

## White-barred Clearwing *Synanthedon spheciformis* ([Denis & Schiffermüller], 1775) (Lep: Sesiidae) at the Shakenhurst Estate.

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The establishment of a breeding population of White-barred Clearwing *Synanthedon spheciformis* in Wissett's Wood at the Shakenhurst Estate is reported.

One adult was observed in low and rapid erratic flight alongside a woodland track on 09.06.2020 at Grid Ref: SO671729.

I instinctively and instantly knew exactly what it was, but I was surprised by the size of the moth; it was considerably larger than I had ever expected this species to be. Fortunately, and after an anxious time following the insect around as best I could without spooking it too much, I was able to take a couple of reasonable photographs when it (all too briefly) alighted on a small Birch sapling when dark clouds obscured the sunlight (01). It is difficult to establish the sex of the moth from the angle of the image (ANB Simpson, *pers. comm*). The time of the observation was 1300hrs, the temperature was 18 degrees Celsius with 43% humidity and a gentle 6mph NW breeze, the atmospheric pressure was 1019 (Met Office).



01. White-barred Clearwing *Synanthedon spheciformis* on Birch foliage at Wissett's Wood, Shakenhurst. 09.06.2020. K.McGee.

I have occasionally been wandering along the side of the brook in Wissett's Wood contemplating the possibility of White-barred Clearwing but then immediately dismissing the idea of ever seeing one without the aid of a pheromone lure, the chances of encountering an adult otherwise have always felt like an impossible dream. The habitat where the moth was seen is in a warm sunny spot close to Shakenhurst Brook with (predominately) mature broad-leaved woodlands occupying the steep slopes either side of the brook. There is a plantation of mature Larch trees, but the dominant tree species here are (probably) hybridised Oak, Ash and Alder, with occasional Wych Elm, Small-leaved Lime, Beech, Sycamore, Silver Birch, Yew, Aspen and Wild Cherry. The shrub understorey is dominated by Hazel, with occasional Spindle, Dogwood and Hawthorn.

This area of the wood has recently undergone management work to create a new vehicle access track to be used by gamekeepers and members of the Shakenhurst Shooting Syndicate (02). Work to remove a number of trees and general scrub to create a clearing for suitable shooting positions has resulted in increased levels of light penetrating through to the ground layers resulting in an enriched and varied ground flora ideal for pollinating insects and invertebrates generally. It is interesting to note that the dominant tree species emerging as saplings at this location is Alder; one of the larval foodplants of White-barred Clearwing, the other being Birch. The

larvae live within the lower parts of the foodplants for up to three years, which are usually young suckers or young trees, but they will also use older trees and cut stumps (Porter, 1997). Evidence of the presence of a larva can be established by searching the bases of likely hosts during April for small piles of frass exiting from holes in the bark to form small piles on the ground below (Porter, 1997). This method, along with using pheromone lures, has established that there continues to be a good population of White-barred Clearwing using the Alders alongside Dowles Brook and some of the meadows in Wyre Forest (Westwood *et al*, 2015).



02. A view looking south-east along the trackside in Wissett's Wood, Shakenhurst where the moth was observed. Note the Alder saplings on the right alongside the brook. 09.06.2020. K.McGee.

The species distribution map on the NBN Atlas website shows records scattered across Wyre Forest, with most immediately adjacent to Dowles Brook, it can also be seen how important the population at Wyre is when viewed in relation to the rest of the British Isle (NBN Atlas, 2020). This new location at Wissett's Wood could be considered as evidence of a historical ecological link with Wyre, the centre of Wyre Forest lies just 8km (5 miles) to the north-east of this new site. However, the site-management histories of the two sites have been very different since at least the Norman conquest, and very possibly for hundreds of years before then as a result of bronze and iron age woodland clearances. But intriguingly, there are several small pockets of dense and almost impenetrable ancient 'dingle' woodlands within steep-sided stream valleys to the west and south-west of Wyre Forest that could have remained relatively untouched by agriculture for many centuries. The increasing use of pheromone lures may yet (hopefully) reveal populations of this enigmatic and elusive moth at similar locations in the north-west Worcestershire area generally.

### Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to ANB Simpson for advising that the sex of the moth could not be established from the photograph.

### References

- NBN Atlas *Species search* [on-line] <http://www.nbnatlas.org/> [Accessed 11.06.2020]  
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 Westwood, B., Shirley, P., Winnall, R. & Green, H. 2015. *The Nature of Wyre*. Pisces Publications, Newbury, Berkshire.

### Images

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