

Larger Brachycera Recording Scheme Newsletter 21

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Dipterists
FORUM

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Recording Scheme News

Simon Hayhow

'British Soldierflies and their Allies' continues to receive excellent reviews:

'But what really lifts this book out of the ordinary is the detail of life histories, habits, distribution and behaviour, producing a fascinating insight into the lives of these relatively poorly understood insects' (British Wildlife).

'It is very difficult to fault this book'. 'There is plenty here for anyone to have a go at, and this book looks set to become a classic. Get a copy now and be the first in your street to record a Flecked Snout!' (British Wildlife).

Thanks to the following people who have submitted records to the Scheme - Brian Banks, Laurence Clemons, Dave Dana, Andy Douse, Mike Howe, Mike Paskin, Ivan Perry, John Tubb and Mike Wall since the last newsletter.

In response to my comments on computerisation of records Dave Gibbs has highlighted Mapmate software which is 'very simple to use, yet with a multiplicity of facilities'. This was developed by moth recorders but now has a Diptera checklist, including the Larger Brachycera. How many people are using this for recording Diptera? Further details at www.mapmate.net.

Request for contributions and records

Please send me your:

- a) interesting records (see Dipterists Forum Bulletin No. 51)
- b) records of all common species (also in DFB 51)
- c) news on input to local Biodiversity Action Plans
- d) notes on behaviour and ecology
- e) articles for newsletter

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Recording cards are available from:

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Notes on Asilidae

Copulating pairs of *Machimus atricapillus* (Fallén, 1814)

Andrew Grayson, 56, Piercy End, Kirkbymoorside, York, North Yorkshire, YO62 6DF.

Whilst observing insects on an unimproved meadow beside Howl Beck at Manor Farm, Eddlethorpe, (v.c. 61, S.E.Yorks., NGR 44/767659) close to dusk on 15.8.2001, I came across two copulating pairs of *Machimus atricapillus* (Fallén) on the upper surface of a small plank that was laid upon the grass. This was a very unusual time of day for me to be collecting/observing insects, and the first time that I have found this common species in copula. Perhaps copulation near dusk is not unusual for *M. atricapillus*; further observations are required.

Notes on Tabanidae

Confirmation that *Hybomitra muehlfeldi* (Brauer) (Diptera: Tabanidae) is an Irish species

Andrew Grayson

Grayson (2002) questioned the authenticity of the Irish records of *Hybomitra muehlfeldi* (Brauer); this prompted a rapid, and welcomed, response from Peter Chandler, who confirmed that *H. muehlfeldi* is an Irish species. Peter also kindly furnished me with a copy of Chandler (1975), which divulges full data for six Irish female *H. muehlfeldi* specimens, which

he had examined. These specimens had previously been standing under various names, and were collected on six different dates between 1901 and 1952 inclusive, by either J.W. Yerbury, H.C. Huggins, or J.N. Halbert. Chandler (1975) divulges that the British Museum holds two female *H. muehlfeldi* specimens from Kenmare in South Kerry (H1) and two females from Glengarriff in West Cork (H3); whilst a further two females from Glengarriff are located in the National Museum, Dublin. Chandler (1975) also gives an assessment on additional previously published references to various *Hybomitra* species in Ireland, which probably refer to either *H. muehlfeldi* or *H. montana* (Meigen).

References

- Chandler, P.J. 1975. An account of the Irish species of two-winged flies (Diptera) belonging to the families of Larger Brachycera (Tabanoidea and Asiloidea). Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy Vol. 75, Section B, No. 2. Royal Irish Academy. Dublin.
- Grayson, A. 2002. British Soldierflies and their allies: a few points to note, and minor corrections to the chapter on Tabanidae and one photographic plate. *Larger Brachycera Recording Scheme Newsletter* 20: 9-10.

Necessary corrections to some of my past articles in the Larger Brachycera Recording Scheme Newsletters.

Andrew Grayson

Unfortunately, and inevitably when articles are transcribed, it is not unusual for the occasional spelling mistake or omission to occur in the L. B. R.S. Newsletters. Most of these are obvious and not confusing, but the following few require correction.

