 so far	7
Solitary Wasps in Wales	8
Hold it right there!	9
Biting flower bugs	9
Ferrari's Photo Gallery	10
A first for Britain from Buddon Wood	11
Indoor Meetings Programme	12
Cheers!	12

## What are Springtails?

Although they have six legs (Hexapoda), springtails (Collembola) are no longer considered insects, primarily because, along with the Diplura and Protura, they have internal rather than external mouthparts. These three orders are commonly grouped together in a class called Entognatha ("internal jaws"), although they are no more closely related to one another than they are to insects with external mouthparts. They are extremely common in soil and leaf litter and may reach densities of 100,000 per square metre in fertile soils and grassland. They are primarily detritivores and fungivores, and one of the main biological agents responsible for the controlling the numbers of other soil organisms as well as soil fertility. However,

*cont'd on p. 3...*

Above: *Pogonognathellus longicornis*, one of the largest common springtails (6 mm). Photo: A. Cann.

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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 Jan 2019**

## Editorial

Entomologists know that warm weather generally brings out the insects, but this year's hot and dry summer produced mixed results. I personally saw very few insects, even compared to recent poor years. Too hot for *them* to be active? - probably. Too hot for *us* to be active? - certainly. Or a shortage of fresh plants for insects to feed on? - no doubt a combination of these and other factors. At the BWARS AGM at Oxford in September, other hymenopterists from around the country were generally reporting suppressed numbers, although a few mentioned a late surge of some species around particular plants. Adrian Russell tells me that moth trap catches in July were exceptionally high - yet *Noctua pronuba* the Large Yellow Underwing, formerly one of our commonest species, was scarce in August. I am conscious that I keep saying this ... but *let's hope we "get back to normal" next year.*

Grubbing around in the soil can be a rewarding activity for entomologists - Helen Ikin and myself spent a few days doing this on the *Soil Mesofauna* course at Preston Montford this year (<https://www.field-studies-council.org/>). We concentrated on springtails and mites, both of which can be very abundant and crucially important for nutrient cycling. I am pleased to say that at last, we made some headway with mite identification, thanks to our tutor Felicity Crotty from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust at Loddington. Felicity has agreed to talk to the LES at the October meeting (see p. 12) on soil ecology - not to be missed! Leicestershire springtails now have a local champion: if Alan Cann's enthusiasm rubs off on a few LES members (p. 1 & 3) then this neglected order may be "put on the map".

Helen Ikin reports on another Field Studies Council course, this time on solitary wasps (p. 8).

It you thought you had mastered the identification of small ermine moths - then you better have a look at Adrian Russell's article on p. 6)

We have reports of new or scarce finds from the usual suspects, a gallery of photos from our award-winning photographer Gianpiero Ferrari FRPS, and a programme of talks arranged by Anona Finch. My thanks go to all contributors.

**Steve Woodward**

cont'd from p. 1.

some of the larger species are more resistant to desiccation, and are found primarily in the tree canopy. Some are pioneer colonizers of green rooftops in urban locations. They are found on all seven continents and are some of the most abundant Arthropods on Antarctica.

Springtails range in size from 0.1 to 6 mm and their small size and environmental preferences are the primary reasons that they are frequently overlooked ("cryptozoa"). Considering their abundance, springtails are one of least-recorded groups of animals. Leicestershire and Rutland is no different to other regions in this regard. A few other counties (Shropshire, Lancashire) have ambitious and well-advanced plans to build county atlases of springtails. There are presently no such plans that I am aware of for VC55, but we do have a secret weapon that the other counties do not have - NatureSpot! In thinking about building a species atlas, there are a few problems which occur to me.

### Tools

While there are good free mapping tools available, they require skills which I do not have and realistically will not be able to develop. However, the NatureSpot Explore All Records tool provides a simple way of generating maps based on the NatureSpot (=iRecord) dataset. The NBN maps include a much bigger dataset than NatureSpot, including all the records from the former Collembola Recording Scheme (approximately 10,000 records covering Great Britain and Ireland for 359 species, collected between 1808-2008). However, there are acknowledged issues with the accuracy of this dataset, so for this reason I am inclined to stick with the contemporary NatureSpot records.

### Coverage

There are two major problems with the coverage of springtail records - geographical and species groups. For a single fieldworker, VC55 is a big patch, and without more boots on the ground it is not going to be possible to get systematic coverage of the whole vice county throughout the seasons. Springtails are likely to remain Cinderella species and I cannot imagine that I would ever be able to attract the public engagement that the Hoverfly Recording Scheme or Butterfly Conservation have done. It is only in recent months that I have become aware of the significance of phenology (seasonality) to Collembola, and this just multiplies the geographic coverage problem. I am not



Above: *Sminthurus viridis* one of the group with globular bodies. Photo: A. Cann.

sure what can be done about these problems, but I am hoping that this is where LES members will be able to help me. I would be happy to receive any specimens of springtails for identification, accompanied by suitable data (date, location and preferably method of collection). While I doubt that many others will devote their lives to springtails, it may be that sizeable collections already exist or are being generated, e.g. as bycatch (particularly from pitfall traps for example). Another issue is my inexperience with certain groups (Poduromorpha in particular), something I am trying to work on. Cute and photogenic though globular springtails may be (see above), I cannot pretend to have generated a representative atlas without better taxonomic coverage.

