

## The New Year Beetle

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The internet is becoming progressively more useful to coleopterists trying to identify their finds. Not only are there many sites with very good (and generally reliable) photographs of many different British beetle species, but there are an increasing number where expert beetle hunters offer beautifully illustrated keys to various small families. A favourite newcomer is *Beetle News* edited by Richard Wright (email: [richardwrightuk@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:richardwrightuk@yahoo.co.uk)). This particular note has made use of *Beetle News* 1:3, October 2009.

I have for many years gone for an extended walk on New Year's Day with Peter Shirley. We have tried to visit different places of interest each time. This has given us valuable opportunities to review recent happenings in the world of wildlife, to make up bad poetry and to take periodic rests, when we examine withered galls on oaks through the bottom of the port and brandy flask.

This year was cold and desolate for anyone planning such an excursion, so we decided to return to Wyre as a well-trusted place with familiar pathways. The unexpected happened, because the route was planned in ignorance of the knowledge that the Dowles in spate during the infamous flood year had carried away a bridge near the Experimental Pool. The stream was again a boiling torrent making it doubly certain that we would not be continuing our walk from the Bewdley end to the Pool. The necessary detour back through dense vegetation uphill to the railway walk led to a sudden encounter with a deer fence -

only negotiated by discovery of a handy log pile and my rolling over the top 'like a beached whale' (Peter Shirley's description - not mine).

As we rejoined the main path system, with its well-managed tracks, I realised we were at exactly the same location where we had been twelve years earlier. As it happened, I had on that occasion been using my trowel to lift moss on the ground, hoping something of interest might brighten up a similarly desolate day. A flat black beetle was disturbed and duly retained. A more determined effort might have discovered more, but the light was fading and the passage of time dictated that a comfortable conclusion to the foray might best be attained by a relatively rapid return to the Forest Centre.

As befitted that earlier drear occasion, we had found no great rarity - just a solitary *Silpha atrata*. This is a beetle that can appear with yellowish as well as black colouration and is partial to snails. The long head is characteristic - very like that of the ground beetle *Cychrus caraboides* - which has similar feeding habits: both are recorded from Wyre and are probably present in woods throughout Worcestershire. So to welcome the new decade I have taken a picture of my silent companion of twelve years (not Peter Shirley) and leave you with it. The publication mentioned at the outset will be more than adequate to help you put a name to this insect, whether you decide to let it go or sinfully retain it (as I did).



*Silpha atrata*, Wyre Forest, SO745760, 1st January 1998

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