

## Land Caddis *Enoicyla pusilla* habitats - new perspectives.

Brett Westwood.

For over twenty years, inspired by Harry Green and others, I've been searching likely landscapes of Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Staffordshire and Shropshire for Land Caddis *Enoicyla pusilla*. This, our only terrestrial caddis species, is closely associated in the UK with moist leaf-litter in ancient semi-natural woodland for which it seems to be an indicator. For earlier reports see Green & Westwood 2005a, 2005b, 2012.

Searching independently or together and drawing in records from other local naturalists as well as our own, Harry Green and I produced a definitive map of land caddis using as a template one compiled in 2014 by Worcestershire Biological Records Centre who we thank. This map (04) includes at the latest count, 277 monads between Bridgnorth, Malvern Wells, Titterstone Cleve Hill and Uffmoor Wood, the known north, south, west and easterly limits respectively of *Enoicyla* in the British Isles. The vast majority of these sites embrace ancient woodland while some are linked by old hedgerows which also contain the species. In the formative years of our searches, we concentrated on likely spots with rich supplies of leaf-litter so that our findings were to an extent a self-fulfilling prophesy: they were only in these ancient woods because those were the places we searched.

As we grew more adventurous, we began to look in potentially less favourable areas. The grassy, bracken-clothed commons and woodland edges of Titterstone Cleve in Shropshire provided us with several records. The leaf litter and rich compost-like humus that accumulates under Alder *Alnus glutinosa* trees is also ideal for the caddis larva which finds the humidity it needs there.

When I began to look in the alder carr fringing the brooks and millponds around Blakedown, Belbroughton and Churchill in north Worcestershire, I found *Enoicyla* in places which didn't seem to fulfil the criteria for ancient semi-natural woodland. But the caddis was there in almost every monad where there was enough leaf-litter. At Brakemill Plantation near Hagley, *Enoicyla* is common under a few oaks by an ancient hollow-way on the edge of a modern pine plantation, a site which we would never have looked at twice when we began our surveys. Along the Barnett Brook east of Kidderminster, *Enoicyla* is in almost every monad where large Alders grow. These streamside monads stretch in a slender arc across north Worcestershire, joining long-known sites at Clent Hills and Chaddesley Woods to the caddis's Wyre Forest heartland. Perhaps there were even more sites before Kidderminster expanded and urban development enveloped old woodland in the area.

In recent years I am finding that Land Caddis can be remarkably persistent in ancient woodland fragments if its basic needs are met. For three decades I have searched canal-side woods along the River Stour valley north of Kidderminster at Caunsall, Cookley and Wolverley without success, even though one or two of these relict woods on sandstone contain Wild Service *Sorbus torminalis*, a good indicator of ancient woodland. In late April 2018 I explored Gloucester Coppice at Wolverley where planted Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* grows over dark avenues of Cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* in a wood that has been heavily modified by planting for game cover. Old maps show that this is a remnant of ancient woodland, though apart from the few patches of shaded bluebells, it is hard to imagine now. But among the leaf litter beneath the laurels, I found live *Enoicyla* larvae, the only specimens I have seen along the northern Stour Valley. It was a wake-up call which has inspired me to search further, though so far I have not met with success.

My most surprising *Enoicyla* find came in April 2019 when I was searching an old railway siding at Blackstone Fields near Bewdley (01). The steep embankments of this disused line run through a sandstone cutting shortly before joining the Severn Valley line

between Bewdley and Kidderminster. Arable fields, now under the management of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust lie on either side. The cutting is lined on one side with fragments of industrial waste, concrete and clinker among which grows a selection of ruderal plants and garden throw-outs (02). It's as unlikely a site as I can imagine for Land Caddis, so I had to blink twice when on April 27 I found a case there, constructed from tiny fragments of clinker and brick (03). Although the case was empty and no more could be found at the spot, I have no doubt that it was *Enoicyla* and that the case had been constructed on site from local materials, rather than being transported there by a bird or mammal. Land caddis occurs over half a kilometre away at Blackstone Rock, so it is possible that the insects have spread over time along the railway line, but even so the lack of leaf litter, which the larvae seem to require, is puzzling.

I intend to go back soon to look for other specimens and establish where and how they are living at Blackstone railway. What these recent finds show is that while Land Caddis seems to have a genuine preference for ancient woodlands, we might be hasty in making assumptions about its habitat choices. Harry Green and I would be happy to receive further records of *Enoicyla* and I hope that this will spur others on to search for this enigmatic species which has its UK stronghold in our region.