In the species account for *Chrysops relictus* (Meigen) in Grayson (1997a), the first line should begin "Females usually attack", not "attach". Also in the same article, *Tabanus maculicornis* Zetterstedt, has "Zetterstedt" in brackets, which is incorrect, and the 4th line under that species should read "The females attacked within a five minute period, and unusually..." etc., not "and usually".

In the species account for *Chrysops relictus* (Meigen) in Grayson (1997b), the first line should begin "Single males were carefully stalked, and then swept..." etc., not "and ten swept". In the species account for *Haematopota crassicornis* (Wahlberg) in the same article, "resting places" should be printed, not "nesting places". Also within the same article, the date for the male *Atylotus plebeius* (Fallén), should be 21.7.1996.

In Grayson (1998), the last line of the first paragraph should read "Grayson (1995) lists ten sites within Yorkshire, from where *H. montana* has been recorded: five are in the Yorkshire Pennines, and five are in the Vale of York area". The editorial alteration to "I had to be content with listing the ten Yorkshire records as five sites in the Yorkshire Pennines and five in the Vale of York area", is wrong, and does not really make sense.

In Grayson (2001), the word "no" was omitted from the first sentence of the second paragraph, which should have read "In localities at which *H. crassicornis* occurs, a single male or group of males usually no more than ten in number" etc. More precisely, it is usual to find between one and five males at rest upon the structures on which they choose to congregate, but unusual to find more than five congregating together. In the same article, part of the 15th line of the second paragraph should read "and groups of males may 'dance' in the sky" etc., not "my 'dance' in the sky". My original decision to refer to congregating areas as 'resting places' is unsatisfactory: congregating areas or congregation sites would have been more appropriate.

References

- Grayson, A. 1997a. Personal notes on attacks by female tabanids. *L.B. R.S. Newsletter* 15: 3-5
- Grayson, A. 1997b. Further notes regarding finding male tabanids. *L. B. R. S. Newsletter* 15: 5-8
- Grayson, A. 1998. The discovery of *Hybomitra montana* (Meigen) (Tabanidae) in the North York Moors. *L. B. R.S. Newsletter* 16: 3.
- Grayson, A. 2001. Notes on the behaviour of males of *Haematopota crassicornis* Wahlberg and *Haematopota pluvialis* (Linnaeus). *L.B.R.S. Newsletter* 19: 2.

A few observations of *Atylotus latistriatus* (Brauer, 1880) (Diptera: Tabanidae)

Andrew Grayson

In Britain, *Atylotus latistriatus* (Brauer) is a nationally rare coastal species that is associated with *Limonium*-dominated saltmarsh, and known from Dorset, Hampshire, Sussex, Kent, Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk (Stubbs & Drake, 2001). It has not been found northwards of Norfolk, which may be its northern limit, but pockets of apparently suitable *Limonium*-dominated saltmarsh also occur in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. I have had little trouble locating adult *A. latistriatus* on well-developed *Limonium*-dominated saltmarshes that I have investigated in Essex (Woodrolfe Creek, Tollesbury Wick Marshes, 52/97-10-; Copthall Saltings, 52/97-14-; Old Hall Creek, 52/957118; Mersea Island, 62/01-14- & 62/01-15-; North Saltmarsh, Fingringhoe Wick, 62/052197) and Hampshire (two sites mentioned below). I consider that the most productive method for locating *A. latistriatus* is to wander out onto the saltmarsh and stealthily observe the ground flora, particularly larger clumps of *Limonium*. *A. latistriatus* are fairly large flies, with the typically distinctive and conspicuous *Atylotus* eyes, and are not particularly difficult to spot when perched on saltmarsh vegetation at sites where they occur. During periods when the tide is out, *A. latistriatus* typically appears to live in loose colonies out on the saltmarsh, where both sexes feed on the flowers of *Limonium*, or rest on saltmarsh vegetation. Except when feeding, they are quite wary, and will readily fly off, even when approached in a stealthy manner.

The following is basic advice, but nevertheless, a necessary warning worthy of repeat: saltmarshes with well-developed dense ground flora are more-or-less safe and easy to walk on, but the muddy creeks and channels that cut through them are treacherous, as are salt-pans. Anyone venturing onto saltmarsh needs to be careful where they tread, and make sure that they return to land before the incoming tide starts to cut them off.

