Illustrated personal highlights from field meetings in 2022

OLIVER WADSWORTH

Having missed my visits to the Wyre when the group's activities were suspended or restricted by Covid considerations, I have been pleased to be able to attend many of the planned field meetings this year. I have been lucky enough to see some interesting critters over the year. What follows are my personal highlights.

This year I have made an effort to get more familiar with weevils. I have always liked photographing them, but until recently identification often seemed rather difficult. Mark Gurney's excellent online guides to the weevils have made a huge difference and his F.S.C. course provided good practice. In May the Wyre Forest Study Group visited Button Oak Meadow where, while looking for Psychid moth cases on fence posts, I found the weevil *Mecinus pascuorum*. Common enough, but new to me and a typically attractive character to photograph. Also basking on a fencepost was a small green and black spider that looked a little unusual. Rosemary Winnall later identified it as *Gibbaranea gibbosa*.

Mecinus pascuorum, Wyre Oliver Wadsworth

Gibbaranea gibbosa, Button Oak Meadow Oliver Wadsworth

Later in the month we visited Longdon Wood. Mid-May is often quite productive for sweeping moths during the day. While investigating a patch of Bluebells in a boggy area I swept one of the tiny *Micropterix* moths that feed on pollen as adults. The common *M. calthella* is easy to find in Buttercup flowers and the flower heads of Pendulous Sedge, but this one looked a little different. On closer inspection it proved to be *M. mansuetella*. As far as I can tell, this species has not been found in Wyre before. It has been recorded from very few sites in Worcestershire, the closest to Wyre is probably Uffmoor Wood.

As it turns out it has not been recorded at all in Shropshire. I assume it has always been there but it is strange that it has never been found in Wyre given the amount of recording that goes on. That said, it is easily overlooked and has often eluded me when looking for it deliberately at known sites. Sometimes it can be found in numbers but often you really have to search for it, sometimes without success. With such short-lived insects there is an element of luck involved as you really have to catch them on the right day. Since the moth found in Wyre was not in good condition when I photographed it, the photo below shows a specimen from Monkwood.

Another find on this trip was the weevil *Dorytomus tortrix*. It is associated with Aspen and was found in an area with a lot of young growth.

Micropterix mansuetella Monkwood 20118 Oliver Wadsworth


Dorytomus tortrix Wyre Oliver Wadsworth

On 1st June we visited Cleobury Wood, a privately owned section of the forest. The undoubted highlight for me was the Narrow-Bordered Bee Hawk-Moth *Hemaris tityus* that Jane Pope found, settled on foliage. The moth posed for a good while allowing the photographers among us to capture good images of it.


Narrow-Bordered Bee Hawk-moth Wyre Oliver Wadsworth

The next meeting was our Moth trapping event at Habberley Valley. A site I have trapped before some years ago and a lovely bit of habitat. We managed to dodge the rain by bringing the date forward to the Friday night and were rewarded with almost perfect conditions for moth trapping.

Over 150 species were recorded over the evening with one or two good records. For me, the unexpected highlight was finding three Great Oak Beauties *Hypomecis roboraria* in the last trap as I was packing up early in the morning. It is much declined in Worcestershire and is only reliably seen in Wyre now. There is always a fair amount of 'by-catch' in moth traps. All manner of flies, wasps and caddis *etc.* turn up. Most of them I ignore as I am too busy with the moths, but I did spot a large shiny weevil that I took away to identify. It was *Lasiorhynchites cavifrons* which is associated with Oaks and reasonably well recorded in the Midlands.


Great Oak Beauty Habberley Valley Oliver Wadsworth


Lasiorhynchites cavifrons Habberley Valley Oliver Wadsworth

A Wednesday visit to Bell Coppice, another privately owned area, reminded me of a previous visit when I was trapping with Dave Grundy. The group were accosted by the landowner's son, who was unconvinced when he misheard our reason for being there as 'moss trapping'. The day turned out to be productive for beetles with two longhorns and two weevils to look at, I also netted the White-strapped Sober moth *Aproaerema larseniella*.


Aproaerema larseniella Bell Coppice Oliver Wadsworth

The next visit was to Pound Green. I had just discovered that it is possible to knock numerous tiny black weevils out of low, flowery vegetation so I collected a few. They are annoyingly difficult to identify with many subtle variations in otherwise similar looking small black beetles that tend to be very active. I managed to determine three species in the end. All common, but new to me and good identification practice. The moth highlight was finding the distinctive feeding signs of the larvae of the Tortrix moth *Lobesia occidentis*. They feed in the new, non-flowering growth of Wood Spurge. The larvae burrow into the stem spinning up the foliage preventing it from opening out like it normally does. The photo shows two Spurge plants, with one normal and one (the lower) inhabited by the caterpillar. The adult moth is rarely seen. The specimen in the photo was bred through from larvae found at Lodge Hill in 2013.

