



Wyre Forest Study Group

WORCESTERSHIRE ENTOMOLOGY DAY – 29 OCTOBER 2005

Geoff Trevis

The outstanding success of the first Entomology Day in 2004 encouraged the Study Group committee to continue what it hopes will become a regular feature each year and to arrange another event in 2005. The support in 2004 meant that accommodation at the Wyre Forest Education Centre was filled to capacity and in anticipation of a similar response this year the venue was moved to the excellent facilities at Heightington Village Hall. This proved a wise choice as there was ample room for talks, displays and circulation space for the all important informal discussions where information and ideas could be exchanged. Attendance was up on last year with 32 registered participants in addition to the speakers.

I was very pleased to be asked to co-ordinate the organisation of the event but its success depended on the active support of the committee and to the expert speakers who provided the core of the day's activities. My thanks go to all concerned.

Morning Session

Woodland Structure and Insects (Mike Edwards)

The focus for the day was the insects of woodlands and Mike Edwards provided a challenging insight into habitat requirements needed for a rich invertebrate fauna. The message we must take on board is that the traditional coppice with standards woodland, whilst being floristically rich and providing a visual delight in spring, does not contain the variety of niches and microhabitats to encourage high invertebrate diversity. Indeed, in this and most other woodlands the highest diversity is likely to be found not in the wood itself but at the woodland edge where the trees give way to more open habitats. Here the sun's warmth will suit many species and the habitat structure will range from fully grown trees through shrubs and hedges to field margins containing, hopefully, the wild flowers required by nectar and pollen feeding insects. With luck some ancient and possibly dead trees will also be present to provide for saproxylic organisms.

Within the wood itself we should also be seeking to encourage a wide variety of habitats. Older trees will support the usual leaf eating species, gall formers, sap suckers, honeydew feeders and their parasites and predators. The trunks may be infected with fungi giving accommodation for fungus feeders and epiphytes on the bark will support their own special fauna. Such trees are likely to have dead and decaying wood, rot holes, sap runs and broken surfaces where branches have fallen, all of which add to the invertebrate diversity. Fallen dead wood also supports its own suite of organisms and excessive tidiness is to be deprecated. Nonetheless, a wide age range of tree and shrub species within the wood is necessary for continuity and for insects requiring the younger growth. Open spaces between trees and along rides provide a further range of habitats for species that eat herbs and grasses or burrow in the soil to feed, nest or pupate or to predate the species that do so. Bare soil around the base of trees and warm banks along rides are of particular importance.

Mike clearly demonstrated that woodland management is taking a new direction and coming of age. Given the opportunity a wood will support a huge range of insects from tiny springtails through beetles and flies to the largest wood wasps and is not to be considered as a habitat but rather as a complex mosaic of interrelated habitats. Perhaps the thinking on wilderness areas which is currently in vogue will permit some of our woodlands to regain something of their potential diversity.

Some Hoverflies of Wyre Forest and Other Woodlands (Nigel Jones)

Since the publication of the second edition of "British Hoverflies" by Alan Stubbs and Steven Falk there has been a resurgence of interest in these attractive and fascinating insects and we were very pleased that Nigel was able to accept an invitation to speak at our meeting. He gave a most informative introduction to the group followed by a summary of species likely to be encountered in woodlands, illustrated by photographs of outstanding quality. His précis of the talk follows.

Introduction

Many hoverflies encountered in parks, gardens and other non woodland habitats are considered to be woodland species. The conditions in parks and gardens, with scattered trees, bushes, flowers, leaf litter etc. replicate important woodland features that hoverflies use in larval and adult stages. Thus, many of the species that will be introduced today may be familiar garden hoverflies. None-the-less, there are a good number of woodland specialists that rarely occur outside classic woodland and old parkland with ancient tree habitat.



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Variety of Hoverflies

Hoverflies are an exciting family of insects to study. They range from tiny black flies to large and spectacular bumble bee mimics. In between these extremes are a wide variety of forms, including the classic yellow and black wasp mimics and honey bee mimics.

Distinguishing Hoverflies

Hoverflies are distinctive insects. Many have a readily recognisable “jizz”, arising from their hovering, swift darting flight, shiny or hairy bodies and large eyes. The easiest way to distinguish a hoverfly for certain is to look for the presence of a false wing edge, formed by the outer edges of two of the wing cells. Also, hoverflies have an area of hardened wing membrane that looks like a vein and is known as the vena spuria.

