

Diptera of note at the Shakenhurst Estate

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All my Diptera records are based on observations of the larger and easier to identify species which I try to photograph (and occasionally collect) in their natural habitats. We have lived in the estate grounds since 2015 so these records cover a five year period however I have only undertaken more intensive recording effort here during the 'lockdown' period caused by the Covid 19 pandemic of 2020. It is possible that a specialist Dipterist could find a range of important species in parts of the estate, particularly in families such as the Tipulidae that require the moist, sheltered habitat found on the undisturbed steep wooded slopes alongside the water-courses flowing through Wissett's Wood. The wood, centred on SO 675367, is part of the Shakenhurst Estate in north-west Worcestershire adjacent to the boundary with Shropshire. The history of the estate can be traced back to the Norman conquest, it occupies 1300 acres of mainly intensive arable farmland, but approximately 300 acres includes Wissett's Wood; an area of ancient broad-leaved woodland on steep slopes either side of Mill Brook and Shakenhurst Brook that eventually enter the River Rea at the north-western boundary of the estate; comprising another valuable habitat. The wood is now managed as a gamebird shoot by the Shakenhurst Shooting Syndicate but there are limited public rights of way. The old Bewdley to Tenbury railway line passes through the estate and there are several fine specimens of veteran open-grown oak, ash, beech and sweet chestnut trees across the estate; but particularly in the landscaped area of 'parkland' at the eastern approach to Shakenhurst Hall.

Conopidae

Myopa buccata

One photographed on low vegetation in a sunny spot close to flowering Germander and Wood Speedwell at the old railway on 06.05.2020 (Plate 01) and one on flowering Raspberry in Wissett's Wood on 23.05.2020.



01. *Myopa buccata* at the Shakenhurst Estate on 06.05.2020. K.McGee.

Myopa extricata

Three recorded; from flowers of Daisy on 04.04.2020, Dandelion on 21.04.2020, and Ramsons on 14.05.2020.

Myopa testacea

Just one record on Creeping Buttercup flowers on 02.05.2020.

Stratiomyidae

Odontomyia tigrina

One was found on poolside vegetation at the former ornamental pool in the landscaped 'parkland' at the eastern aspect of Shakenhurst Hall on 09.06.2018.

Stratiomys potamida

Regular readers may recall an article describing a female I found at the former ornamental pool at Shakenhurst on 20.07.2019 when I waded through soft mud and Yellow Flag roots in a futile attempt to get a good photograph. I was luckier during mid-afternoon of 02.06.2020 when I encountered a female alongside a sunny track in Wissett's Wood. This individual was more obliging allowing a series of good photographs (02 & 03). The weather was hot, sunny and humid but with the forecast for an overnight change with rain. The fly appeared to be freshly emerged with traces of fine soil fragments visible on the thorax; had she deliberately emerged to synchronise with the change to wetter conditions following one of the warmest and driest springs on record? She spent some time investigating an area of the trackside that I know becomes easily water-logged due to seepages and would be suitable habitat for the developing larvae of *S. potamida*. The ground flora at this small zone of normally muddy ground consists predominately of Compact Rush, Common Sedge, Remote Sedge, Thin-spiked Wood Sedge, False Fox Sedge, Brooklime and Creeping Buttercup. *S. potamida* is uncommon but widely distributed, it is normally associated with wet meadows with ditches, streams, seepages and springs, but is also occasionally recorded at wet parts of muddy woodland rides (Stubbs & Drake, 2001).

A male was found at Hogweed flowers at the northern edge of Wissett's Wood on 15.06.2020 (04).



02. *Stratiomys potamida* female in Wissett's Wood on 02.06.2020.. K.McGee.



03. *Stratiomys potamida* female investigating a patch of normally water-logged ground in Wissett's Wood on 02.06.2020. K.McGee.



04. *Stratiomys potamida* (male) at Hogweed flowers alongside Wissett's Wood on 15.06.2020. K.McGee.

Syrphidae

Brachypaloides lentus

Sightings of this striking species have been relatively frequent during May since 2015, especially along parts of the old railway, but also in Wissett's Wood. However, I have only ever seen occasional singles and they are exceptionally difficult to approach for photography which is very frustrating considering that related species, such as *Xylota segnis*, are normally easy to photograph.

Brachypalpus laphriformis

One male was photographed at a log pile alongside a track in Wissett's Wood on 16.05.2020 (04). This is my first record of this scarce hoverfly at this site, all my previous records are from the woodland edges at Mill Rough near Drakes Broughton between 2004 and 2009. Interestingly, Rosemary Winnall photographed one during the following day (17.05.2020) on a log-pile in Bell Coppice, Wyre Forest approximately 5.3km to the north-east. This is thought to be the first record for Wyre.



05. *Brachypalpus laphriformis* (male) at a log pile in Wissett's Wood on 16.05.2020. K.McGee.

Criorhina asilica

A female was photographed on emergent track-side vegetation in Wissett's Wood on 11.05.2019. This is my only record for Shakenhurst and was published in an earlier edition of the *Worcestershire Record*.

