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Beetle News

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Editorial

Welcome to the very first edition of "Beetle News".This is an internet publication devoted to British Beetles. It is a public domain publication which can be freely copied and distributed provided no charge is made. However, copyright to all text and photographs remains with the original authors and photographers. If you find Beetle News of interest, please pass it to others.

Beetle News will include any relevant material which is not suitable for publication elsewhere. It is not intended for articles which are more suited to formal journals such as The Coleopterist.

The intention is to publish on a quarterly basis, approximately in March, June, September and December. Beetle News can only continue if sufficient material is submitted to make it worthwhile. Please submit material for the June issue by 21st May.
Richard Wright

Review:
British Scraptiidae. *Handbooks for the identification of British Insects Vol 5 Part 18*. Brian Levey.
Field Studies Council/Royal Entomological Society

This latest volume in the "Handbooks" covers 16 species, 13 of *Anaspis* and 3 of *Scraptia*. It follows the format of other recent volumes in the series, with well-illustrated keys followed by further notes on identification, biology, distribution, habitat and phenology. It is undoubtedly a big improvement on previous works and should make the identification of these sometimes tricky species much easier. The all-important male secondary sexual characters are of course all figured.

13 species are illustrated on 17 plates, including colour variations of some species. One might question the utility of colour photographs of those species which are very similar in general appearance. For some reason the common *Anaspis frontalis* is not shown, while the photograph of *A. costai* does not look very typical. It is possible that the inclusion of these photographs has raised the price which at £7.50 seems rather high for the size of the publication relative to other recent volumes.

There are a few other minor quibbles. For example, several species are described as being adult from May onwards, while in Warwickshire these have been recorded in numbers from as early as 10th April. In spite of these slight reservations, this Handbook will be an essential addition to the libraries of all British coleopterists.
Richard Wright

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Warwickshire Coleoptera – an update

In the years leading up to the publication of 'An Atlas of Warwickshire Beetles' in 2002 and its updated successor, the CD-Rom 'Beetles of Warwickshire' issued in 2008, beetle recording efforts in Warwickshire by the authors, were frantic. Since the publication of the CD-Rom, however, 2008 saw a marked gear change and recording resumed at a much more leisurely rate. Despite the slower pace of fieldwork, three species were added to the Warwickshire list.

The first significant record of the year occurred in May when several examples of *Philonthus atratus* (Gravenhorst) were taken by myself and Richard from poolside gravel next to the River Tame at Middleton Hall NR gravel pits (SP29). This species has only otherwise been found in Warwickshire at Alcester NR where a female was collected off river shingle.

June was the most productive month of the year and a number of significant records were processed. *Silis ruficollis* (Fabricius) was discovered by Mike Bloxham at Park Hall Farm (SP19), the second site in the county for this recent colonist which was first taken at Swift Valley NR. Park Hall Farm also produced the third modern county record of *Aulacobaris lepidii* (Germar) in the same month.

A predicted arrival in our region, *Chrysolina americana* (Linnaeus), made its first reported appearance in a garden at Castle Close, Warwick (SP 26) (coll: Andrea Hartfield) and was later also observed at Malvern Park, Solihull (SP17) in August (noted by Gary Farmer). Further records of this colourful addition to our garden fauna are expected in 2009.

I visited the Radway NR (SP34) in June and took *Dascillus cervinus* (Linnaeus). Many Coleopterists will be familiar with this species in other areas of the UK, but in our region of the Midlands, it appears to be a genuine rarity. This was the first recorded for Warwickshire. On the same date, this nature reserve also yielded the third county record of *Orchesia minor* Walker and the second county record of the colourfully-marked *Zyras haworthi* Stephens. All three species were obtained by sweeping grassland near a hedgerow.

Also in June, by sweeping at Brandon Marsh NR (SP37), I was lucky enough to take a specimen of *Longitarsus rutilus* (Illiger), which I would likely have passed off as *Longitarsus flavicornis* (Stephens) in the net were it not for the fact that it was swept off figwort (*Scrophularia sp*). The record of this specimen, a male, was the first for Warwickshire and along with a record from East Anglia, it represents the most northerly limit of the species' British distribution.