Larval Stages

The larval stages of hoverflies occupy an interesting range of mediums. These include aphid eating larvae – above and below ground, feeding in plant stem bases, in fungi, in bulbs, in wasp, ant and bumblebee nests, in decaying matter in ditches, ponds, farmyards, compost heaps; in trees - in rot holes, rotting roots, rotting heartwood, sap runs and under bark.

Sub Family Syrphinae

The Syrphinae is a large sub family. These include the familiar yellow and black “gardeners friends” so often quoted in popular gardening literature. All feed on aphids, or in a few cases, caterpillars in their larval stages.

Baccha elongata – an extraordinarily narrow and long bodied fly. Flies in spring and is one of the few hoverflies regularly found in the dappled shade of closed woodland.

Platycheirus albimanus – one of our commonest species. In gardens and anywhere else. Every woodland will have this species! This is one of the silver spotted *Platycheirus* flies. Most are yellow/orange spotted.

Platycheirus manicatus - One of the yellow/orange marked *Platycheirus*. *Platycheirus* is a large genus, with at least 22 species in the UK. Some are difficult to identify to species level. There are a number of species from this genus that are regularly encountered in woodlands. *P. manicatus* is a common hoverfly that prefers habitat with scattered trees and bushes.

Paragus haemorrhous – one of our tiniest hoverflies and a specialist of bare ground. Often encountered along well worn, sunny rides in the Wyre Forest.

Episyrphus balteatus – the Marmalade Fly. This is one of the most ubiquitous of hoverflies. It has very distinctive double yellow bands on the abdomen. When large migrations occur, such as in 2004, there can be enormous numbers of this fly on the wing. You can often find 10- 20 specimens on a single umbellifer flowerhead! Occurs anywhere, including woodlands.

Syrphus species – there are four species known from the UK. Three are very common (*S. ribesii*, *S. torvus* and *S. vitripennis*) and can often be seen (and heard) resting on tree leaves making a high pitched buzzing noise as they vibrate their wings. This is the classic hoverfly illustrated in just about all general books on insects! Abdomen is quite distinctive with yellow moustache shaped bands.

Eupeodes corollae and *Eupeodes luniger* - two very common members of a genus containing some eleven UK species. Patterning on the abdomen is black with broad yellow spots. A very uncommon species, *E. nitens* has been recorded from the Wyre Forest.

Dasysyrphus albostrigatus – a lovely brightly marked hoverfly. Lemon yellow chevron marks contrasting with a black background and two pale stripes on a dark thorax make this an easy hoverfly to identify. Quite common in woodlands and gardens. Expect to find it in most, if not all Worcestershire woodlands.

Dasysyrphus tricinctus – another easily identified hoverfly. Has three bright yellow bands on the thorax that recede in width from front to back. A common, but never abundant fly. Most woodlands will harbour a few specimens. *Dasysyrphus* larvae appear to feed on aphids in trees.

Chrysotoxum arcuatum – *Chrysotoxum* are amongst our most striking looking hoverflies, with their bright lemon yellow markings on a dark background, stout build and elongated antenna. They are excellent wasp mimics, particularly in flight. The larvae of all species appear to favour below ground aphids, with a suspected association with ant nests in some species. *C. arcuatum* is a northern hoverfly and shares an interesting mutually exclusive UK distribution with *C. cautum*. Their ranges more or less meet, but do not appear to overlap in the north west Midlands. *Chrysotoxum* are insects of open habitat, often found at woodland edges. Other species likely to be encountered in Worcestershire are *C. festivum* and *C. bicinctum*.

Didea fasciata – *Didea* are a distinctive, wide and somewhat flattened bodied genus of black and yellow flies. *D. fasciata* is the most frequent of a rather uncommon genus. Even this species is only occasionally seen and has a strong association with old woodlands. Surprisingly though, the present speaker found *D. fasciata* in his Shrewsbury suburban garden in 2003 and 2004. On both occasions feeding on fennel flowers.



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Xanthogramma pedissequum - A very handsome hoverfly with bright lemon yellow markings on a very dark background, and quite dark wings. This uncommon fly is associated in its larval stage with subterranean aphids. It is never abundant, but can be found in many woodland and garden situations.