Unlike most tabanids, it is not unusual to find that the wings (of particularly the older females, which probably have a longer life-span than males) are damaged, typically having pieces missing from the hinder part, and often also having salty stains. The damage to the wings probably occurs through repeated flying-off from rest positions amongst saltmarsh vegetation. It is usually rare to find extensive wing-damage in Tabanidae, as most species fly in the open, and avoid flying amongst tight-knit vegetation. *A. latistriatus* colonies are typically on the sea-ward side of coastal embankments, but there appeared to be a small colony on the land-ward side of the embankment at Farlington Marshes (41/68-04-) in Hampshire on 6.7.1995. Attacks on humans by female *A. latistriatus* in search of a blood-meal are not particularly common. I was attacked by a single, quite worn, female whilst walking along the bottom of a dried-up ditch at Milford-on-Sea (40/30-90-), Hampshire on 7.7.1995. I was also attacked by four females within the space of only a few minutes at North Saltmarsh, Fingringhoe Wick (62/052197), Essex on 11.8.1999; they particularly liked to alight upon my black Wellington boots, but of course, were unable to bite through them. Another attack was by a single female on Sandy Heath, Fingringhoe Wick (62/052196) on 22.7.2000. In flight, female *A. latistriatus*, possibly in search of a blood-meal, can be encountered out on the saltmarsh, or patrolling along ditches behind coastal embankments. During cool weather conditions on 25.7.2000, a female was resting on a top rail in a high position on a wooden jetty at Fingringhoe Wick (62/053194).

Reference

Stubbs, A.E. & Drake, (C.) M. 2001. British Soldierflies and their Allies. An illustrated guide to their identification and ecology: covering all flies (Diptera) in the families Acroceridae, Asilidae, Athericidae, Bombyliidae, Rhagionidae, Scenopinidae, Stratiomyidae, Tabanidae, Therevidae, Xylomyidae and Xylophagidae. British Entomological and Natural History Society. Reading.

Slightly derogatory comments in the chapter on Tabanidae in Verrall (1909)

Andrew Grayson

Verrall (1909) is an impressively detailed and scholarly tome, which is often listed in bibliographies, but unfortunately, copies are not readily available nowadays and most modern dipterists, myself included, do not possess a copy. I have long been aware that, tucked away in the reams of text, are a few interesting remarks about the work of some of his contemporaries and predecessors. Verrall, was always very fair with his published comments on the work and opinions of fellow authors, but there are odd occasions where he felt it necessary to make a slightly derogatory comment. These comments could also be regarded as slightly amusing, but are interesting at the very least. The chapter on Tabanidae in Verrall (1909) contains the following thinly-veiled derogatory comments. Note that Pandellé's work is regarded with disdain, and that Verrall makes a discrepancy in the two comments about Pandellé and *Chrysops*.

On *Haematopota bigoti* "Gobert's description is hopelessly inadequate"

On *Atylotus*: "I know however that Osten Sacken did not admit that Brauer had properly interpreted his subgenus, and I know that Bigot had not the most elementary conception of it".

On *Tabanus glaucus*: "Pandellé apparently included both *T. glaucus* and *T. mikii* under his *T. bromius*, and his suggestion that *T. mikii* is a small clear variety of *T. autumnalis* is absurd"

On *Tabanus maculicornis*: "Loew failed to distinguish this species from *T. bromius*, which seems to be very extraordinary"

On *Tabanus glaucopis* and regarding Walker: "It was somewhat absurd to describe the 'Antennae black; first joint testaceous; second dark red; third slender, dark red at the base'".

On *Chrysops*: "Pandellé was of the opinion that these four perfectly distinct species are all varieties of one species!".

On *Chrysops relictata*: "Pandellé's ridiculous statement that *C. caecutiens*, *C. quadrata*, and *C. relictata* are only varieties of one species merely serves to show the superficiality of his work".

Reference

Verrall, G. H. 1909. British Flies. Volume V, Stratiomyidae and succeeding families of the Diptera Brachycera of Great Britain. Gurney & Jackson. London.