

***Bracon intercessor* Nees, 1834 var. *laetus* (Wesmael, 1853) (Hymenoptera, Braconidae) on Bredon Hill, Worcestershire.**

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Introduction

On 20 October 2018 a female *Bracon* sp. (Figs 01,02,03) was swept from limestone grassland on Bredon Hill at Westmancote, Worcestershire (52°04'N 2°08'W SO9439 190 m O.D.). An illustration of the superficially distinctive insect was passed to a number of British specialists who all commented on the formidable taxonomic complexities of the genus. Shaw & Huddleston (1991) refer to these difficulties in an accessible overview of braconid wasps and Quicke (2015) makes the same point in his extended tome.

Eventually the trail led to Dr K. Samartsev, a research entomologist at the Zoological Institute RAS, St.Petersburg, Russia.

Discussion

A distinctive braconid wasp identified as *Bracon intercessor* Nees, 1834 var. *laetus* (Wesmael, 1853) was swept on the dip slope of Bredon Hill near Westmancote during October 2018. The identification was confirmed after consideration of numerous fine points of detail; Dr Samartsev had already examined the type specimen of *B. intercessor* and of this variety keyed by Papp (2012).

The diagnostic characters of the Westmancote example were found to be virtually identical with those of the type specimen. The combination of the radial vein joining the pterostigma closer to its base (01), the dense irregular punctuation of the metasomal tergites (neither concentrically arranged nor sparsely or irregularly punctate) and the long flagellomeres are characteristic. Another useful character is the short malar space whereby the 'cheeks' are 30-35% as long as the height of the eye. As in so many Hymenoptera: Parasitica, infraspecific colouration may vary considerably although in this regard the Westmancote example and the type specimen were not too dissimilar.

Shaw and Huddleston (1991) are instructive on the host-width of *Bracon* spp., not uncommonly involving Coleoptera and Diptera. Papp (2012) cites Curculionidae as a host of *B. intercessor* which is widespread throughout the Palaearctic region (Zargar *et al.*, 2015) although the British status is unclear; in more than 60 years of study I have never seen this species and it did not figure in the former English Nature's Bredon Hill Malaise trapping programme in the late 1990s. It therefore adds a further useful dimension to the fauna of Bredon Hill.



01. Female *Bracon intercessor* var. *laetus*, Westmancote, Worcestershire, 20 October 2018 dorsal aspect.



02. Female *Bracon intercessor* var. *laetus*, Westmancote, Worcestershire, 20 October 2018, lateral aspect.



03. Female *Bracon intercessor* var. *laetus*, Westmancote, Worcestershire, 20 October 2018. Head, frontal aspect.

Acknowledgements

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References

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Nomenclatural note

Papp (2012) ascribed varietal status to *B. intercessor laetus* and that name is used here even if its taxonomic validity is open to question. Elsewhere it may be described as a subspecies or as *B. laetus* Wesmael. The nomenclature will be formally clarified in the future.

Images

01. Female *Bracon intercessor* var. *laetus*, Westmancote, Worcestershire, 20 October 2018 dorsal aspect.

02. Female *Bracon intercessor* var. *laetus*, Westmancote, Worcestershire, 20 October 2018, lateral aspect.

03. Female *Bracon intercessor* var. *laetus*, Westmancote, Worcestershire, 20 October 2018. Head, frontal aspect.