Stratford (SP25), hotspot of the region's recently discovered Stag Beetle, *Lucanus cervus* (Linnaeus) population, produced two further records in 2008. The first of these involved a male which flew into a shop window on June 10th and was picked up off the pavement by a startled passer-by. The second, a female, was found in the grounds of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre on June 17th . Both beetles were passed onto Stratford Butterfly Farm where staff photographed the specimens before releasing them.

Autumn heralded the predictable seasonal influx of records of *Harmonia axyridis* (Pallas) which seems now to be firmly established throughout urban areas of the county. In Coventry City Centre (SP37), hundreds, including many of the pattern variants, were counted on railings bordering the cathedral walkway in October.

On a visit to Sutton Park (SP09) in October, I collected *Agabus affinis* (Paykull) which I netted from a stream edge, an uncharacteristic habitat for this species, but within an area dominated by peat mire and *Sphagnum* bog, which **is** typical habitat for this diving beetle. In another area of the park (SP19) on the same day, *Hydroporus tristis* (Paykull) was taken by puddling *Sphagnum* moss at the edge of small acid-water pools which were produced by a recent incidence of high rainfall. The only other known site for this small diving beetle in Warwickshire, is the excellent Coleshill Pool SSSI.

It was at Sutton Park in February 2009 that I severely broke my ankle. My foot is now intact once again, but with the addition of internal plates and screws and I look forward to putting weight on my right leg again just in time to catch the spring fieldwork season.

Steve Lane

Somerset beetle records wanted

"Beetles of Somerset" was published in 1993 and over the past 15 years no fewer than 175 species have been added to the county list. An updated PDF version of the book is now available for free download at www.coleopterist.org.uk/BeetlesofSomerset-050309.pdf. This includes many new and corrected records, as well as an updated nomenclature but no pretty colour cover (sorry). I am still actively compiling records for the county so if you have beetle records for vice-counties 5 and 6 then please send them by e-mail to andrew.duff@virgin.net. Any format suitable but Worddocument or Excel spreadsheet are preferred.

Andrew Duff, Wells, Somerset.

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Some observations on the orange ladybird
Halyzia 16-guttata (L.)

I have had a casual interest in beetles ever since 1959 when, on a whim, I borrowed from my local library, Linssen's "Beetles of the British Isles", but it is only recently in retirement that my interest has developed. I have joined the excellent Lancashire and Cheshire Entomological Society, and bought a microscope and a first edition of Joy (and paid even more money for Linssen's two volumes). I already had a few of the RES handbooks which I received as school GCE prizes, but they were quite beyond my capabilities at the time and so never used until recently. I have now added Martin Luff's excellent Carabidae handbook and Martin himself has kindly given me much help with Bembidion species. So despite my age, I very low down on the learning curve. Accordingly, I do not know if these observations on orange ladybirds are of any significance, but would welcome feedback.

On 6 March 2007 I went on my first beetle foray to the local woods near my house in Marple, Cheshire. At GR SJ 9400 8941, I counted 35 orange ladybirds on a mature beech tree, 20 on the main trunk and 15 under side branches. Most of the latter were in groups, but most of those on the trunk were singletons and did not appear to favour any particular side of the tree. Using binoculars I could see no ladybirds higher than about 7 metres. These observations have remained valid ever since. I have never seen a cluster of more than 8 ladybirds, and these are always under a side branch and appear to stay constant for weeks, as do some of the singletons. The beetles on the main trunk are mainly singletons with a very few "miniclusters" of 2 or 3. The beetles only occasionally take advantage of the cracks in the bark as they mostly stay fully exposed to the elements and predators. I assume that birds find them unpalatable and I wonder if they are also resistant to insect parasites.

The numbers increased over the next 2 weeks, reaching 70 on 21 March. By the time I got back to the tree in May, they had all gone.

