

**Would the real *Cantharis nigra* please reveal itself. An example of a very confusing nomenclature change.**

Gary Farmer

There have been many nomenclature changes within the British soldier beetles (Cantharidae), but none more confusing than a recent change involving two species and three names. This came to light with the production of 'A guide to British soldier beetles' and subsequent updated versions (Gurney 2019). In this guide *Cantharis nigra* is shown with a red scutellum and another similar species *Cantharis flavilabris* is shown with its scutellum black. The supporting text notes that *C. flavilabris* has been called *C. nigra* in recent British works and *C. nigra* has been called *C. thoracica*, leading to considerable confusion and undoubtedly many erroneous records. A detailed account was given in *The Coleopterist* by Geiser and Fanti (2015) after considering previous name changes to the species concerned in Europe. Their report notes "that British coleopterists since 1971 have been misinterpreting the name *C. nigra*. The valid name for the species with black scutellum must therefore be *C. flavilabris*."

I emailed some of my photos to Keith Alexander, the National Recorder for the group, to seek guidance and received the following reply. "[the photos] are *Cantharis flavilabris*, a species which is very variable in coloration, from all black to black with a red pronotum, but always with a black scutellum. It was known in GB as *C. nigra* up until very recently and so will key out as *nigra* in Joy and Fowler [and in various other sources e.g. Alexander 1986 and Fitton 1973]. The name *nigra* is now used for what the old literature has as *thoracica* and always has a red scutellum and a red pronotum. The taxonomists have left us with a real mess of nomenclature! *C nigra* is characteristic of grasslands on more or less permanently damp or waterlogged soils."

The correct nomenclature in summary:

*C. nigra* (was *C. thoracica*) – Pronotum red. Scutellum RED.  
*C. flavilabris* (was *C. nigra*) – Pronotum red or black. Scutellum BLACK. The last is illustrated in 01, 02, 03, 04.

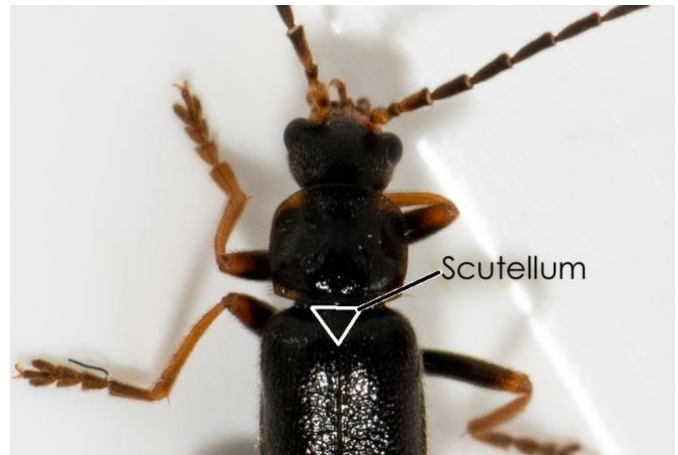
With my new found knowledge I began sorting through my photos of soldier beetles and sure enough all of my images checked so far labelled *Cantharis nigra* have a black scutellum and so are actually *C. flavilabris*. I have also checked through specimens collected by John Partridge and have found the same scenario. John Bingham also confirmed that all of his photos labelled *C. nigra* are in fact *C. flavilabris*. This should not be a surprise as we all used the literature available at the time which has now been shown to be incorrect.

What to do about the existing and future records?

The dictionary in the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) database classifies *C. flavilabris* as a synonym of *C. nigra* so a search for either pulls out the same records. It might be possible to determine the true identification going by the date of the identification, which key was used originally if known and habitat details will also be useful.

A search for all records held for the three names (*Cantharis nigra*, *C. thoracica*, *C. flavilabris*) revealed that WBRC presently holds 151 records for *Cantharis nigra* (with two as *C. flavilabris* noted as a synonym) and also seven records for *Cantharis thoracica*. Of these, only one site has records for both species, Croome Landscape Park (recorded on the same day by the same recorder - A. Foster 23.06.16).

Until the dictionary catches up with the corrected nomenclature it is advisable to make some distinction when submitting new records. A comment stating if it has a red or black scutellum or record it as *Cantharis nigra (thoracica)* will help.



01. *Cantharis flavilabris* with scutellum outlined. Gary Farmer.



02. *Cantharis flavilabris* 09.06.19 Hardwick Green. Gary Farmer.



03. *Cantharis flavilabris* 31.07.15 Smite Farm. N.J. Farmer.



04. *Cantharis flavilabris* pair Redditch 11.07.14. N.J. Farmer.

#### Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Keith Alexander for confirming the details of the change and to Simon Wood for supplying the records and dictionary information from WBRC.

#### References

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#### Images

01. *Cantharis flavilabris* with scutellum outlined. Gary Farmer.
02. *Cantharis flavilabris* 09.06.19 Hardwick Green. Gary Farmer.
03. *Cantharis flavilabris* 31.07.15 Smitte Farm. N.J. Farmer.
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