

Interesting Records in 2008

JOHN BINGHAM

FUNGI

2008 was not the most rewarding year for fungi. With a cool damp summer and a drier autumn, fungal fruiting was limited and somewhat erratic in appearance.

Cordyceps gracilis (Grev.) Durieu & Mont.

Cordyceps gracilis grows on the caterpillar larvae of the Lepidoptera, specifically moths belonging to the genus *Hepialis*, the swift moths whose larvae feed on the roots of various grasses. This unusual fungus was first discovered in species-rich grassland by John and Denise Bingham, near Bell Coppice on April 2008. The small fruit bodies are brown and pin-shaped and only a few centimetres high. When carefully exposed the fungus is attached to the caterpillar a few centimetres below ground level. The images show the fruit-body and host.



The fungus inhabits the host larvae with spores that germinate and penetrate into the caterpillar. The fungus infiltrates the circulatory system and eventually kills the larvae before it has chance to develop into a pupa stage. It appears to be very similar to *Cordyceps sinensis* a much-prized species used in Tibet for its medicinal properties.

Although widespread, *C. gracilis* appears rather uncommon with only 100 records in the Fungal Records Data Base (BMS) at the last count. Only one other record appears from Shropshire: Burwarton in 1932. There were no records for Worcestershire, but following a WFSG meeting on which we examined the species at Bell Coppice Rosemary Winnall was able to locate the fungus at Bliss Gate, Worcestershire.



It appears the moth may need species-rich or semi-improved quality grassland with a selection of grasses and nectar herbs to attract it, hence limiting the choice of sites.

Cortinarius humicola (Quél.) Maire, Bull.

Conservation Status: EN / B (Red Data List, ed. 2)

John Bingham recorded this attractive and unusually shaggy species on 20th September 2008 during a Wyre Forest Study Group meeting. It was growing under oaks along the steep slope of Breakneck Bank in Cleobury Woods, Shropshire. The habitat was acidic and mossy with areas of bare soil. Over a dozen specimens were noted growing singly over a small area of a few square metres in extent. The specimen has been sent to Kew and deposited in the herbarium.

This *Cortinarius* species is known from only four sites; England (Buckholt Woods, East Gloucestershire, north-east Yorkshire and Shropshire) and Wales (Monmouthshire).

The previous Shropshire record comes from the late Neville Wilde, who





Cortinarius humicola

© John Bingham

was a keen member of the WFSG. It reads; *Cortinarius humicola*, soil, woodland, 28/10/1984, England, Worcestershire (VC: 37), Wyre Forest, col.: N.A.J. Wilde, id: D.A. Reid, herb.: K(M)143774, FRDBI Record No.: 1240238.

Russula aurea Pers.

Conservation Status: Vulnerable (Red Data List, ed. 1); Near Threatened (Red Data List, ed. 2)

This was recorded on 6 August 2008 on bare soil under hazel on a very steep bare bank at the bottom of Dry Mill Lane, Worcestershire. This red *Russula* has an orange-red cap and yellow gills giving it a striking appearance.

It is rarely reported, but apparently widespread. I have recorded it before in 1980 but not seen it since then. It does appear to be rare in the forest and fruits only very occasionally. Unfortunately the specimen was in poor condition and not photographed.

Cortinarius violaceus (L.) Gray.

This species appeared at a different site in the forest this year, this time at Brand Wood (two locations) where

over a dozen specimens appeared under oak and beech woodland on 27 September 2008, recorded by John & Denise Bingham.

REFERENCES

Legon N W and Henrici. A. Kew's online Checklist of the British & Irish Basidiomycota with P.J. Roberts, B.M. Spooner & R. Watling. Database designed by J.A. Cooper and supported by P.M. Kirk

OTHER RECORDS

Isolepis fluitans (L.) R.Br. Family: Cyperaceae
in Wyre Forest, Worcestershire.

Isolepis (*Eleogiton*) *fluitans*, floating club-rush is not a nationally scarce plant. The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain gives it as locally common (Cheffings & Farrell 2005), but due to agricultural improvement it has seriously declined in the lowlands. It is now very rare in the Midlands and found at only two sites in Worcestershire.

