

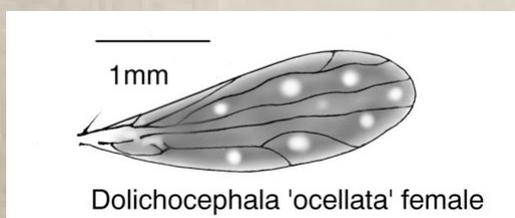
Mike Bloxham

2005 saw use of the malaise trap in two projects, the main one being the Orchard Project and the other the Roxel Site Investigation. Those who are unfamiliar with this trap will see a picture of it in action on page 42 of the Wyre Forest Study Group Review for 2004. The final report on the Orchard Project is almost completed as I write and has involved much intensive work from all parties involved. As a consequence, the Roxel samples have not yet received the same amount of attention. The traps concerned here were situated in Postensplain (Grid Reference SO 74387908. V.C. 40). Mick Blythe gave me some tubes of assorted flies from the catch, the specimens having been collected between 12/8/05 to 1/9/05. I immediately subjected the contents to a quick search to see if any material could be readily identified as having special interest. Four species were immediately selected for diverse reasons, as subject matter for this article. Two additional species from elsewhere are mentioned for comparative purposes. Basic Species Status definitions mentioned below may be found in Falk (1991), but for some of the most recent amendments coming into use, consult Falk & Crossley (2005).

Empididae ('Assassin Flies')

Dolichocephala 'ocellata' sensu lato. A single female.

This genus contains tiny flies with strongly marked wings and before 1996 the insect found here would have been confidently identified as *D. ocellata* (**RDB3** in Falk's 1991 'Review of the Scarce & Threatened flies of Great Britain'). Since then, a closely similar species (*D. thomasi*) has been added by Iain MacGowan as a consequence of his malaise trapping activities in Scotland. Females of the two species cannot be reliably separated and although *D. thomasi* may turn out to be confined to more northerly parts, it is not possible to give the Roxel specimen a more precise name on the basis of current knowledge. The species has also lost its conservation status in the latest 'Review' (Falk & Crossley 2005) as a consequence of the foregoing, although it can legitimately still be regarded as a very local insect. The very distinctive wing is illustrated below to help in recognition of the species pair, and reference to MacGowan's 1996 paper should enable accurate naming if you have caught a male.



Syrphidae ('Hoverflies')

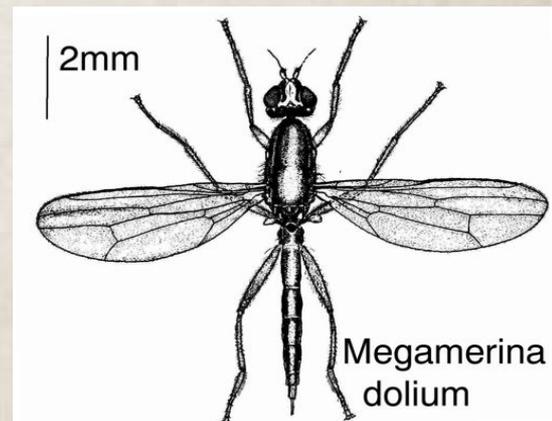
Cheilosia griseiventris (Loew). A single male.

This black hoverfly keys out to the Stubbs 'variabilis' group and controversy still surrounds its taxonomy. Unfortunately a closely similar species pair is again the problem, with *Cheilosia latifrons* and *C. griseiventris* being often so alike that genitalic differences are too slight to provide reliable characters for separation. In the eyes of some workers this indicates that they are the same species. There are, however, certain physical differences and large specimens with longer ocellar triangles in the male can be fairly readily separated. The Roxel specimen satisfies this condition (it is 1cm in body length with appropriate ocellar triangle ratios) and I am therefore following Stubbs & Falk (2002) in naming it as *C. griseiventris*. The specimen is available to anyone who wishes to borrow it.

Megamerinidae (No Common Name)

Megamerina dolium (Fabricius) the only species in the family. one female.

Recent work suggests that this insect is not nearly as uncommon as its **Nationally Notable** status would suggest. It is an easily recognised fly with characteristic wings and two rows of spines on the underside of the hind femora. I have caught it in a variety of situations (including on giant hogweed flowers). An account of the distribution is found in Chandler (1977).



Tachinidae (Parasite Flies)

Catharosia pygmaea (Fallen). One male (illustrated) with notes on two related species.

This was first recorded by Steven Falk as British on the basis of two Coventry specimens found in 1996. Since then it has been found on a few more sites (I took specimens in the Sandwell Valley during this period). A member of the subfamily Phasiinae, it is probably a parasitoid on Lygaeid bugs and may be under recorded both because of its

small size and also because it probably remains in ground vegetation as it searches for hosts. The wing shading and behaviour make it fairly conspicuous if it is swept or pooted. I am uncertain of its current status, but **pRDBk** is likely. Readers will need to consult Falk (1998) for details of the species because it is not included in Belshaw's 1993 Tachinidae handbook. A close relative, *Phasia hemiptera* (Fabricius), was recorded during the Orchard survey. This fly is usually readily recognised because of its large size & black wings. I am figuring the other *Phasia* species (*Phasia obesa*) because although small, it is common and characteristically marked. I believe I have recorded it from Wyre (although I cannot find the details!) so maybe the picture will help readers recognise it.

Comments

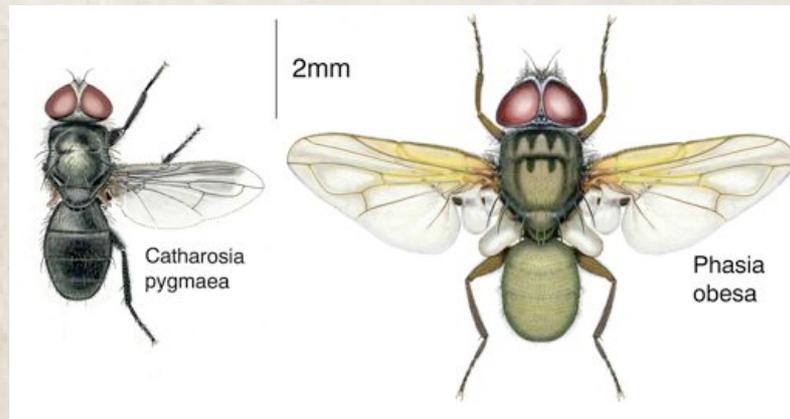
In this brief review of a few species, it is possible to see some of the basic problems faced by taxonomists with regard both to identification and also discussion of conservation issues concerning the invertebrates they find. It is generally believed that the malaise trap provides a reasonably sound and consistent route to discovery of useful data

about British insects (especially the smaller and less attractive ones). This small data set could be considered as a supportive component for this view. A good deal of alternative collecting methodology can be subtly influenced by selective perception or other factors such as personal safety (if a wasp is caught in a sweep net, other captives can escape while the operative removes the wasp to avoid being stung!). The carefully sited malaise trap is not influenced in such ways and provides a set of specimens of all types without regard for personal preferences.

A more comprehensive report on the Roxel findings can be expected in due course.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Mick Blythe for giving me the opportunity to study some of the specimens caught in his traps and to the Wyre Forest Study Group for permitting these notes to be published in advance of the main report.



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