01. The old railway siding at Blackstone Fields near Bewdley. Brett Westwood.



02. The ground in the old railway cutting where a case of *Enoicyla pusilla* was found. Brett Westwood.





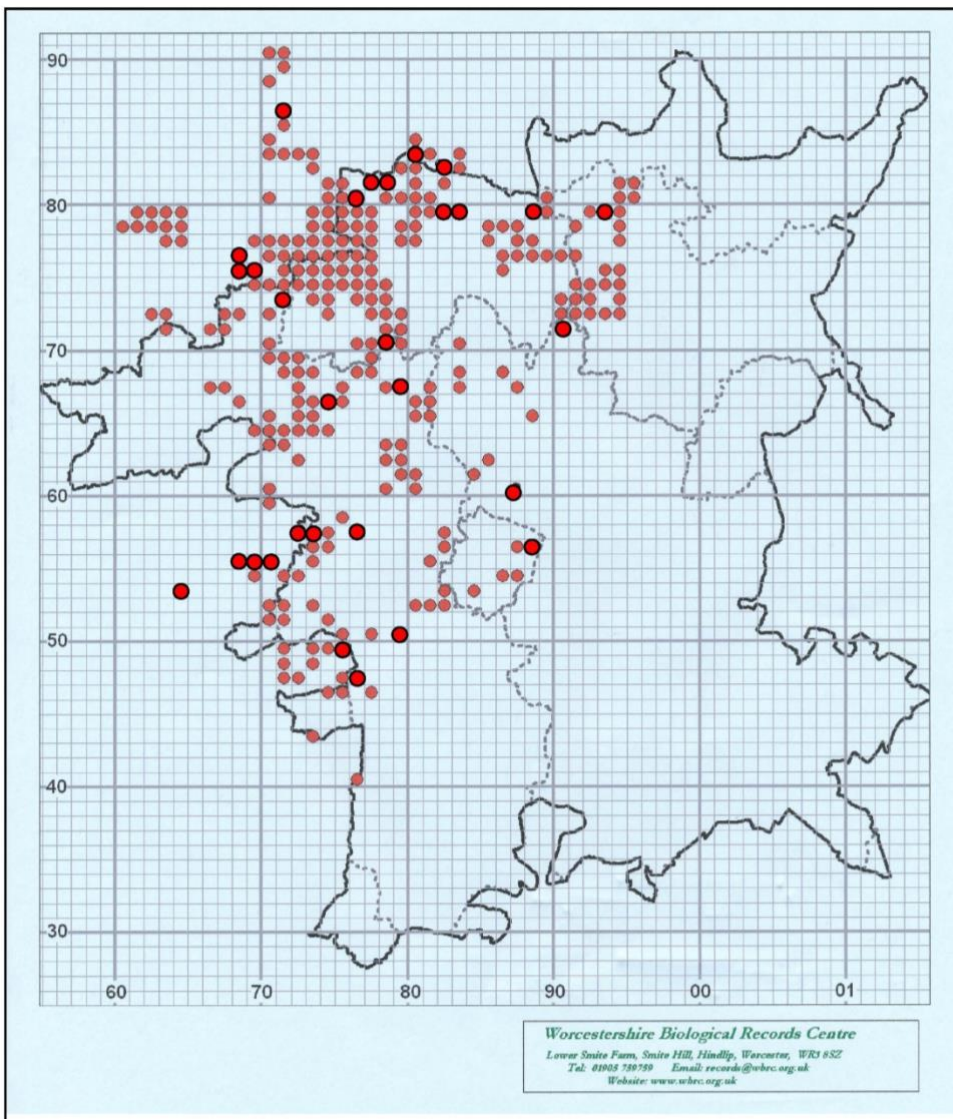
03. The case of *Enoicyla pusilla* found in the old railway cutting. Brett Westwood.

**References**

Green, G. H. & Westwood, B. 2005a. In search of the Land Caddis. *British Wildlife* 17:21-26  
 Green, H. & Westwood, B. 2005b. The Land or Terrestrial caddis (*Enoicyla pusilla*) and Wyre Forest. *Wyre Forest Study Group Review 2005*. Pages 3-9.  
 Green, H. & Westwood, B. 2012. Sightings of adult Land Caddis *Enoicyla pusilla* and a mating pair, Worcestershire October 2012. *Worcestershire Record* 33:39-40

**Images**

- 01. The old railway siding at Blackstone Fields near Bewdley. Brett Westwood.
- 01. The ground in the old railway cutting where a case of *Enoicyla pusilla* was found. Brett Westwood.
- 03. The case of *Enoicyla pusilla* found in the old railway cutting. Brett Westwood.
- 03. The case of *Enoicyla pusilla* found in the old railway cutting. Brett Westwood.
- 04. The national distribution in monads (1×1 km. squares) of Land Caddis *Enoicyla pusilla* . The slightly larger red dots are monad records added since 2014



04. The national distribution in monads (1×1 km. squares) of Land Caddis *Enoicyla pusilla* . The slightly larger red dots are monad records added since 2014