

## Clearwing Moths of Greater Wyre

TONY SIMPSON



White-barred Clearwing male to pheromone, Wyre Forest

Rosemary Winnall

The Clearwing Moths, Family Sesiidae, are a classical example of mimicry. They are day-flying insects who have come to resemble, sometimes to a remarkable degree, various hymenoptera. This is thought to give them protection, particularly against avian predators. They resemble wasps not only in appearance but also in their flight, movement and behaviour.

They all feed internally as larvae either in the substance of living wood, under the bark of living trees and shrubs, or in the rootstock and lower stems of some herbaceous plants. Some of the larger wood feeding species take two or three years to reach maturity.

They prepare for their emergence as adults by making an easily breakable cap of thin bark at the end of the feeding tunnel.

They are usually very difficult to find as imagines or larvae and many seemed to be rare or uncommon. In recent years commercially available pheromones that attract the males have made it much easier to find and record these moths, and some have been found to be quite widespread and fairly common. Choose the correct lure for the species you are after and hang them in small muslin bags in sunshine and be prepared to net any possible small insects flying close to the lure. Clearwings sometimes settle on nearby vegetation and will often only stay around for a short time. However they can hover around the lure or even settle on it if you are lucky. Sunshine or at least bright hot conditions are essential. Usually they come quickly and if nothing happens after fifteen minutes move on and try another spot. Most fly in June and early July, earlier or later depending on the summer weather.

Eight species have been found in and around the Wyre Forest.



Hornet Clearwing female

Rosemary Winnall



Lunar Hornet Moth female

Oliver Wadsworth



Hornet Moth emergence holes

Rosemary Winnall

There are two large Hornet mimics. The Hornet Moth *Sesia apiformis* feeds in the roots and lower trunk of large Poplars; I have found feeding signs in Black, Hybrid, White, Grey and Lombardy Poplars preferring trees with sun exposed trunks, often those in municipal parks and urban areas. When about to pupate the larvae make a cocoon of chewed wood fragments just under the bark of the tree. Old emergence holes are easy to find often in large numbers and moths can be seen on the trunks in the early morning after emergence at the end of June or early July. Rosemary Winnall found evidence of this species in a park by the River Severn in Bewdley in 2017.

The Lunar Hornet Moth *Sesia bembeciformis* is rarely seen as an imago but larval tunnels are widespread in woodland, including Wyre Forest, in cut trunks and stems of Goat Willow *Salix caprea*. Moths can be bred from offcuts containing larval tunnels. This species does not make a cocoon, and pupae are mobile in their tunnel which helps no doubt to evade predation by Great Spotted Woodpeckers. There is no effective pheromone at present.



Hornet Moth pupal case in poplar

Rosemary Winnall



White-barred Clearwing male

Rosemary Winnall

Wyre Forest has been known for many years as a site for the very local White-barred Clearwing *Synanthedon spheciformis*. This moth was mentioned by Norman Hickin in his book 'Forest Refreshed'. It comes readily to pheromone lures especially along Dowles Brook near its foodplants, Alder and birch. When coppicing small and regenerating birch and Alders during conservation work in the winter, old larval borings and emergence holes are often found in the Forest.



White-barred Clearwing emergence holes

Rosemary Winnall

The commonest Clearwing in the Forest is the Yellow-legged Clearwing *Synanthedon vespiformis* whose larvae feed mainly under the bark of oaks, and can most easily be found feeding under the cambium in eighteen month old cut stumps. Frass can be seen in May extruded onto the surface of the stump and if bark is chipped off, larvae, and later pupae, can be found. Vacated pupae are also often visible protruding around burrs on oak trunks. Sometimes other trees are used, in particular Sweet Chestnut. They come to pheromone lures often in large numbers and this and the previous species can also sometimes be found flying in sunshine in the Forest.

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Yellow-legged Clearwing male

Rosemary Winnall

Around Apple trees in Lodgehill Farm orchard and elsewhere in the forest the Red-belted Clearwing *Synanthedon myopaeformis* has been attracted to pheromone lures. This otherwise uncommonly found species turns out to be fairly common and widespread in the county. It is also said to feed in other rosaceous trees such as Hawthorn.



Red-belted Clearwing male

Oliver Wadsworth

The Currant Clearwing *Synanthedon tipuliformis* has been seen coming to lures at Hopley's Fruit Farm and old emergence holes in Black Currant have been found in the garden at Newalls. Old feeding signs can be found in the twigs but tenanted ones are much harder to find. It seems to especially favour Black Currant but has been attracted to lures around Red Currant as well.



Currant Clearwing

John Bingham

Pheromone lures have also disclosed the presence of the very beautiful little Red-tipped Clearwing *Synanthedon formicaeformis* along the Severn, especially near to Osier bushes *Salix viminalis*, but it also feeds in other Willow and Sallow species. It has been seen at lures along the Rivers Avon and Teme and in Tiddesley Wood. I have never managed to find larvae of this species even where it is known to be present.



Red-tipped Clearwing male

Oliver Wadsworth

There are at present no records in the Wyre area of the Six-belted Clearwing *Bembecia ichneumoniformis* which is quite common in Worcestershire. It feeds in the rootstock of Bird's-Foot Trefoil and occurs in open grassland often even on small roadside verges with plenty of the foodplant. I am sure it will be found in such areas around Wyre and can be swept from herbage on sunny mornings and early afternoons and comes readily to its pheromone lure.

Lastly the most uncommon species of Clearwing in the Forest, or possibly the most difficult to find, is the Large Red-belted Clearwing *Synanthedon culiciformis* which is a birch feeder preferring cut sun-exposed stumps. It

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Red-belted Clearwing male

Oliver Wadsworth

was bred from a cut stump in 1991 from near Lodgehill Farm and then not seen until Brett Westwood saw one in the Shropshire part of the Forest in 2016, and then two came to Gavin and Francis Peplow's pheromone lures in 2017. Care needs to be taken with identification as the smaller Red-belted Clearwing also can come to the same lure. It emerges with the first warm sunny



Large Red-belted Clearwing

Francis Peplow

weather in May and seems to have a short flight period and is, I suspect, often missed. Possibly it also comes less readily to pheromone lures when the temperature is frequently not very warm early in the season.



Six-belted Clearwing

Kevin McGee