

## Carrion beetles recorded at Shakenhurst, Worcestershire, during the period 2015-16.

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The discovery of a recently deceased bird or mammal is a moment of excitement and anticipation for the enthusiastic coleopterist. Below is an account of the beetle species recorded on a casual basis whenever the opportunity has arisen. I am fortunate to live in a cottage on the Shakenhurst estate in north-west Worcestershire close to the Shropshire border. Much of the estate is either semi-natural ancient woodland occupying steep-sided slopes alongside a series of small streams flowing into the River Rea, or agricultural land farmed for arable and mixed cattle/sheep grazing purposes. There are many veteran trees within some of the grazing pastures close to Shakenhurst Hall indicative of former 'pasture woodland' communities that once covered larger areas of the countryside than they do now. The veteran trees are predominately pedunculate oak, but there are also veteran ash and sweet chestnut trees.

Mammal corpses at varying stages of decay provide vital 'patch' habitats where a wide variety of insect species can feed and reproduce. Investigation of decaying corpses provides an opportunity to find species specially adapted to survive in such environments that would otherwise be difficult to locate. The following are some of the more interesting species I have recorded here to date.

*Margarinotus merdarius* (Hoffman, J., 1803) (Col; Histeridae). One collected from a dead fox. 14.5.2016.



1. *Margarinotus merdarius* on the remains of a dead fox. © K.McGee.

*Onthophagus coenobita* (Herbst, 1783) (Col; Scarabaeidae). I was surprised to find a number of beetles from the Scarabaeidae normally associated with animal dung in decaying corpses. A single specimen of the localised *O.coenobita* was found in a dead carrion crow on 27.4.2016 and another was found in a dead pheasant on 17.5.2016.



02. *Onthophagus coenobita*. This particular example was photographed on sheep dung in Kent, May 2016. © K.McGee.

*Necrodes littoralis* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Col; Silphidae). One under a dead fox on 30.4.2016. (No picture).

*Nicrophorus vespilloides* Herbst, 1783 (Col; Silphidae). One under a dead fox on 2.5.2016.



03. *Nicrophorus vespilloides*. © K.McGee.

*Oiceoptoma thoracicum* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Col; Silphidae). One was in a dead pheasant on 17.7.2015. Several were under the remains of a dead fox on 23.4.2016. A search on NBN Gateway reveals few records for Worcestershire; but the few records are all from the north of the county.



04. *Oiceoptoma thoracicum* on the remains of a dead fox. © K.McGee.

*Creophilus maxillosus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Col; Staphylinidae). Three were under a dead fox on 23.4.2016. A single specimen was under a dead carrion crow on 8.5.2016. A search on NBN Gateway reveals very few Worcestershire records for this impressive rove beetle.



05. *Creophilus maxillosus* on the remains of a dead fox. © K.McGee.

**Table 1. Coleoptera from carrion at Shakenhurst.**

| Family        | Species                         | Status | Carrion type       | Date     |
|---------------|---------------------------------|--------|--------------------|----------|
| Histeridae    | <i>Hister unicolor</i>          | Common | Dead crow          | 28.05.16 |
| Histeridae    | <i>Margarinotus carbonarius</i> | Common | Dead crow          | 17.05.16 |
| Histeridae    | <i>Margarinotus merdarius</i>   | Local  | Dead fox           | 14.05.16 |
| Histeridae    | <i>Margarinotus striola</i>     | Common | Dead fox           | 22.05.16 |
| Histeridae    | <i>Margarinotus striola</i>     | Common | Dead pheasant      | 27.05.16 |
| Hydrophilidae | <i>Sphaeridium marginatum</i>   | Common | Dead crow          | 09.05.16 |
| Scarabaeidae  | <i>Aphodius prodromus</i>       | Common | Dead fox           | 23.04.16 |
| Scarabaeidae  | <i>Aphodius sticticus</i>       | Common | Dead fox           | 02.05.16 |
| Scarabaeidae  | <i>Onthophagus coenobita</i>    | Local  | Dead pheasant      | 17.05.16 |
| Scarabaeidae  | <i>Onthophagus coenobita</i>    | Local  | Dead crow          | 27.04.16 |
| Silphidae     | <i>Necrodes littoralis</i>      | Local  | Dead fox           | 30.04.16 |
| Silphidae     | <i>Nicrophorus humator</i>      | Common | Dead crow          | 24.04.16 |
| Silphidae     | <i>Nicrophorus vespillo</i>     | Common | Dead crow          | 24.04.16 |
| Silphidae     | <i>Nicrophorus vespilloides</i> | Local  | Dead fox           | 02.05.16 |
| Silphidae     | <i>Oiceoptoma thoracicum</i>    | Local  | Dead pheasant      | 17.07.15 |
| Silphidae     | <i>Oiceoptoma thoracicum</i>    | Local  | Dead fox           | 23.04.16 |
| Silphidae     | <i>Thanatophilus rugosus</i>    | Common | Dead fox           | 23.04.16 |
| Silphidae     | <i>Thanatophilus rugosus</i>    | Common | Dead pheasant      | 26.08.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Aleochara curtula</i>        | Common | Dead pheasant      | 26.08.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Bisnius fimetarius</i>       | Common | Dead fox           | 22.05.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Creophilus maxillosus</i>    | Local  | Dead crow          | 08.05.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Creophilus maxillosus</i>    | Local  | Dead fox           | 23.04.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Gyrohypnus angustatus</i>    | Common | Dead grey squirrel | 17.04.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Ontholestes tessellatus</i>  | Common | Dead fox           | 14.05.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Philonthus marginatus</i>    | Common | Dead crow          | 01.05.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Philonthus politus</i>       | Common | Dead crow          | 21.05.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Philonthus splendens</i>     | Common | Dead fox           | 02.05.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Philonthus splendens</i>     | Common | Dead crow          | 09.05.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Philonthus tenuicornis</i>   | Local  | Dead fox           | 23.04.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Philonthus tenuicornis</i>   | Local  | Dead pheasant      | 26.08.16 |
| Staphylinidae | <i>Tachinus rufipes</i>         | Common | Dead crow          | 25.04.16 |

Images

01. *Margarinotus merdarius*. Kevin McGee.
02. *Onthophagus coenobita*. Kevin McGee.
03. *Nicrophorus vespilloides*. Kevin McGee.
04. *Oiceoptoma thoracicum*. Kevin McGee.
05. *Creophilus maxillosus*. Kevin McGee