

# Wyre Forest Study Group

## Snow Fleas *Boreus hyemalis* (Linnaeus, 1767) (Mecoptera: Boreidae)

ROSEMARY WINNALL

The oak stump lay bathed in autumn sunshine, jewelled with sparkling mosses and lichens. We clustered round and peered down at the details of this landscape in miniature.

It was Jane Scott who spotted the movement of a minute creature in its mossy stump living quarters in Withybed Wood on 2nd December 2009. It hopped easily out of our reach as we tried gently to entice it into a tube for further examination. However, we persevered and once entrapped we were able to examine it in detail. None of us had seen anything like it before and it took a while to place it into its taxonomic group. With the aid of a hand lens we identified a long downwards-pointing conical beak and it reminded us of a Scorpion Fly with no wings. It had a strange elongated process instead of wings that arched across its back and we later found out that this was the male's aid to support the female as she climbed on top of the male during mating.

Then I spotted another little beast amongst the mosses and we realised that we now had a male and female. We carefully borrowed the pair with a little of their substrate to check the identification (Mick Blythe) and to photograph the little creatures (Rosemary Winnall). Then they were returned to their log on the hillside, back to their mossy miniature world.

Snow Fleas are flightless, about than 5mm in length, and are unusual in being active throughout the winter, sometimes even hopping around on top of snow. Both larvae and adults are predatory on insects.

There are no records for the midlands on the NBN Gateway, but this animal is easily overlooked, especially as November and December are the best months to find it. There are not many entomologists roaming the woodland in the winter months, but this record might entice a few more out of winter hibernation!



Snow Flea female, 2nd December 2009 Rosemary Winnall



Snow Flea male, 2nd December 2009 Rosemary Winnall



The Snow Flea on its stump, Withybed Wood, 5th December 2009 Rosemary Winnall



The Snow Flea male showing curved back spines, Withybed Wood, 5th December 2009 Rosemary Winnall



The Snow Flea's mossy oak stump, Withybed Wood, 5th December 2009

Rosemary Winnall