

Box Bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* in Ashton-under-Hill.

Roger Umpelby

In the late afternoon of 22 October 2015 I noticed a fairly non-descript bug on a stone in the garden and assumed it was the Dock Bug *Coreus marginatus*, and as I wanted to get better photographs of *C. marginatus* I collected it. When I got round to photographing it a couple of days later it didn't seem quite right for *C. marginatus* and using the British Bugs excellent website (see references list), sure enough it turned out to be the Box Bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus*.

In the UK the Box Bug was originally confined to Box Hill in Surrey (Southwood & Leston 1959) and was seen there on box and also on ivy flowers late in the season. It has spread slowly west and north in recent years and has been recorded feeding on buckthorn, yew and plum (British Bugs website). The species is quite common in parts of Europe and in Italy and Turkey it is regarded as an economic pest of hazel nuts (Moraglio 2014). In Europe other host plants recorded are alder, *Arbutus*, *Berberis*, juniper, oak, pear, and some *Rosa* and *Rubus* species (Moraglio 2014). My specimen was not on a plant when I found it, but during its captivity I offered it a range of food plants and it only one it chose was hawthorn, so perhaps this might be another food plant in the wild. Although I do not have any box plants in my garden, many of my close neighbours do.

As the species is so similar to the Dock Bug, it is probably under-recorded. According to the NBN Gateway website, the only records nearby are from Cheltenham, Chedworth and Daylesford, but it has been recorded in Edgbaston by Andrew Curran (2011). Pests of plants commonly grown in gardens, such as the Box Bug, are likely to be spread around by commercial movement of box plants much more quickly than would occur by natural spread.

Pictures 01 and 02 show the main features of the Box Bug and for comparison 04 and 05 show the Dock Bug. Both species have the same overall brown colour, but the Box Bug has a much narrower abdomen than the Dock Bug and has pointed lateral projections ('shoulders') on the pronotum (03) compared to blunter very rounded ones on the Dock Bug. Also the lateral projections on the Box Bug are sharply turned upwards in profile (02), unlike the flat projections on the Dock Bug (05). On the Dock Bug there are two small projections between the antennae which is diagnostic of this species, these are just about visible in (06) but are absent in the Box Bug.



02. Box bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* lateral view. Roger Umpelby



03. Box bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* pronotum and head detail. Roger Umpelby



01. Box bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* dorsal view. Roger Umpelby



04. Dock bug *Coreus marginatus* dorsal view. Roger Umpelby



05. Dock bug *Coreus marginatus* lateral view. Roger Umpelby



06. Dock bug *Coreus marginatus* head detail Roger Umpelby

Post script – Box Bug in Kemerton.

At the excellent Worcestershire Entomology day at Rock on Saturday 7 November 2015, John Clark showed me two bugs that he had found in his garden in Kemerton but was not sure which they were. One proved to be the Sloe (or Hairy) Bug *Dolycoris baccarum*; but to my surprise the other was the Box Bug. John had found the Box Bug on 20 October, two days before I found mine, so it seems very likely that this species is well established around Bredon Hill but is probably being overlooked because of its similarity to the Dock Bug.

References:

Curran, A. 2011. Box Bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* in Edgbaston. *Worcestershire Record* 30:23
British Bugs website -
http://www.britishbugs.org.uk/heteroptera/Coreidae/gonocerus_acuteangulatus
Southwood, T.R.E. & Leston, D. 1959. *Land and water bugs of the British Isles*, p58. Frederick Warne, London.
Moraglio, S.T., Ingegno, B.L. and Tavella, L. 2014 *Studies on semiochemicals produced by Gonocerus acuteangulatus*, 8th international congress on hazelnuts, ISHS *Acta Horticulturae* 1052, p281-287

Images

01. Box bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* dorsal view. Roger Umpelby
02. Box bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* lateral view. Roger Umpelby
03. Box bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* pronotum and head detail. Roger Umpelby

04. Dock bug *Coreus marginatus* dorsal view. Roger Umpelby
05. Dock bug *Coreus marginatus* lateral view. Roger Umpelby
06. Dock bug *Coreus marginatus* head detail Roger Umpelby