

Third British record for the delphacid bug *Flastena fumipennis* (Hemiptera: Delphacidae) from southwest Worcestershire

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On sweeping vegetation at the edge of a pond at Carpenter's Farm (SO777339), Berrow, between 14th September and 13th October 2020, I found cicadellid and delphacid bugs on a stand of a tall sedge, *Cyperus longus*, commonly called Galingale (01). The cicadellids I identified as *Cicadula quadrinotata*, but the delphacids were more difficult — and very small at about 2 mm long. From the keys in the RES publication on Fulgoromorpha by Le Quesne (1960), I decided that they were probably *Muellerianella fairmairei* and sent photos and details to Alan Stewart of the University of Sussex for assessment.

He responded with keenness to say that he thought they were *Flastena fumipennis*, which had been found only twice before in mainland Britain (the species is present on the Channel Islands). As *Flastena fumipennis* was not included in the RES publication, Alan Stewart sent the relevant pages from a major French publication on delphacid bugs describing the species and giving detailed illustrations of male genitalia (Della Giustina 2019). The external features of the genitalia of my male specimens, and a dissected aedeagus from one of them, confirmed that they were indeed *F. fumipennis* (02,03,04). The two existing British mainland records were from Cambridge in 2018 and at Netherton near Peterborough in 2019. In both cases the bugs were found on *Cyperus longus* on which *F. fumipennis* feeds exclusively, but full details do not appear to have been published.



01. Stand of *Cyperus longus* at Carpenter's Farm yielding *Flastena fumipennis* (photo taken in mid-November when plant partly dying down). Martin Skirrow.

The sedge *Cyperus longus* is an uncommon native to Britain, but owing to its 4-foot stature and attractive fine-leaf formation (01) it is sold by some plant nurseries, and this is how we came to have it at Carpenter's Farm. The farm was in a neglected state when it came into our possession in 2002, and a spring-fed pond near the main farmhouse was dredged in 2003. Several water plants were bought to restock it, including the *Cyperus*. They were obtained from Merebrook Water Plants, a reputable family-run water plant nursery near Hanley Swan that sells only native species of plant. Alan Stewart thinks the *Flastena* would have come with the plant rather than the insects finding it here naturally, so I contacted the owners of the nursery to see whether they could trace the origin of the *Cyperus*. Their stock of the plant was obtained as long as 40 years ago and maintained there ever since, so it is no surprise that they could not trace its origin. If the bugs came with the original plant, the species has been in Britain for much longer than suspected.

The *Flastena* has had no visible effect on our *Cyperus* and I found only small numbers of the bug in my sweepings. As it feeds only on *Cyperus longus* it would be well worth looking for the species in any stand of the plant that can be found in the county, whether wild or planted ornamentally. It is an insect that would be easily overlooked unless a deliberate search is made for it, and I guess that it is under-recorded. The owners of the nursery have generously invited me to look for the bug in their *Cyperus* next year when adult bugs are likely to be active, and this I hope to do. I would be pleased to share the relevant pages from the voluminous Della Giustina publication and help with identification if needed.



02. *Flastena fumipennis* male at Carpenter's Farm on 14 September 2020. length 2.1 mm. Martin Skirrow.



03. Rear view of genitalia (partly cleared in KOH) of male *Flastena fumipennis* swept from *Cyperus longus* on 30 September 2020. Martin Skirrow.



04. Aedeagus of the male *Flastena fumipennis* shown in 03. Martin Skirrow.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Dr Alan Stewart for identifying the *Flastena*, for sending the extract from the Della Giustina publication and for general guidance; also to Mr and Mrs Kings, owners of Merebrook Water Plants, for searching their records and for their interest.

References

Della Giustina, W. 2019. *Les Delphacidae de France et des pays limitrophes. Faune de France* Vol. 100 (832 pp.)
Le Quesne, W.J. 1960. *Handbooks for the identification of British insects: Hemiptera Fulgoromorpha*. Vol. II. Part 3. Royal Entomological Society of London.

Images

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