

A Biting Midge problem in Wyre

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Forcipomyia sphagnophila male

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On the 6 July 2015 a male biting midge of the genus *Forcipomyia* was collected from a vane trap in an oak tree in the Wyre Forest at SO746777 and another from an emergence trap on the Mount Pleasant farm dung heap at SO768751 on 12 October 2015. Both were identified as *Forcipomyia sphagnophila* Kieffer, 1925 using the diagrams of the distinctive male genitalia in John Boorman's unpublished manual on the Ceratopogonidae.

The genitalia diagram was a good match to the specimens but the description was not. Boorman described *F. sphagnophila* as "a large, very pale species with unmarked pale legs". Only the description of the legs matched the two Wyre specimens which had a brown body with a darker brown scutum.

An earlier paper by Remm (1962a) (in Russian and Estonian but with an English translation of the actual key) described *F. sphagnophila* as having a pale body, a dull greyish scutum, yellow legs and yellow postpronotal lobes.

In view of these discrepancies it was decided to collect more specimens from Wyre. On 2 December 2015, 5 male *Forcipomyia* were netted during a Study Group walk along Dowles Brook starting at the experimental pool. All were *F. sphagnophila* from the male genitalia and their colouring matched the earlier specimens.

The late date also supported the identification as *F. sphagnophila* as Boorman described the species as "both one of the first and last species of the year". It was quite possible therefore that Boorman's large pale specimens were a spring form and the dark brown specimens an autumn form. On 3 February 2016 7 males and 7 females were collected from a low bush in Longdon (SO75587664), and on the same day 1 male and 4 females were collected from SO753768 and 4 males and 8 females from SO747764. The latter two locations were areas of open heather. No attempt was made to identify the females. The males were all *F. sphagnophila* and were indistinguishable in colour and the form of the genitalia from the autumn specimens.

John Boorman explains in the introduction to his manual that the museum taxonomists in the earlier years were working predominantly with pin mounted specimens and these were very prone to fade during storage. It seems therefore a good working hypothesis that the brown Wyre specimens are the normal fresh form of *F. sphagnophila*, at least in the Wyre Forest.

Patrycja Dominiak has very kindly confirmed the dung heap specimen as *F. sphagnophila* from a photomicrograph of the male genitalia.

The biting midges of the genus *Forcipomyia* do not suck the blood of mammals such as ourselves, at least not in Europe, but are considered to feed on the blood of invertebrates such as other insects or spiders. The larvae of *Forcipomyia* species may be found in colonies beneath the loose bark of fallen tree branches, probably feeding on microfungi, and Wirth (1951) records the larvae of *F. sphagnophila* (under the name of *F. solonensis*) from such an environment.

References

- Boorman, J. The British Ceratopogonidae. Unpublished MS.
 Remm, H. (1962a) [A survey of the species of the genus *Forcipomyia* Meigen (Diptera, Heleidae) from Estonia]. Eesti NSV Teaduste Akadeemia Juures Asuva Loodusuurijatte Seltsi Aastaraamat 54: 165-195 (in Russian, summary in Estonian, English translation of the key.)



F. sphagnophila male genitalia M. Blythe



F. sphagnophila aedeagus area

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