In Wyre Forest the plant has been recorded from the Shropshire portion since 1979 when I discovered a good colony in a pool at Lawley's Coppice. Since then, in 1995, I found another smaller colony in a stream within the Roxel Rocket Motors site. These were reported in Rare Plants of Shropshire. Both sites are still flourishing. The plant has a total of six locations in Shropshire but has suffered serious decline. It does still have a substantial population on Brown Clee Hill. (Locton & Whild 2005).

On a rather wet Wyre Forest Study Group recording day on 21 June 2008 I discovered a new Worcestershire colony around the muddy margins of a small pool in oak woodland, just south of Lodgehill Farm meadows. The site had been completely shaded by rhododendron for many years until 2006 when Natural England opened the area and removed the offending rhododendron. The pool still remains quite sterile but plants are now starting to reappear. Where the *Isolepis* came from, either introduced naturally or from a long dormant seed bank, is debatable, but it's a welcome new site for Worcestershire and hopefully will be protected as it lies within the National Nature Reserve.

REFERENCES

Locton A J and Whild S J (2005). Rare Plants of Shropshire: A Red Data Book of Vascular Plants, 3rd edition. Shropshire Botanical Society.
Cheffings, C. and Farrell, L. (Editors), (2005). The Vascular Plant Red Data List for Great Britain, JNCC

Pyrrhidium sanguineum (L., 1758) (a longhorn beetle)

Conservation Status RDB2

This bright scarlet longhorn beetle is remarkably rare in Britain and known from a small number of important

woodland sites as a saproxylic (deadwood-dependent) indicator species. Typically it is found in sites such as ancient wood pasture and parklands, such as Moccas Park, Herefordshire, where it was first recorded as a British species in 1949 (Harding & Wall 1999).



Pyrrhidium sanguineum

© John Bingham

To discover this species in Wyre Forest is surprising considering the history of coppicing in the forest that would have limited the large deadwood. Perhaps the continuity of woodland on a site is as important as the size or state of the timber. It is possible that the species has recently colonised the area. (Perhaps it was formerly present?)

The first record for Wyre Forest *Pyrrhidium* came unexpectedly from Bredon Hill, Worcestershire. It appeared emerging from a wood pile where the logs had been obtained from Bell Coppice, Wyre Forest. John Meiklejohn reported this amazing discovery to the Study Group in 2006. Despite several people searching the Wyre woodlands no records were made.

Next, in 2008, Cedric Quayle reported beetles coming out of his woodpile at Bowcastle Farm from timber taken from the nearby Shelfheld Coppice. The species was finally found in situ by John Bingham at Sturt Common on 10 May during the late afternoon; it was exploring a recently fallen oak branch (snapped off late winter?) that was bathed in weak sunlight. The beetle was scurrying over the surface and looking at bark crevices and had a tendency to hide in the crevices.

Then it appeared from log piles at Uncllys Farm reported by Linda Iles, again from wood felled at Shelfheld Coppice. Several members of the Study Group descended on the Uncllys woodpile and were rewarded with several specimens of *Pyrrhidium* to photograph.

It appears the species is found across the forest in the larger oak woodland compartments. The numbers emerging from the various woodpiles suggest it is quite common

where it occurs. Why has this rare species suddenly appeared or was it previously missed? It seems difficult to believe that a bright red beetle had gone unnoticed. Perhaps the two hot summers a few years ago prompted a population explosion? We need to keep looking!

REFERENCES

Harding, P. and Wall, T. Ed. (1999). Moccas: an English deer park. English Nature. p.171-186.

Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth (*Hemaris tityus*)

This moth was found on the 24 May 2008, by Denise Bingham at Cleobury Woods about 1 pm flying over species-rich grassland. This was the first record for Wyre Forest since 1961 when it was reported from near Cleobury Mortimer. (Grundy)



Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth

© John Bingham

In Great Britain this species is classified as Nationally Scarce. The Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth occurs on a wide range of unimproved grasslands, including wet, acidic grassland and chalk downland; it is also found on acid bogs, peat cuttings and drier heathland. The larval foodplant is Devil's-bit Scabious. The adult moth requires a supply of nectar, but visits various flower species, especially Lousewort.

Formerly widespread in the UK, the Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth has declined severely and now appears to have retreated to western Britain, especially south-west England from Cornwall to Wiltshire. It was a target species for National Moth Night and Day on 7 June 2008.

There are also scattered records from west Wales, the west coast of Scotland, Northern Ireland, and a single colony on a nature reserve in Yorkshire. The moth occurs locally across the western Palaearctic, with records from virtually every country in Europe.

REFERENCES

Grundy D. 2006. A list of Significant Species of Lepidoptera Recorded in the Wyre Forest. English Nature (unpublished report).

Tipula selene Meigen, 1830 (Tipulidae) a crane fly. RDB3 (rare)

This Tipulid was recorded on 17 May 2008 by Denise Bingham who observed the fly emerging from the pupal case on the base of a mossy covered oak tree in Bell Coppice, Shropshire. Many Study Group members observed and photographed the emerging insect.



Most records come from southern England, predominating in the southwest. Scattered records are from as far north as Oxfordshire and Herefordshire and there are 2 historical records from Shropshire in 1924, one from near Oswestry and the other from Ironbridge (Boardman 2007). This crane fly is found in broad-leaved woodland and has been recorded as requiring deadwood (even small branches) lying on damp soil.

REFERENCES

Falk, S. (1992). A review of the scarce and threatened flies of Great Britain (part 1). Research and Survey in Nature Conservation 39. Nature Conservancy Council.
 Alexander, K. (2002). The invertebrates of living and decaying timber in Britain and Ireland; a provisional annotated checklist. English Nature Research Reports 467.
 Boardman P. 2007. A Provisional Account and Atlas of The Craneflies of Shropshire 2007

Phymatodes testaceus (Linne 1857) the tanbark borer beetle.

This is a nocturnal species rarely seen, but perhaps not uncommon in the forest. This was taken as a pupa from a firewood log pile at Uncllys Farm. Photographed on 26 May 2008.



Coccinella magnifica Redtenbacher, 1843. Scarce 7-spot Ladybird beetle.

Conservation Status - Notable A. (between 16-30 hectads in UK)

The Scarce 7-spot Ladybird (*Coccinella magnifica*) is an obligate associate of wood ants (*Formica rufa*). It feeds upon aphids tended by the ants.

It is a rare insect with most of the known sites occurring in south-east England. In Wyre Forest it appears to be widespread but rather uncommon, although it is probably under-recorded. I have a scattering of records from both the Worcestershire and Shropshire sides of the forest going back to the 1980s.

The best places to look for it are more open woodland and glade edges where scrubby birch grows, the young stems appear to attract aphids and the ants to milk honeydew. Anywhere open with the combination of wood ants and aphids might be worth searching for the Scarce 7-spot.



A more domed 'square-ended' shape can distinguish it from the common 7-spot Ladybird (*C. septempunctata*), with four small white marks on the underside by the middle and hind legs. The 7-spot has only two white spots below the middle legs. If you find any 7-spot ladybird with lots of wood ants there's a good chance you have the Scarce 7-spot, but check carefully! (See Hawkins 2000)

The Scarce 7-spot is rarely recorded far from nests of wood ants. It is not really attacked by ants as it moves around and it appears quite defensive if approached by ants. The 7-spot ladybird appears to avoid wood ant areas.

It is possible that chemical adaptation exists in the scarce 7-spot to overcome potential ant aggression, but it just appears to cope with ant attacks as it feeds on aphids.

This is a really special species to the Wyre Forest and worth recording to find the true distribution and frequency within the forest. Photographs taken on 20 May 2008.

REFERENCE

Hawkins, R.D. (2000) Ladybirds of Surrey. Surrey Wildlife Trust.