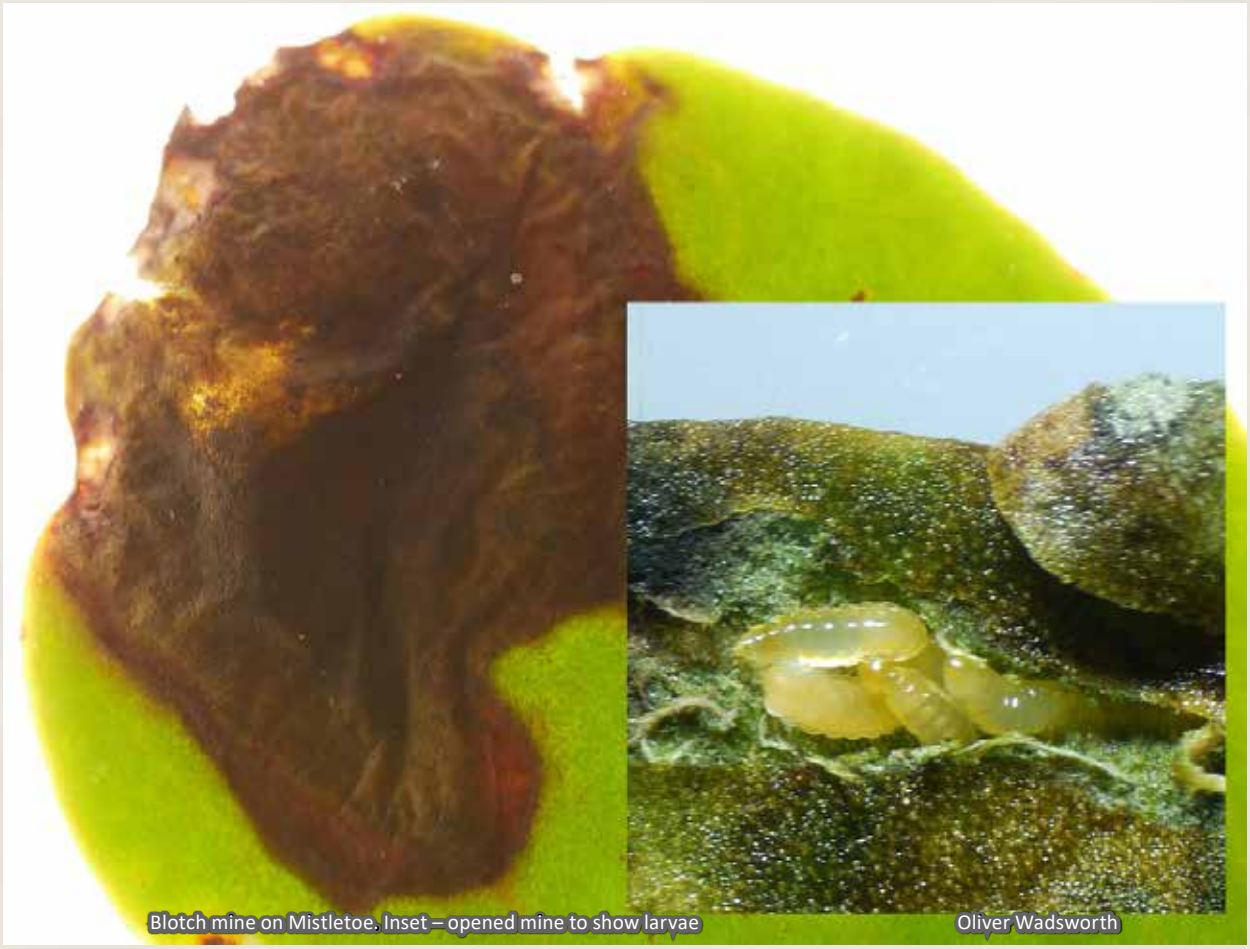
Protapion fulvipes Wyre Oliver Wadsworth

Lobesia occidentis Ex. larva Lodge Hill 2013 Oliver Wadsworth

Wood Spurge spinning by larva of *Lobesia occidentis* Oliver Wadsworth

On the August meeting at Button Oak, I was pleased to find larvae feeding on a patch of Lesser Skullcap *Scutellaria minor*. The two moths, *Prochoreutis myllerana* and *P. sehestediana* both use *Scutellaria sp.* and can occur together on the same plant. They are close relatives of the familiar Nettle Tap moth that can be seen flying over nettle patches throughout the summer. I collected a few larvae to breed though to confirm the species. I know *P. sehestediana* from Trench wood where there is a colony in a damp area at the north end of the wood but I have not seen *P. myllerana*. These moths are multi-brooded and it only took a couple of weeks to produce an adult from the larvae collected. Sadly, for me, it was *P. sehestediana*, but it did give me the chance to photograph it as a pristine fresh imago.

Prochoreutis sehestediana Wyre Oliver Wadsworth



Blotch mine on Mistletoe. Inset – opened mine to show larvae Oliver Wadsworth

My final Wyre visit of the year was to Eyemore Wood where I recorded mostly leafmines. One which remains a mystery at present is a blotch mine on Mistletoe which is not described in any of the usual sources. The larvae are gregarious and look like fly maggots to my eye. I have retained them and hope that I may get an adult at some point which can be sent off for identification. With luck I may be able to provide an update on this next year.