

Longhorn Beetles at Besford

Jean Young

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Over the last few years I have been pleased to find a few longhorn beetles (family Cerambycidae) on my local patch at Besford, (near Pershore) which has a mixed habitat of gardens, lawns, mature trees, dead wood and grassland with plentiful umbellifers. The longhorns I have spotted include the beautifully marked *Rutpela maculata* (Black and Yellow) (01), the more discreetly coloured *Phytoecia cylindrical* (Umbellifer) (02), and *Stenurella melanura* (Black-striped) (03). I've also seen what I believe were *Agapanthia villosiviridescens* (Golden-bloomed grey) and *Grammoptera ruficornis* (Common Grammoptera) but unfortunately didn't manage to get good enough photos for definitive identification, so I'll be looking out for them again next year.



01. *Rutpela maculata* Black and yellow longhorn beetle 01.07.2014.



02. *Phytoecia cylindrical* Umbellifer Longhorn 11.04.2017.

However, the most abundant longhorn I have come across is an 'LBJ' (or a 'Little Brown Job' for those unfamiliar with the abbreviation, often used in the birding world). As there are several similar looking small tan/brownish longhorns I was uncertain as to which one it was, but thought it must be a fairly common one as there were dozens of them feeding and mating in the grassland. Being fairly new to the world of



03. *Stenurella melanura* Black Striped Longhorn 09.06.2018.

beetles, Longhorns seemed like a good group to start with, as there aren't too many of them and some are fairly distinctive. While attending the excellent FSC Biolinks 'Introduction to Longhorns' course I took the opportunity to ask 'What are the common little brown longhorns that I was seeing in large numbers were likely to be?' It soon became apparent that it is rather unusual to see dozens of longhorns at a time, so further investigation was required! The next day I went to get an idea of the abundance of the beetles. I started counting and stopped after about quarter of an hour, by which time I had seen 100, of which about two thirds were mating pairs and there were plenty more around. Although I have seen good numbers of them over the last few years, 2018 seems to have been a particularly successful year for them. In June almost every clump of Ox-eye daisies I came across would have one of the beetles or a mating pair and the hogweed heads would have several beetles, I saw seven on one head!

After studying the new FSC Longhorn beetle chart, reading the Longhorn identification articles in *British Wildlife* (Duff 2007) and looking at some photos on the internet I concluded that my longhorns were *Pseudovadonia livida*, the Fairy-ring longhorn (05-09).



04. *Pseudovadonia livida* Fairy-ring Longhorn 13.06.2017.

Unlike most species of longhorn whose larvae develop in dead and decaying wood, *Pseudovadonia livida* larvae develop in soil. They are found a few centimetres beneath the surface in relatively dry grassland in a layer of humus containing the mycelium of the saprophytic fungus *Marasmius oreades* (the Fairy ring/Scotch Bonnet mushroom). They

feed on humus, roots and fungal hyphae and take two years to reach maturity, with the adults appearing from late May and feeding on flowers, mainly from the Umbelliferae or Compositae families. They are most active on warm, sunny days with mating taking place on the flower heads and females laying their eggs into the humus/soil where the mycelium of *Marasmius oreades* is found (Burakowski 1979).

The behaviour I observed ties in well with the description in the studies carried out and reported in Burakowski's paper, and the field where I was finding the longhorns has some fairly impressive fairy-rings, as can be seen in the aerial photo (10). The Watford Coleoptera Group species page for *Pseudovadonia livida* mentions that the beetles are much more abundant in some years and that they occasionally swarm. They reported that in 1980 a group of 60 adults were seen, including many mating pairs.



05. *Pseudovadonia livida* Fairy-ring longhorn 17.06.2016



06. *Pseudovadonia livida* Fairy Ring Longhorns 09.06.2018.



07. *Pseudovadonia livida* Fairy-ring Longhorns 17.06.2016.



08. *Pseudovadonia livida* Fairy-ring Longhorns mating pair 03.06.2018



09. *Pseudovadonia livida* Fairy-ring Longhorns mating pair 06.06.2018



10. Aerial photo of Fairy Rings in grassland, Besford.

The majority of records for this beetle are in the southeast of the country below a line from the Wash to the Severn estuary with a few in the Midlands. Within Worcestershire there are about 40 records, all in the south of the county from Worcester and below. The majority are in the vicinity of Pershore with a few west of Tewkesbury and a couple around Worcester.

As these beetles have a two year lifecycle, it would be interesting to know what conditions over the last 2 years have been particularly favourable for them to have become so abundant? Has anyone else been aware of a population boom this year, or maybe they've always been that numerous and I just didn't notice?

If you're out and about between May and September next year in grassland which has fairy-rings, keep a look out for these little longhorns as it would be great to get some more records of them. Although I found them mainly on hogweed and daisies they're not averse to venturing onto creeping thistle and scabious for a change.

Acknowledgements

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References

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- Watford Coleoptera Group species page
<http://www.thewcg.org.uk/cerambycidae/0139.htm>.

Images

01. *Rutpela maculata* Black and yellow longhorn beetle 01.07.2014.
 02. *Phytoecia cylindrica* Umbellifer Longhorn 11.04.2017.
 03. *Stenurella melanura* Black Striped Longhorn 09.06.2018.
 04. *Pseudovadonia livida* Fairy-ring Longhorn 13.06.2017.
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 10. Aerial photo of Fairy Rings in grassland, Besford.
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