

## The hoverfly *Sericomyia superbiens* (Müller, 1776) at Great Witley, Worcestershire.

Ian Wright

The first time I encountered the hoverfly *Sericomyia superbiens* (previously *Arctophila superbiens*) in my garden at Great Witley in NW Worcestershire at SO750666 was on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2013. The record was sent to the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre, but at the time I didn't realise its significance. This individual was feeding from the flowers of Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, and subsequent records have all involved this plant.

*Sericomyia superbiens* is a bumblebee mimic, and it closely resembles the Common Carder-bee *Bombus pascuorum* which is usually present on Devil's-bit Scabious at the same time. This hoverfly has a dark wing patch and this, combined with its colouring, elongate face and plumose antennae will rule out most other species. A rare colour form of *Volucella bombylans* has these features, but has a re-entrant upper outer cross-vein in the wing which *S. superbiens* lacks. A good photograph taken at the right angle will show this wing venation, and it is probably a better method than the one I used in 2013 of crawling towards the hoverfly on hands and knees with a handlens – although this method did work eventually!

Since 2013 I have seen *S. superbiens* in my garden on the following dates:

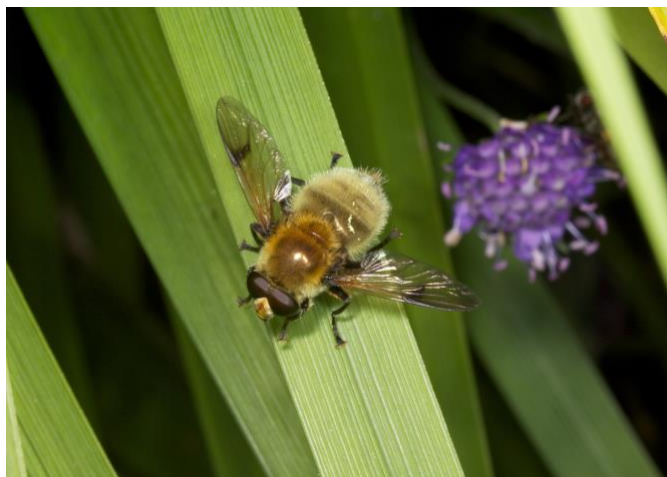
2015 September, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>

2016 September 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> (images 01 and 02)

2016 October 2<sup>nd</sup>.



01. *Sericomyia superbiens* male in garden, Great Witley, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016. Rosemary Winnall.



02. *Sericomyia superbiens* male in garden, Great Witley, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016. Rosemary Winnall.

As far as I can remember the 2013 and 2015 records were of single individuals, but on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2016, a second *S. superbiens* arrived and was almost immediately grabbed by the first, and they flew off together. A short while later one returned alone. I hadn't checked the sex of the first individual and there was not time to check the second, but it is possible that a mating occurred.

The number of sightings of *S. superbiens* seems to suggest that they are breeding in the garden or close by. One source states that: "A female was seen ovipositing in a deep, water-filled horse hoof print along a shaded muddy path near a stream" (Stubbs & Falk 2000) which leaves me wondering if some of the overgrown, neglected ponds in the garden might provide breeding habitat.

Whilst Rosemary Winnall and I were watching one male *S. superbiens* on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016, it was seen to make short flights to chase other species – maybe this represents some sort of territorial behaviour? If looking for this species, a point to bear in mind is that it seems to spend time basking on foliage between periods of feeding. Although it presumably visits other plant species, searching areas where Devil's-bit Scabious is present may yield results.

The question now remains as to whether *S. superbiens* is managing to maintain a small population in a single Worcestershire garden, or if this large and attractive hoverfly is going undetected in other parts of Worcestershire.

Many thanks are due to Rosemary Winnall for her photographs, but also for finding out the known distribution of *Sericomyia superbiens* (or lack of it in Worcestershire), and thus alerting me to the importance of the records.

### Reference

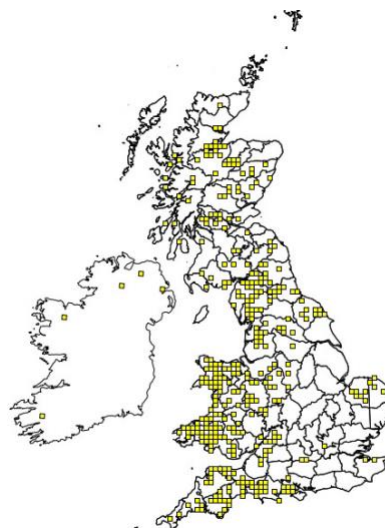
Stubbs, A. E. & Falk S. J. 2000. *British Hoverflies*. British Entomological and Natural History Society, Reading.

### Editor's Note.

Nigel Jones sent the following note on *Arctophila superbiens* in Shropshire. "Sometimes turns up in wet woodlands in south Shropshire. There are a couple of woods in the Habberley area (Eastridge and Riddles Woods) where I see it regularly. It is also been seen on the Long Mynd (Carding Mill Valley) and The Bog on open ground with wet soggy areas and flowers such as *Knautia* and thistles. I expect it is on Catherton Common and the Clee Hills and feel sure it will be in the Wyre Forest somewhere".

The national distribution is mainly westerly at can be seen on the National Biodiversity Network map at

[https://data.nbn.org.uk/Taxa/NBNSYS0100001633/Grid\\_Map](https://data.nbn.org.uk/Taxa/NBNSYS0100001633/Grid_Map) and shown below.



03. National distribution of *Sericomyia superbiens* from NBN web site

**Images**

01. *Sericomyia superbiens* male in garden, Great Witley, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016. Rosemary Winnall.

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