

Wyre Forest Study Group

Caryocolum juncella (Lepidoptera: Gelechiidae) still present in the Wyre Forest

OLIVER WADSWORTH AND TONY SIMPSON



Hatched *Caryocolum juncella*

Oliver Wadsworth

Caryocolum juncella (Douglas, 1851) is a rare moth species in the UK with few recent records.

On 27/4/1994 Tony Simpson and Mike Harper caught two imagines flying in afternoon sunshine at a meadow behind Lodge Hill Farm in the Wyre Forest. This species overwinters as an adult, flying again in the spring. At that time the life history of this species was unknown so they returned on 21/5/1994 and found larvae feeding in spun shoots of Lesser Stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* which was growing on the tops of the many ant hills in the meadow. Imagines were bred. (Simpson, A.N.B., 1996. Entomologist's Rec. J. Var. 108: 145-146).

Since then the moth was encountered once more on at light in August 2000, on the western edge of the Forest near Park House.

Recent attempts to find the moth in the spring, either at light or flying during the day, have been unsuccessful so this year a concerted effort was made to find areas in the forest where the food plant still grows. Tony could find no Lesser Stitchwort in the original meadow behind Lodge Hill. The tops of the ant hills were severely grazed and left largely bare. On 1/6/2016 Tony and Oliver joined other members of the Wyre Forest Study Group on a visit to the Park House site. This was a little more encouraging in that the food plant was present, albeit in very low density. We also made a visit to a private meadow just outside the forest which had an abundance of Lesser Stitchwort but we could find nothing feeding at either site. Finally we tried the meadow in front of Lodge Hill Farm. The plant was found in small clumps on the tops of ant hills and a couple of likely looking spun stems were found.

Examining the spinings under magnification confirmed that they were inhabited by very small larvae. Larvae were also found on other stems collected more or less at random, there being little or no outward sign of occupation. Leaving this material in boxes on clean paper for a few days, the larvae revealed themselves by the small piles of frass left below inhabited flowers and leaves. Tony and Mike described the larvae they found in 1994 as 'apple green' in colour. Initially the larvae found this year were pale cream, but they quickly darkened into a convincing apple green as they matured over the next two or three weeks. Once full fed they pupated in tissue. The first imagines emerged on 29th June.

Nationally, *Caryocolum juncella* is classed as pRDB 3. Recent records are from the Highlands of Scotland and North Wales. It is therefore very good to know that the Worcestershire colony is still present.



Lesser Stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* in meadow, Bliss Gate, 3 June 2016

Rosemary Winnall

Wyre Forest Study Group