Epistrophe eligans - A true harbinger of spring. When the first really warm days of spring occur in April and early May, this fly can nearly always be seen hovering in mid air. *E. eligans* heralds the start of the hoverfly season, so it is always a very welcome sight, with its shiny brassy thorax sparkling in the sun. Woodland rides are a classic place to find this common hoverfly.

Leucozona lucorum - Along with *E. eligans* this fly is one of the welcome signs that spring has arrived and that the variety of hoverflies will soon increase. An attractive species, very unlike the other members of the Syrphinae sub family, with its ginger haired thorax and striking wide white band on a dark thorax. A common woodland hoverfly that enjoys dappled shade more than many other hoverflies.

Leucozona laternaria and *Leucozona glauca* - two relatives of the previous fly, but quite different in appearance and flight season. Both flies have pale blue markings on their abdomen, making them instantly recognisable as one of only two species of hoverfly with blue colouration. These two flies can be separated by the colour of their scutellums - yellowish in *L. glauca* and dark in *L. laternaria*. Both these flies are strongly associated with woodland edges and the flowers of Wild Angelica. Most Worcestershire woodlands should hold populations. Look out for them in July and August on Angelica flowers.

Sub Family Milesiinae

Chrysogaster solstitialis - whilst looking on Angelica flowers for hoverflies, you will often come across a small dark hoverfly with red eyes. This will be *C. solstitialis*, which is part of the second sub family of the Syrphidae - the Milesiinae. Nearly all of the members of this sub family do not feed on aphids, but utilise a range of other larval feeding mediums. All the remaining flies in this presentation are members of this second sub family. *Chrysogaster* is a common fly of damp situations and is often frequent along damp woodland rides.

Cheilosia illustrata - Cheilosia is the largest genus of UK hoverflies, with at least 37 species. Many are black and rather undistinguished flies. Others are hairy to varying degrees. *C. illustrata* is one of the most commonly encountered species, being common and quite a large hoverfly, with a hairy bee-like appearance. All Cheilosia feed as larvae in the bases of plant stems, plant leaves and in fungi. *C. illustrata* occurs in many situations, but can often be found in damp woodlands on umbellifer flowers.

Cheilosia pagana and *Cheilosia variabilis* - Among the many rather indistinguishable black Cheilosias is a fairly easily identified fly, *C. pagana*, with conspicuous orange antenna, particularly so in the female. *C. fraternus* is more characteristic of the genus with its overall dark and indistinct appearance. With practice and a microscope though, many Cheilosia can be identified quite easily. Both these species are commonly met with in woodlands.

Cheilosia variabilis - with practice one can identify this Cheilosia fairly readily in the field. It is a fairly large fly that usually holds its long wings at an angle, making it appear rather delta-winged. *C. variabilis* is one of the commonest members of the genus. Often a frequent species of woodlands.

Pipiza noctiluca - Pipiza, a genus within the sub family Milesiinae that defies the rule of avoiding aphids in its larval stages. Pipiza and a closely related genera, Pipizella both feed on aphids. Pipiza are dark flies with varying dull silvery markings. This is a difficult genus in which there are some virtually intractable identification problems. None-the-less, it is possible to distinguish a few species relatively easily, including some specimens of *P. noctiluca*.

Portevinia maculata - Another dark fly, but one that is very easily identified, both through its habit and its appearance. *P. maculata* breeds in the bulbs of Ramsons *Allium ursinum*. Where ever there are large patches of this plant you are likely to find this hoverfly. It sits around on the plant's leaves and feeds from its flowers. It holds its wings delta style and has six large square silvery spots on its abdomen. Curiously, the females are rarely encountered, but there can be hundreds, or even thousands of males on good days when Ramsons is in flower. Expect to find this fly in many Worcestershire woodlands.

Ferdinadea cuprea - closely related to Cheilosia this is an attractive and very distinctive fly of woodlands. *Ferdinadea* has a bright brassy abdomen with golden hairs and a strongly pale striped thorax. It is infrequent, associated with sap runs. In Shropshire, many woodlands harbour it, so it should occur widely in Worcestershire. A much rarer fly, *Ferdinadea ruficornis*, is similar in appearance, but is smaller and darker, lacking the brassy abdomen. *F. ruficornis* has been recorded from the Wyre Forest in 1983 and may well occur in other woodlands.