Criorhina berberina

All *Criorhina* bee-mimicking hoverfly species are uncommon, but *C. berberina* is by far the one most frequently recorded throughout the Shakenhurst Estate. This concurs with Stubbs & Falk (2002) who describe it as the most widespread *Criorhina* species. All are

associated with wooded areas where the larvae develop mainly in underground decaying roots of broad-leaved trees. Although never seen in numbers greater than four or five, it is particularly frequent along the old railway line during sunny days in May. A female was observed ovipositing at the base of an Ash stump on the railway embankment on 02.05.2020 and two females were ovipositing at the base of an Alder stump in Wissett's Wood on 06.05.2020.



06. *Criorhina berberina* at Mill Rough, Drakes Broughton on 23.05.2009. K.McGee.

Criorhina ranunculi

Two records of females ovipositing at the bases of moss-covered Birch trunks in Wissett's Wood on 21.04.2018 and 30.03.2019. Both were published in the *Worcestershire Record*. *C. ranunculi* emerges early in the year and males can sometimes be seen on the first warm spring days flying rapidly among flowering blackthorn in search of females.

Orthonevra nobilis

One male was collected from low vegetation alongside the old railway on 06.05.2020. This is only my second record of this species.

Portevinia maculata

Larvae of this distinctive hoverfly develop in the bulbs of Ramsons (Stubbs & Falk, 2002). Despite seemingly perfect habitat alongside Shakenhurst Brook flowing through Wissett's Wood, where there are extensive swathes of flowering Ramsons during late April and early May, the population of this species is small with adults rarely seen in double figures.

Sericomyia silentis

Two were seen at Bramble flowers along a sunny ride in Wissett's Wood on 12.06.2020. These are my first records here, and unusually early for this species which is much more likely to be seen during August and September. For example 07 is of a female visiting Ivy flowers at the churchyard in Martley on 28.09.2018.



07. *Sericomyia silentis* (female) on Ivy at Martley churchyard on 28.09.2018. K.McGee.

Volucella inflata

This is another uncommon species associated mainly with ancient broad-leaved woodlands. Just two records from Wissett’s Wood; 17.07.2015 and 07.06.2020.

Xanthogramma citrofasciatum

One female was photographed on 21.05.2017. It was found on a steep hillside facing the north-west covered in large numbers of ant hills constructed by Yellow Meadow Ants *Lasius flavus*. Larvae of *X. citrofasciatum* feed on ant-attended root aphids (Stubbs & Falk, 2002). This small area alongside a large field presently containing a crop of Barley is left uncultivated, presumably due to the steep gradient, but will eventually revert to dense hawthorn scrub unless management work such as low-level grazing is undertaken.

Xylota florum

One female was collected on 07.06.2018 from vegetation alongside a former ornamental pool in the landscaped area forming the eastern aspect of Shakenhurst Hall. This remains my only record of this species away from Wyre Forest.

Tipulidae

Ctenophora pectinicornis

The Tipulidae are not a family I record or have extensive knowledge of, but some species are so noticeable they demand further attention and photography! Not the correct scientific approach I know! Adults of this scarce species were found on 27.05.2020 and 01.06.2020. Both were on foliage in sunny situations along woodland edges. The larvae develop in dead and decaying wood.



08. *Ctenicera pectinicornis* on Beech foliage at Shakenhurst on 27.05.2020. K.McGee.

Tanyptera atrata

This is another spectacular and uncommon crane-fly requiring dead and decaying wood as habitat for the developing larvae (Westwood *et al*, 2015). I have several records of single males between 09.05.2020 and 27.05.2020 from various log-piles in Wissett’s Wood, and on 21.05.2020 there were three males (07) and a female on a large old Ash trunk on the banks of the River Rea that must have been carried downstream by the recent extensive winter floods. Unfortunately, I failed to photograph the female. Online maps suggest that Wyre Forest and the immediate surrounding area contain an important core population of this scarce species.



09. *Tanyptera atra* male at a large Ash log alongside the River Rea at Shakenhurst on 21.05.2020. K.McGee.

References

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- Stubbs, A. & Falk, S. (2002). *British Hoverflies*. British Entomological and Natural History Society, Reading.
- Westwood, B., Shirley, P., Winnall, R. and Green, H. (2015). *The Nature of Wyre*. Pisces Publications, Berkshire.
- Images
- 01. *Myopa buccata* at the Shakenhurst Estate on 06.05.2020. K.McGee.
- 02. *Stratiomys potamida* (female) in Wissett’s Wood on 02.06.2020. K.McGee.
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- 05. *Brachypalpus laphriformis* (male) at a log pile in Wissett’s Wood on 16.05.2020. K.McGee.
- 06. *Criorhina berberina* at Mill Rough, Drakes Broughton on 23.05.2009. K.McGee.
- 07. *Sericomyia silentis* (female) on Ivy at Martley churchyard on 28.09.2018. K.McGee.
- 08. *Ctenicera pectinicornis* on Beech foliage at Shakenhurst on 27.05.2020. K.McGee.
- 09. *Tanyptera atrata* (male) at a large Ash log near the River Rea at Shakenhurst on 21.05.2020. K.McGee.