

Locust Blowfly *Stomorhina lunulata* in Worcestershire

Brett Westwood

On August 19 2022, I explored an area of Wilden Marsh where Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* and Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus* were frequent. The late-summer flowers were attractive to large numbers of insects including the hoverflies *Sericomyia silentis* and numerous *Eristalis*, *pertinax* and *E.intricarius*, so I sat down in a cloud of minty fragrance, to watch the entomological action. Before long I noticed what looked like a small *Rhingia* hoverfly on a mint flowerhead. Through close-focusing binoculars, I saw that its abdomen was barred in orange and it had a humbug-striped thorax. The elongated proboscis gave it a "snouty" appearance even in silhouette and I recalled a recent image I had seen online which convinced me that this was a male *Stomorhina lunulata*, the Locust Blowfly or Locust Fly (01).



01. Male *Stomorhina lunulata* showing 'snouty' appearance, Wilden Marsh 19.08.22. Brett Westwood.

The fly, which superficially resembled a hoverfly, spent much of its time on lower flowerheads, walking up and down stems rather than flying between them. Using this behavioural clue, I scanned the surrounding area through binoculars and easily found another four specimens, all male. Some posed for photographs (02).



02. Male *Stomorhina lunulata*, Wilden Marsh 19.08.22. Brett Westwood.

During a return visit to the same site on August 31, I found a probable female, identifiable by its grey-barred abdomen.



03. Female *Stomorhina lunulata* Wilden Marsh, 31.08.22. Brett Westwood.

Recent years have seen an increase in *Stomorhina* as a migrant to the UK, mainly in southern and eastern areas but also as far north as Scotland. It is generally considered not to breed here as it is a parasite of locust egg-masses (oothecae) including those of the Desert Locust *Schistocerca gregaria* and the Migratory Locust *Locustana migratoria*.

However, the upsurge in *Stomorhina* records involving both sexes suggests that it may be extending its host-base to encompass other orthoptera which may allow it to become resident in the UK. At Wilden there are large populations of Long-winged and Short-winged Coneheads *Conocephalus discolor* and *C.dorsalis* and Roesel's Bush Cricket *Metrioptera roeselii* which might be current or future hosts of this attractive blowfly.

These records from Wilden Marsh may be the first for the county, but were quickly followed by a female *Stomorhina lunulata* photographed in his garden by Ian Wright in Abberley in early September. Although the exceptionally hot weather may have increased numbers arriving in the UK in 2022, this is clearly an insect to look for in future.

References

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Images

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02. Male *Stomorhina lunulata*, Wilden Marsh 19.08.22. Brett Westwood.
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