The "Heineken Fly" *Rhingia campestris*. - This is probably the most readily recognised genus of hoverflies. *R. campestris* has a bright orange body and a long projecting snout that houses a long tongue, with which the fly can feed from deeper flower nectaries than most hoverflies (thus its nickname - the fly that can reach the parts other flies cannot). This is a very common fly, often found in woodlands. It is particularly fond of Red Champion flowers. During 2004 and 2005 its rare



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cousin, *R rostrata*, was recorded at several localities in Shropshire and Worcestershire.

Brachyopa insensilis – *Brachyopa* are most hoverfly like in appearance. They look very much like a dusky coloured Muscid fly. *Brachyopa insensilis* has been recorded from the Knapp & Papermill Nature Reserve. These very uncommon flies are associated with sap runs.

Eristalis tenax and *Eristalis pertinax* - The Drone Fly – These are extremely common flies that mimic honeybees. The two species can be separated by the colour of their front tarsi - dark in *E. tenax* and pale in *E. pertinax*.

Eristalis arbustorum – A smaller cousin of *E. tenax*. These flies have a distinctive courtship habit where the male hovers up and down above a female. All *Eristalis* breed in putrid media, such as mud in ditches and ponds. This and *E interruptus* are very common.

Eristalis intricarius - An attractive bumblebee mimic. *E intricarius* is frequent, though never abundant. It can often be seen hovering about six feet from the ground along woodland rides, making very rapid darts after other flies intruding in its territory.

Myathropa florea - *Myathropa* is related to *Eristalis*, but has a strong association with rot holes in trees. Thus it is frequently encountered in woodlands. An attractive, brightly marked fly with golden-yellow hairs and markings on both thorax and abdomen. As a relatively large hoverfly it is very frequently recorded from most areas.

Merodon equestris – The Bulb Fly. *Merodon* is ubiquitous in gardens where it does considerable damage to bulbs. The larvae breed within a range of plant bulbs. *Merodon* is often common in woodlands harbouring bulbous plants. The adult fly is an attractive bumblebee mimic, with a distinctive hump backed appearance to its thorax. It occurs in three colour forms.

Volucella bombylans – *Volucella* is one of the best of the bumblebee mimics. This genus is remarkable for its habit of entering wasp and bee nests where it lays its eggs and where the larvae scavenge on the detritus from the nest. The larvae may also attack and eat larvae of the host species. *V. bombylans*, if stung by wasps or bees when entering a nest, has an innate reaction, whereby it immediately starts to lay eggs as it dies. The adult fly is very attractive, with plumose arista on the antenna and a bright, hairy appearance. There are red tailed and white tailed forms, mimicking white and red tailed bumblebees. It is quite common in woodlands and gardens.

Volucella pellucens - With its broad white band on a black body, large size and excellent hovering ability, this is a hoverfly that anyone can recognise. Like its cousin *V bombylans*, it lives out its larval stages in nests of social bees and wasps. One of a few hoverflies that can be readily identified “in flight”. Sometimes occurs in large numbers in woodlands.

Volucella inflata – A much less common relative of *V. pellucens*. It has a broad orange-brown band, rather than the white band of *V. pellucens*. *V inflata* is restricted to old woodlands and appears to be associated with sap runs, rather than nests of hymenoptera. It has been recorded from the Wyre Forest.

Xylota segnis – a very common fly associated with all kinds of dead wood, including piles of sawdust. This fly occurs in all woodlands and many gardens. *Xylota* are distinctive dark, slender looking flies, with varied abdominal markings. *X segnis* has an orange belt on the abdomen. A much rarer species, where the belt is broken into spots, *X. abiens*, has been recorded in Worcestershire. A specimen of this latter fly was exhibited at the Worcs Entomological Day in 2005.

Xylota jakutorum, *X florum*, *Brachypalpoides lentus* – *X jakutorum* is uncommon, but is quite common in the Wyre Forest. It has dull silver spots on the abdomen and can often be seen at buttercup flowers. Most other *Xylota* species do not visit flowers, but walk about on leaves “hovering” up liquid substances from the surface. *X florum* is another uncommon fly, which can be found in areas with old woodlands near streams. It is particularly long and slender, with dull orange spots on the abdomen. A close relative, *Brachypalpoides lentus* is a stout and handsome fly. It is jet black on the body and legs, with a bright red band on the abdomen. It has a strong association with old woodlands and is never common anywhere. It has been recorded from the Wyre Forest.

