

Spider Days! Birchen Park

NICKI FARMER

This meeting on Wednesday 4 June 2014 was led by spider experts Nigel Cane-Honeysett (Shropshire Spider recorder), Dr Richard Burkmar (Biodiversity Project Officer, Field Studies Council) and John Partridge (Worcestershire Spider Recorder), and 6 other people attended. The purpose of this meeting was to site spider traps in veteran oak trees in the hope of finding the rare Midas Tree-weaver Spider *Midia midas*. This tiny spider, just 2mm. in length is a UK BAP species and has RDB2 status. There are very few records for the UK and just two since 1992, but it might be overlooked. It is noted as being associated with veteran trees, living in bird nests and squirrel dreys, and less frequently in accumulated litter in tree holes.

Nigel explained that the traps needed to be positioned and left for a month and he went on to show the traps he had made and describe the methods he used. He had converted cheap slug traps by using oasis, and soaking these with water and propylene glycol to preserve the spiders caught. These were to be placed in crooks of tree branches alongside bunches of twigs tied together with cord. He had black plastic bags, some lined with bubble wrap, and these were to be bandaged round larger branches (see photograph). Nigel demonstrated his ingenious Spy Pot used to hold spiders still for checking identification features without the need to kill the specimen (see photograph). Nigel used a powerful hand lens with inbuilt light, normally sold for checking currency. John Partridge demonstrated 'hoovering' the bark to suck up any creatures hiding there - he spends more time hoovering than me! (see photograph)

The traps were put in place on a number of trees during which the hardy group braved the rainy conditions, seeking cover from umbrellas and tree canopies. In spite of this a Willow Warbler and a Song Thrush



Nigel Cane-Honeysett with Spy Pot

Rosemary Winnall

serenaded us and Blackbirds sounded their alarm calls as we passed. The first spider found was a female guarding its distinctive spiky eggsac on the underside of an oak leaf which was identified as *Paidescura pallens* (see photograph). The experts sorted the contents of the 'vacuum cleaner' and leaf litter at intervals. The majority of spiders found were very small and were retained for identification at a later date.

Some of the group were introduced to the separate male and female plants of Red Campion *Silene dioica* and the wonderful aroma of Hedge Woundwort *Stachys sylvatica* growing alongside the woodland ride. The meeting finished early at 1:30pm and a date was set to check the traps on 28th June 2014.

On the return visit any hope of improved weather was dashed as a storm hit whilst driving through Kidderminster, so once again we had a wet start to the day. Brett Westwood made an exciting discovery of the rare Barberry, *Berberis vulgaris* in the hedge near the gate into the wood.



Paidescura pallens female with egg case on underside of oak leaf, Birchen Park, 28 June 2014

Rosemary Winnall

Wyre Forest Study Group

Nigel explained what he was going to do with the traps and that he would have to take all of the specimens back to examine the catch. So we would have to be patient to find out if we had been lucky in finding the spider *Midia midas*.

A small adult male dark money spider type was found under the plastic trap on the second tree and also went to be identified by Nigel.

An interesting video was recorded of a ladder being assembled by many of the group interspersed with comments from Brett amongst others....to be aired at the Christmas indoor meeting!

A Chiff Chaff sang to us in spite of the rain. Then much to our delight the sun showed its face after lunch, and with it came more birds including a Spotted Flycatcher, Garden Warbler and Buzzard.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent looking at the assortment of creatures that came out with the sun. To round off our day the highlights were a beetle, *Elaphrus cupreus* on the shore of the stream, in which Palmate Newts *Lissotriton helveticus* swam and a Water Scorpion *Ranatra chinensis* was spotted, and 3 species of figwort weevils *Cionus alauda*, *hortulanus* and *tuberculosis* found on the many figwort plants on the bank of the stream.

The question many of you will be asking is did we find our target spider? We are still waiting to hear!



Richard Burkmar siting traps

Nicki Farmer



John Partidge sampling

Rosemary Winnall



From left: Frances Finch, Nigel Cane-Honeysett, John Cox, Rosemary Winnall, Roy Finch, ?, Mick Blythe

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