I studied them more comprehensively in the winter of 2007/08. I was unable to visit the tree until 23 November 2007 when I counted 6 ladybirds (4 main trunk/2 under side branches) which had increased to 19 (12/7) by 31 Dec. However, on 6 Jan 2008 I counted 46 (9/37) and on 24 Jan there were 75 (50/25). By 11 Feb there were 91 (51/40) and those numbers were virtually constant for the next month but reduced between 13 and 21 March from 91 to 68 as a result of a loss of about 20 from the side branches. This new level was then maintained (about 40/30) until the 23 April and on my next visit (11 May) they had all dispersed, presumably to breed on sycamore leaves (see below). Incidentally, on the 23 April, I also saw a cream spot ladybird *(Calvia 14-guttata)* on the same tree trunk as the *Halyzia*.

My eyes have become fairly attuned to spotting orange ladybirds, and I have never seen another tree anywhere so well populated with over-wintering specimens. In the winter of 2007/08 there were small numbers of the species on other beech trees within about 50 metres and occasional ones on sycamore, and indeed for a while there were a total of 22 clustered in 3 groups beneath the loose bark of a young sycamore.

The side-branch ladybirds in clusters were in the same locations in 2007/8 as they were in the previous winter, and I am fairly sure that this also applies to some of the singletons. Are they following a scent or is there an even more sophisticated homing mechanism?

These were the questions in my mind last summer and were emphasised by a new discovery.

The "Halyzia beech tree" is on steep slopes of the valley of the River Goyt and 400m from it (GR SJ 9415 8986) is the river's 200 years old Chadkirk Weir (broken up by floods last year). On 21 August I was examining a young alder bush on the bank of the river just below the weir and was excited to find adults and larvae of the alder leaf beetle *(Agelastica alni)*. It was lucky I looked when I did as this bush was swept clean by floods a few days later. My identification was confirmed by Don Stenhouse, the Cheshire beetle recorder. It seems that for the last few years this species has been observed radiating out from the Manchester area, so although this was a new location for it, it was not a total surprise.

However next to this alder was a young sycamore bush under the leaves of which were many *Halyzia* larvae and pupae (fortunately, just above the flood waters). By 18 September many adults had emerged, leaving many empty pupal cases, and there were a number of larvae in what I took to be a pre-pupal stage. By the 28 September the adults had dispersed, but there were now some pupae. There were a few adults on the leaves of nearby mature sycamores.

I wondered whether I had stumbled on the summer breeding ground of the beech tree over-winterers and thought I should have marked them. However, even if this was the case where do the beetles go between autumn leaf-fall and January?

I saw no *Halyzia* on "the" beech tree until 1 November when I observed one walking up the trunk. I saw no more until 30 November when I saw 2 on the main trunk and 2 under a side branch (and one on a nearby oak).

The numbers slowly increased, reaching 12 on 31 December compared with 19 a year earlier. From the previous year's observations, I hoped for a big influx in January, and indeed on 5 January 2009, there was a marginal increase to 14, but then perhaps because of the very cold weather the numbers had dwindled down to 6 by 16 February. Each time I went, another "old friend" had "deserted his post", and I feared that there would soon be none left. However, by 10 March, with the weather somewhat warmer, the numbers had recovered to 15, the most I have seen all winter. Although the normally most populated side branch was down to only 2 beetles, there were 9 on the main trunk and a cluster of 4 under a higher (7m) side branch. Furthermore, I counted a total of 7 on nearby beeches including a triplet.

It will now be interesting to see if the numbers increase in March as they did in March 2007, whether the same weir-side sycamore will again be a breeding focus and whether the same beech tree will be a focus for over-wintering next winter.

Ralph S Atherton

10 March 2009

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Vivarium heat mats, a few suggested uses for the coleopterist

Vivarium Heat mats (fig 1) are intended for use to apply gentle heat to the enclosure of a captive reptile to mimic its natural environment. I have found that the gentle heat they provide can aid the coleopterist with a number of tasks a few of which are listed here. Firstly they can be used to warm a relaxing box, I personally find that if I put the box in the airing cupboard I forget about it until the beetles have gone mouldy, by putting the heat mat on my desk the relaxing box stays close and I don't forget to check on it. Secondly, I use it to speed up drying time on gummed specimens, once the specimen is on the card before I put the pin through the card I move the card and beetle to the heat mat complete with data label and leave to dry. Thirdly I use the heat mat to dry slides I make of larvae/whole mounts and of other groups. Its also good to use to provide gentle heat to KOH in dissection. And finally its also rather good to use for insect rearing. As the heat mats are sold in different sizes (for different reptiles) the size you use is dictated by your workload or bench size, personally I use one that is slightly bigger than a piece of A5 paper this is big enough for approximately one pit fall samples worth of beetles, two relaxing boxes or 10 slides