The geographical distribution of springtails on NatureSpot closely reflects the overall pattern of recording in VC55, with its western bias. I would like to invite LES members who may be able to assist in the collection of a bigger and more comprehensive dataset to contact me (see below). I would be grateful for any assistance in improving our knowledge of this little-studied group.

### Further reading

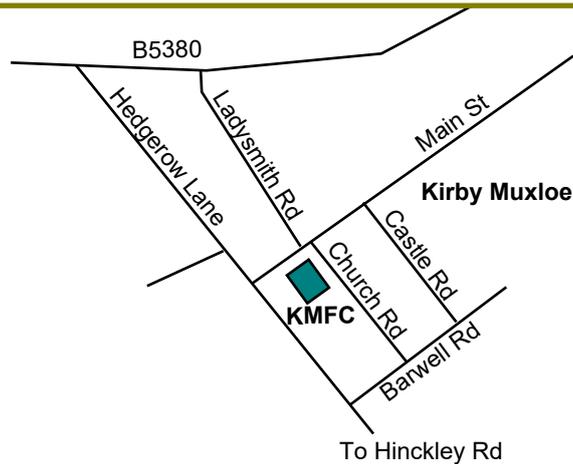
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NatureSpot, "Mind The Gap",  
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Cann, A.J., Springtails of Leicestershire and Rutland,  
<https://collembolla.blogspot.com>

**Alan Cann**  
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## Indoor Meetings Programme



Our venue is Kirby Muxloe Free Church, Main Street, Kirby Muxloe LE9 2AN SK517042. The session starts at 7:30, but most members arrive half an hour earlier for a natter, with tea, coffee and biscuits. Visitors are welcome.

**Thursday 18 October 2018 - Investigating the soil food web, how this relates to soil health and agriculture. Felicity Crotty.** A healthy soil is vital to ensure both high yields and future high yields, but what is healthy soil? In reality only 'living' things can have health, thereby introducing the concept of soil health. Are we (unconsciously?) acknowledging that we regard soil as a living ecosystem and not just an inert base for agriculture. This talk will focus on the inter-linkages within the soil food web, the impact of agriculture on soil biology, the impact soil biology can have on agriculture and how this relates to concepts of soil health.

**Wednesday, 24 October 2018 – Spiders. Lawrence Bee.** This is a joint meeting with Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society, Natural History Section, and will be held at **NEW WALK MUSEUM, LEICESTER**. Free to LES members. Lawrence Bee from Oxfordshire is a naturalist with interests in many areas, in particular invertebrates. He regularly runs identification training courses for various organisations and is particularly known for his expertise with the arachnids. In VC55 we lost our two expert spidermen, John Crocker and Jon Daws, some years ago and it is only recently that Paul Palmer has taken up the mantle. So the visit of Lawrence Bee to our county to talk about spiders is a chance for us to gain some insight into these fascinating invertebrates.

**Thursday 15 November 2018 – Members' Evening.** This is your evening, a chance to share the highlights or disappointments of the entomological year. Bring along any digital images or 35 mm slides plus anything

you want to exhibit. New books or gadgets and your comments on their practicality are also welcome. Please ensure any digital media are virus-checked and If you are bringing 35 mm transparencies please bring your own projector.

**Thursday 13 December 2018 - Members Annual General Meeting.** Our AGM for the first part of the evening, followed by our social 'get together,' catch up with all the latest news on the entomological front whilst taking your fill of mince pies, Christmas cake and chocolate biscuits etc. 'Pop goes yet another button or two.'

**Thursday 17 January 2019 – The Camberwell Beauty in nineteenth century Leicestershire ... and just who was Rev. Armitage's sister? by Adrian Russell, VC55 Lepidoptera County Recorder.** A fascinating look into the historical side of Lepidoptera recording in VC55.

**Thursday 21 February 2019 – Bees and Wasps. Steve Woodward.** Our Newsletter Editor will give us an insight into this complex group of insects. Steve has focused on solitary bees and wasps and with Helen Ikin they have added several new species for VC55.

**Thursday 21 March 2019 – Flies - the next adventure playground. Ray Morris,** our Chairman, who has taken a keen interest in the Diptera. No doubt his enthusiasm will encourage us to take 'note' of these insects.

**Anona Finch**

**Cheers!**



This male Oak Bush-cricket *Meconema thalassinium* was fished out of my glass of cider at Groby, 5 August. Who can blame him in such a hot and dry summer! *Ed.*