Xylota sylvorum. This is a lovely looking *Xylota* of slender build, with a bright golden yellow tail. The tail colour arises from a dense mat of adpressed golden hairs. An unmistakable fly that will be found in many broadleaved woodlands.

Chalcosyrphus eunotus – is a real treasure of the Welsh borderland area. A rare fly throughout its European range, it has been recorded at a number of locations in Shropshire and Worcestershire. This is a denizen of old woodlands with streams. The adult is nearly always found about dead wood lying in or across streams. Outside of the Worcestershire, north Gloucestershire, Shropshire area there are very few records for this red data book species. In Worcestershire it has been recorded from woodland streams in the Wyre Forest, Shrawley and Alfrick areas. The adult is quite distinctive as a brown and grey, slightly hairy, medium sized fly.

Criorhina ranunculi – *Criorhina* are hoverflies to set the heart racing! Large bumble bee and hive bee mimics, fast of flight and infrequently recorded. *C. ranunculi* may well be under-recorded, because it is out very early in the season. It also flies high up in Prunus and Sallow blossom, making it quite difficult to spot. However, with practice it can be recorded by searching blossom in March/April/May with binoculars. Look out for a large hairy fly zooming about the tree, headbutting



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other insects as it tries to drive intruders away from its territory. *Criorhina* are strongly associated with old trees, as the larvae breed in rot holes and rotting roots of trees.

Criorhina berberina – is the commonest of the *Criorhina*. It occurs in dark and buff-brown forms. Most old woodlands will harbour this attractive bumblebee mimic. Look out for it on bramble flowers in May and June. Never occurs in abundance.

Criorhina floccosa – another very uncommon *Criorhina*. It is a splendid sight with long light ginger and pale hairs. Look out for it on Hawthorn blossom about woodlands in May.

Criorhina asilica – is probably the most uncommon of the *Criorhinas*. It is a large hive bee mimic with gingery hairs on the thorax. It can be seen flying about piles of well rotted dead wood, or entering holes at the bases of trees. Ancient woodlands are best searched for it.

Early spring hoverflies - Finally, looking forward to the new season, Sallow blossom is one of the most productive lures for early season hoverflies. Some of the earliest hoverflies are those from the genus *Parasyrphus*, fairly small, narrow black and yellow flies. They can often be taken from Sallow flowers on mild days. *Parasyrphus punctulatus* will be found in most woodlands. Also look out for *P. annulatus*, a very uncommon fly, recorded from the Wyre Forest, plus various other *Parasyrphus* species.

Woodland Stoneflies, Mayflies and Caddis Flies (David Pryce)

David Pryce gave a beautifully illustrated talk covering an introduction to the biology and ecology of the three groups with a report on results of Malaise trapping on the Baveney and Newalls brooks and concluding with a short report on the Land Caddis (*Enocyla pusilla*). The whole was given with an injection of humour, especially regarding the excitement of Stonefly watching!

The UK has 34 species of Stoneflies (Plecoptera) out of total of 2700 world wide. As a whole, this group is characteristic of cool, well-oxygenated upland streams where the two tailed larvae can generally be found. The larvae of most species are herbivorous though some become carnivorous in their later instars. The adults emerge on the shores and can be found on the wing from February through to November, though “on the wing” is perhaps not the best description as, apparently, they rarely fly. The adults look very like the larvae but with four similar sized wings which they hold flat along the back. Keys are available for identification though these can prove difficult to use until

familiarity with the families is gained. In addition to photographs of some adults and larvae, David showed sonograms of the drumming sounds used by some species to communicate.

The Mayflies (Ephemeroptera) typically inhabit rivers and larger streams and are particularly numerous in the chalk streams of southern England. Britain has 51 species out of the world total of 3000. Records usually come from identification of the larvae which are three tailed with gills along the sides or top of the abdomen. The adults may be two or three tailed. They have unequal fore and hind wings with hind ones being very much reduced or even absent. Adults may be found from February to November. The adults emerge from the larval skin as sub-imago which quickly find bank side vegetation on which to land for the emergence of the full imago form. David was able to show pictures of the larvae as well as the sub-imago and imago from various Mayfly families.