Andrew Chick 50 Thorneywood Road Long Eaton Nottingham NG10 2DY

Figure 1 a Vivarium heating mat, it simply plugs in to provide gentle heat

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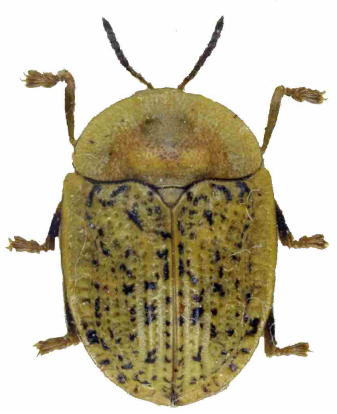
Cassida nebulosa Linnaeus (Chrysomelidae) in flight

Andrew Duff
64 Kings Castle Road, Wells, Somerset BA5 3LT

On the afternoon of 30th August 2008 I was shopping in the centre of Launceston, East Cornwall (SX 332845) when I noticed a beetle flying slowly, low down in a passageway. When it landed I was surprised to see that it was the distinctively marked nationally rare tortoise beetle *Cassida nebulosa*. I can thus confirm that this species is capable of flight (noted as "probable" in Cox, 2007).

Reference

COX, M.L. 2007. *Atlas of the Seed and Leaf Beetles of Britain and Ireland*. Newbury, Berks.: Pisces Publications. 344 pp.



Cassida nebulosa

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News from recording schemes

New Tenebrionoidea recording scheme

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Records are welcomed for the following families:- Mycetophagidae, Tetratomidae, Melandryidae, Mordellidae, Ripiphoridae, Colydidae, Tenebrionidae, Oedemeridae, Meloidae, Mycteridae, Pythidae, Pyrochroidae, Salpingidae, Anthicidae, Aderidae, & Scraptiidae.

The aims of the scheme will be to produce provisional atlases within 2-3 years, and provide maps for the NBN gateway.

Please note that the Ciidae fall within the Tenebrionoidea, and Dr.Glenda Orledge, is collating records.

Change of address for Scirtidae and Stenini recording schemes.

Please send records to *Jonty Denton, Old Hall Place, Hussell Lane, Medstead, Hampshire, GU34 5PF* or by email to JONTYDENTON@AOL.COM.

New Silphidae recording scheme

Richard Wright

I am at present setting up a recording scheme for the Silphidae. Further information about this will appear in the next issue of Beetle News.

One of the aims of this scheme is to involve the wider natural history community in recording beetles, since these large species are easily identified with no more than a hand lens. In addition some species, particularly *Nicrophorus*, are regular in light traps and there is thus potential for many records from this source.

To assist with identification, I am producing a pdf file which will be freely available for download and copying. The first part, dealing with only *Nicrophorus*, forms the final page of this newsletter. The remaining species will be covered in the next issue and the full document will then be made available.

Beetle publications for free download

Richard Wright

There are a number of sites which have useful resources which are out of copyright or have otherwise been offered for free download.

Perhaps the most useful of these is Internet Archive http://www.archive.org/index.php from which 4 of the 5 volumes of Fowler's ***The Coleoptera of the British Islands*** can be obtained. The missing part at present is Vol 2, since downloading the part labelled as Vol 2 will actually give you Vol 4! The plates are of limited use since they are badly yellowed and do not print out well. For printing the text, I recommend downloading the black and white pdf file rather than the colour one as it prints a more readable copy.

There are a number of other (mainly older) classic works on this site, but Fowler is likely to be the most useful to most people.

http://www.faunedefrance.org/BibliothequeVirtuelleNumerique is where you can find a number of out of print volumes in the series Faune de France. Perhaps the most interesting of these are: Vols 59, 62 and 74 which cover the majority of weevils (Vol 52 is not available for download) and 50 on Scolytidae. While somewhat out of date in parts, these are very well illustrated so that even those with little French will find them useful. There are several other older volumes which may be of some interest.

