

***Stelis punctulatissima* (Kirby, 1802) (Hym: Megachilidae) at Shakenhurst, Worcestershire.**

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A single specimen of a male Banded Dark Bee *Stelis punctulatissima* (Kirby, 1802) was captured in our garden at Shakenhurst on 09.06.2018. The bee has a national conservation status of Notable B and this specimen may be the first Worcestershire record as far as is known.



01. *Stelis punctulatissima* (male) at Shakenhurst on 09.06.2018. © K.McGee.

My attention was caught by the sight of a small but robust bee similar in appearance to an *Osmia* species visiting Thyme flowers in our garden during hot sunny weather. At the time I was attempting to photograph one of several small *Hylaeus* mining bee species also visiting the Thyme flowers when the larger *Osmia*-type bee arrived. I decided to risk taking a single photograph before attempting to capture the bee; I already had a small tube to hand in readiness for catching one of the *Hylaeus* bees. My luck was in; I achieved one reasonable photo and then quickly managed to secure the bee in a tube for later microscopic examination. It was definitely my lucky day because successfully photographing and capturing an actively nectaring bee moving rapidly between flowers armed with just a small tube does not usually go to plan!

The bee keyed out readily as a male *Stelis punctulatissima*, I also emailed the image to Steven Falk who was able to confirm the identity of the bee from the photo. This is the first *Stelis* species I have recorded anywhere.

There are eighty-one records of *S.puntulatissima* on the NBN Atlas website widely scattered across most parts of England and Wales with a concentration from the coast and a distinct cluster from Shropshire, but none from Worcestershire! Some of the Shropshire records are those supplied by Ian Cheeseborough who has been finding them recently in churchyards. Indeed, although the species is rarely recorded, most records are from gardens and churchyards where the bees are searching for their hosts the Wool Carder Bee *Anthidium manicatum*. *S.puntulatissima* is a cleptoparasite of *A.manicatum* which is also associated with gardens where females seek out hairy plant species such as Lamb's-ear *Stachys byzantina*. Females gather the hairy fibres from the plants to construct their nest-cells. I have also found that *A. manicatum* can sometimes be seen visiting flowers of Black Horehound so it may be worth keeping a close eye on dense patches of these for suspicious-looking unfamiliar small bees.

Incidentally, the small mining bees I was originally trying to photograph visiting Thyme flowers were *Hylaeus hyalinatus*.



02. *Anthidium manicatum* (male) visiting Lamb's-ear *Stachys byzantina* flowers at Shakenhurst on 27.06.2018. © K.McGee.

References

BWARS Species search [on-line] <http://www.bwars.com/> [Accessed 27.8.2018]
 Falk, S. & Lewington, R. 2015. *Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland*. Bloomsbury Publishing plc.
 NBN Atlas Species search [on-line] <http://www.nbnatlas.org/> [Accessed 27.8.2018]

Images

01. *Stelis punctulatissima* (male) at Shakenhurst on 09.06.2018. K.McGee.
 02. *Anthidium manicatum* (male) visiting Lamb's-ear *Stachys byzantina* flowers at Shakenhurst on 27.06.2018. K.McGee.