The final group, the Caddis Flies (Trichoptera) is the largest with a UK list of 199 species out of a world total of 14,000. About 40% of them are riverine and 60% from still water. The larval forms, which may be net spinners, tube-case makers, purse case makers or free living were well illustrated. The adults show a variety of wing colours through red, brown, grey to black and again were illustrated with excellent photographs.

Malaise traps were installed on the Baveney Brook up stream of Furnace Mill on 7th February 2004 and on the Newalls Brook on 17th April. Bottles were changed weekly and the total numbers of each species recorded. Fourteen species of plecoptera were found with numbers peaking in May and June and the last being caught at the end of August; ephemeroptera showed 9 species, numbers peaking in June and July and the last catches being in early September; and for trichoptera the catch was 53 species again peaking in June and July with catches continuing through to mid October. Several unusual trichoptera were found including *Hydropsyche saxonica* (RDB1), *Tinodes palladus* (RDB1), *Tinodes palladulus* (notable), *Rhyacophila septentrionis* (local), *Hydatophylax infumatus* (local).

The final part of the talk drew attention to the importance of Worcestershire woods for the conservation of the Land Caddis which has been found in many of the woods in the west of the county. The typical habitat was illustrated and pictures of adults and larvae shown. This species has rarely been photographed and David thanked Harry Green and Rosemary Winnall for some of the photographs.



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Afternoon Session

Ancient Trees and the Worcestershire Register of Ancient Trees (Harry Green and John Tilt)

The talk was divided into two parts. Harry Green illustrated a selection of the veteran trees that have been found in Worcestershire which emphasised the importance of our county for these trees and hence for the invertebrate species which depend on them. There are many species of saproxylic organism but perhaps the ones which command most attention are the spectacular longhorn beetles (Cerambycidae) that may be of large size and bright colours. During the flight periods these beetles may be found visiting hawthorn blossom and, later in the season, umbellifer flowers.

Harry pointed out that though Worcestershire is among the best recorded counties in England there are still certain to be many important veteran trees to be found. A prime example is the Temple Oak, probably the county's oldest oak tree (?) which was discovered almost by accident when a hedge was trimmed. He asked everybody to make sure they keep notes of any trees that may meet the criteria and to pass the information to John Tilt. If in doubt, record! It is better to have records of a few trees that do not meet criteria or to have duplicate records than to miss records altogether. However, it should be noted that pollard willows are not included as the number of records would be too high to manage.

There was some discussion about deciding whether a tree is ancient as it is not always obvious. Old pollards and coppiced trees and exceptionally large specimens are relatively easily identified but some hedgerow hawthorns or trees growing in exposed situations may be relatively small but still be of considerable antiquity. If it looks old send in the details!

As a finale to his talk, Harry drew attention to the fact that not all veteran trees are located in hedges, woods or ancient parks. Worcestershire's orchards are also of national significance as old plum and apples trees support populations of the Noble Chafer (*Gnorimus nobilis*), a national BAP priority species. The adult beetles are rarely seen, except on the hottest summer days, but the presence of the species can be inferred from the typical "coffee grounds" frass in hollow trees. Since Harry and other consultants have been surveying the county it has become clear that Worcestershire has, almost certainly, the highest concentration of this beetle in Britain. Harry sits on the national BAP species group for Noble Chafer (leading partner Peoples Trust for Endangered Species) and the Group met in Worcestershire last October to discuss and plan more action on both a local and national scale.

John Tilt has been responsible for designing and maintaining the database and he introduced us to its features. It includes the usual data of species, location with grid reference, recorder and date. In addition, the dimensions of the tree are recorded (particularly girth) with, if possible, a photograph. This information can be used to locate trees, plot the distribution of species or all records and to produce the data of interest to the Ancient Tree Forum to whose register all the information is given. John checks all records carefully and, where doubt exists about any aspect of the record he goes on site to verify it. Aerial photographs held by the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust have proved of particular value as the location of trees can easily be checked and the map references verified. Grid references have, as is so often the case, proved the biggest problem with figures being submitted which may be a long way from any tree let alone a veteran one! In the event of any doubt remaining about a record then it is referred back to the recorder for clarification. This is necessary so that all records will be valid.

Both speakers encouraged everyone to get out into the countryside and record more trees!

