

Micrommata virescens Clerck, 1757 (Aranaea)

JOHN BINGHAM

Spiders tend to be under-recorded from Wyre Forest although with a range of suitable habitats, especially the grassland and heathy woodland, the forest area should be suitable. To date we have about 170 species of spiders and harvestmen recorded, thanks mainly due to Mike Taylor and John Partridge. One species does stand out as being special, perhaps even iconic to the Wyre Forest, *Micrommata virescens*, (the Green Huntsman Spider). It's not a rare species, being widely scattered over most of England except the far north, but it is strongly associated with ancient semi-natural woodland. Locally it is quite uncommon with just a scattering of records in Worcestershire. In Shropshire it is only found from the Wyre Forest. There are 12 recorded tetrads in Wyre Forest and no doubt we could fill in any remaining gaps, possibly making Wyre the best site in the Midlands to see this spider. The species appears to be declining in Britain, possibly because it is so strongly linked to woodland habitats and needs a well wooded landscape.



Micrommata virescens, young male John Bingham

In Wyre Forest the spider is common in the oak woodlands, sometimes damp areas, but also on dry sites with Heather or Bilberry. Anywhere with good ground vegetation, low bushes or scrub coppice. Spiders normally sit head down waiting for passing prey to appear then pounce on it. On most of our WFSG field meetings held during the summer months we find a specimen or two to admire.

The species is sexually dimorphic, the female is large (12-15mm) and a vivid lime green in colour with some



Micrommata virescens, pale female, Ribbesford John Bingham

pale yellow on the abdomen and the legs a darker green (see photo left and front cover). It is found from April to October, peaking in high summer. The male is smaller (8-10mm), green but with a very distinctive red and yellow striped abdomen after the final moult (see photo below). Males tends to occur in spring from May to June and are less commonly seen than females. We even have a slight colour form of the female with a lighter green carapace and yellowish-green abdomen, only seen to date in Ribbesford Woods (see photo above).

REFERENCES/READING

Bristowe W.S. 1958. The World of Spiders. London: Collins New Naturalist.

Jones, D. 1989. A guide to spiders of Britain and Northern Europe. London: Hamlyn

Spider and Harvestman Recording Scheme website ; <http://srs.britishtspiders.org.uk/portal.php/p/summary/s/Micrommata%20virescens>



Micrommata virescens, male John Bingham