Reitter *Die Käfer des Deutschen Reiches* (1908) can be found at http://www.biolib.de/ . Although superseded by later works, this contains perhaps the best set of coloured plates of any and should be of particular use to relative beginners to give an idea of what a particular species looks like. The plates print out well, provided decent paper is used.

Natural England's site http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ contains a number of interesting research reports in the publications section. Most of these can be downloaded as pdf files, but for some reason others are only available as printed copies, though these can be obtained for free by post. Among these is Derek Lott's R488 *An annotated list of wetland ground beetles (Carabidae) and rove beetles (Staphylindae) found in the British Isles including a literature review of their ecology*.

A very useful report which **is** available as a download is R467 - *The invertebrates of living & decaying timber in Britain and Ireland* by Keith Alexander, while the same author also has R574 - *Revision of the Index of Ecological Continuity as used for saproxylic beetles*. Both of these are essential for anyone with an interest in saproxylic species.

There are many other resources available for download which I shall refer to in future issues.

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Beginner's Guide

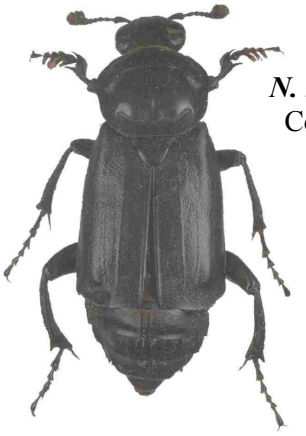
It is intended to produce a page or two in every issue of Beetle News which will help the relative beginner to identify some of the more distinctive species.

Silphidae 1: *Nicrophorus*

This is the first of two parts which can be used to identify the Silphidae (burying and carrion beetles) and is intended to support the new recording scheme for the group. A guide to the remaining species will be produced for the next issue.

Six species of *Nicrophorus* are regularly recorded in the UK, with another occasional species. They have clubbed antennae and the elytra are shortened and truncate, exposing the terminal aqbdominal segments. They are usually found on carrion and also occur regularly in light traps.

Black species



***N. humato*r**
Common

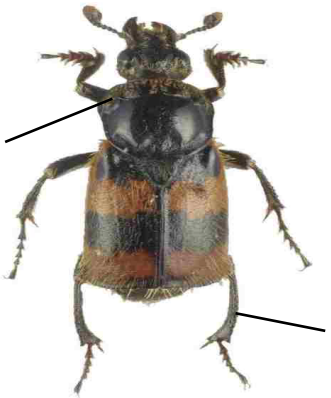
N. germanicus has been recorded very rarely and may not be resident. It is also black, but has the epipleura of the elytra orange (view from side).

Species with orange markings

Club of antenna black (all other species have last three segments orange).
(No yellow hairs on thorax.)

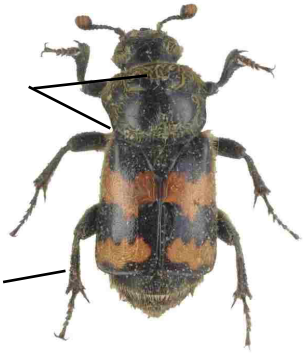
N. vespilloides
Common

Long yellow hairs at front margin of thorax.



Tibia of hind leg bent.
Long yellow hairs only at front of thorax

N. vespillo
Common



Tibia of hind leg straight.
Long yellow hairs over much of thorax

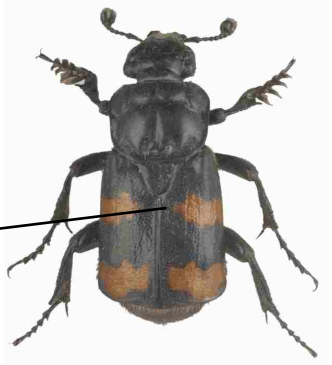
N. vestigator Scarce

Species with no yellow hairs on the thorax and partly orange antennal clubs

Front orange band on elytra more or less continuous.

N. investigator
Quite common

Front orange band on elytra broadly interrupted to form two separate marks



N. interruptus
Local