Hidden Places, Secret Lives (Rosemary Winnall)

I am indebted to Rosemary for writing the summary of her talk which follows. The talk provided a fitting climax to the day as it focussed on questions that too often we leave unasked. During our surveys we collect our specimens, identify them or send them for identification and move on. Rosemary has stopped long enough to ask the question "what are the insects doing and why"? Through digital photographs, some of which she used to illustrate her talk, she is leading the way towards beginning to answer these questions. She writes as follows:

In the last year or so two things have completely changed the way I look at insects. I have spent many years asking the question "What is that?" but now I have started to ask "What is it and what is it doing?" and have become much more interested in lifestyles. I have also purchased a digital camera – the sort that has a swivel viewfinder that you can view at a distance. Now I can get my camera closer to the insect without frightening it off so readily and I don't need to get my nose stuck in those cowpats! I am also enormously privileged to know so many expert and helpful entomologists who help me with identification, and I wish to acknowledge the help given by the following people in naming some of these pictures: Mick Blythe, Geoff Trevis, Tony Simpson, Michael Archer, Matthew Oates, Mike Edwards, Kevin McGee and Mike Bloxham.



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The successful occupation of some Red Mason Bee tubes in my garden probably started me looking more carefully, and the addition of a Schwegler box with glass tubes gave me a fascinating insight into the life histories and inter-relationships within the colony.

For some years I've been collecting hoverflies and more latterly bees and wasps, and have taken the specimen and recorded the species. Now I usually only collect a specimen after I have photographed it. In that way I can build up a collection of named images that have a back-up specimen, and my pictures provide much more information. Evidence of feeding, such as droppings and nibbled leaves can provide extra clues about where and what is present. It is important not to jump to conclusions about what the insect is doing. A hoverfly that is apparently feeding may, in fact, be ovipositing on the flower. This has led me to look in detail this year at a single aphid colony and given me another intriguing insight into insect life on one plant. I have found hoverfly larvae and watched them feed and I am now breeding some through to determine the species. I have watched the variety of creatures that have come to feed on the honeydew, and predators that have moved in to feed on them! I also started to observe at night and in different weather conditions.

Our new garden lavender hedge has provided a wealth of observations. In early August this year I was aware of many bumblebees using this to feed. I started to count them and found that there were often over 100 present but very few of these were collecting pollen. Were all these males? Had the workers stopped taking food back and the nests were closing down for the winter already? I collected 12 bees and found that they were all males, and that there was a high proportion of the cuckoo bee *Bombus vestalis*. So where were the workers and new queens? I failed to find many in my garden even after diligent searching.

I am also trying to build up a series of pictures to record breeding, and these will hopefully be added to over the years. Butterflies are easy to spot, and by watching a colony one can pick up behavioural differences between the sexes and at different stages of the life history. This can provide much more information about the species than just a record of its presence.

The advent of digital photography and the ease with which these images can be communicated via email and the internet, has started a resurgence of interest in entomology I believe. Some of us are not satisfied with the moth light trap and the tick list and wish to find out much more about how the insects are living. There's a lot to do and much can be learnt just in one's back garden. I look forward to discovering more!

Displays and Exhibits

The displays and exhibits provided excellent opportunities for learning and discussion and we are grateful to everybody who brought material and provided microscopes. Exhibits covering a wide range of taxa including coleoptera, diptera and hymenoptera were provided by Mike Bloxham, Kevin McGee, John Meiklejohn, Geoff Trevis and Rosemary Winnall. These were the people who booked space and we were pleased to receive other material on the day. Robin Williams, who travelled all the way from Somerset, brought a copy of his monograph on the Oak Marble Gall in Britain which is probably the most comprehensive treatise on the subject. Harry Green and John Tilt brought a display about the Veteran Tree Survey to complement their talk.

Final Remarks

In summary, the day had proved a great success due to the enthusiastic support of the Wyre Forest Study Group committee and the willingness of experts to share their knowledge through talks and exhibits and all were thanked for their contributions. The success was also in no small measure a result of the support and participation of so many keen members of the Wyre Forest Study Group, not all of whom were entomologists. Without an enthusiastic audience much of the point and enjoyment of the day is lost.

Finally, the chair was handed over to Mike Bloxham to introduce the 2006 event. He said that the probable date would be Saturday 28 October, the theme would be on the aquatic environment and that Mike Averill had been invited to be the organiser.