

## Paper Wasp *Polistes dominula*: new to Worcestershire.

Brett Westwood

On August 30 2022, I was watching Bee-wolves *Philanthus triangulum* through close-focussing binoculars on a stand of Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus* at Wilden Marsh Worcestershire Wildlife Trust rserve, when I noticed an odd-looking wasp crawling through the plants. Closer inspection revealed that it was a paper wasp *Polistes sp.* which is a rare resident and vagrant to the UK from Continental Europe. It stayed for a couple of minutes moving through the vegetation, allowing me to take a few photographs (01 & 02) and then flew off southwards across the river Stour. About fifteen minutes later, it returned briefly to the same patch of Gipsywort and I managed to grab a few more photographs, though none were particularly good. I stayed in the area for over an hour but it did not return.



01. Female *Polistes dominulus* visiting Gipsywort, Wilden Marsh 30.8.22. Brett Westwood



02. Female *Polistes dominulus* visiting Gipsywort, Wilden Marsh 30.8.22. Brett Westwood

Four species of *Polistes* have been recorded in the UK, including the very rare *Polistes nimpha* which established a temporary colony in 2019 at Compton Verney in Warwickshire. The commonest is *P. dominula* which has been established in the south-east for many years and whose well-known colony at Ham House in Surrey was first recorded in 2003. The wasp turns up occasionally in other parts of the UK and is sometimes reported to the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society (BWARS) Facebook page. The nests are made up of fewer than a hundred cells and attached to parts of buildings or shrubs and trees by one or more pedicels. Adults visit flowers in town or in the countryside where they take nectar and hunt prey. The females and workers are active throughout summer and persist until late October. Queens over-winter in moss, tree cavities and old wasp-nests.

I knew that the lack of a specimen or a decent photograph would make this a tricky identification for a potential county first. I also knew that Steven Falk had prepared a key (link below) to the species of *Polistes* likely to be seen in the UK so I contacted him. He said that without a specimen, he would not like to give a verdict on this and recommended that I put my images on the BWARS Facebook page where Continental experts with field experience might be able to help. Within a few hours Matt Smith had referred my question to such an expert, Jesse Mendelsohn, and I had my answer: it was a worker of *Polistes dominula* and as far as I know the first record for Worcestershire.

*Polistes dominula* is a species worth looking for in future as it seems to be increasing in the UK and would be favoured by climate change, especially milder winters.

### Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to Steven Falk and to BWARS for their prompt responses.

### References

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 Falk, S. Key to *Polistes*. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349590561\\_Polistes\\_nimpha\\_Hymenoptera\\_Vespidae\\_another\\_paper\\_wasp\\_new\\_to\\_Britain](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349590561_Polistes_nimpha_Hymenoptera_Vespidae_another_paper_wasp_new_to_Britain) [Accessed 06.10.22].

### Images

01 & 02. Female *Polistes dominulus* visiting Gipsywort, Wilden Marsh 30.8.22. Brett Westwood.