

***Australoplana sanguinea* & *Marionfyfea advertor*;
two Antipodean flatworms at large in
Worcestershire.**

Gary Farmer

Britain can claim just four native species of flatworms or land planarians (Earthworm Society of Britain website) but others have been accidentally introduced to the country, largely by the horticultural trade. Back in 2005 “no fewer than 14 species had been found in the British Isles – so far” (Jones 2005) and now in 2023 it is considered that there are approximately 21 species of land flatworms in Britain (Royal Horticultural Society website).

Of the non-native flatworms, two established species (Australian Flatworm *Australoplana sanguinea* and New Zealand Flatworm *Arthurdendyus triangulatus*) are causing great concern because they are voracious predators of earthworms (Wildlife Gardening Forum website). I have known of the presence of one of these earthworm predators in my garden in Redditch for a number of years; first recorded in Britain in 1980 the Australian Flatworm *Australoplana sanguinea* (01 & 02) has been found in the vicinity of my compost bin and under plant pots on several occasions but never more than one or two at a time. However, a study in a Southport garden involved checking under the same planks and paving stones three times per week over the course of a ten year period, and a total of 5,121 Australian Flatworms were found and removed (Jones 2005)! So far my compost bin continues to hold huge numbers of unidentified earthworms, and I have no trouble finding worms in the wider garden but whether this will continue to be the case in the future remains to be seen as this large (to 8cm long), obvious planarian continues to become established.



01. Australian Flatworm *Australoplana sanguinea* contracted. Note unknown springtail stuck to slime. Redditch 16.04.23. Gary Farmer.



02. Australian Flatworm *Australoplana sanguinea* extended. Redditch 09.05.20. Gary Farmer.



03. *Marionfyfea advertor* flatworm with *Dicyrtomina minuta* springtail. Under flood debris Haines Meadows, Wick 22.04.22. Gary Farmer.

Marionfyfea advertor is a much smaller (to 1cm), far less obvious and as yet much rarer recent addition to the British fauna. In fact this species was described new to science in 2016 from specimens collected in the UK, the Netherlands and France and it is thought that it had been introduced to Europe from New Zealand (Jones & Sluys 2016). My only encounter with this little planarian was during a meeting in 2022 at Haines Meadows, Wick while searching for woodlice. While turning flood debris I noticed a small flatworm and was told that it was “the new one”. I photographed it and thought nothing more about it until recently while sorting unlabelled images. I sent the photo to Steve Gregory who had been present at the meeting with the comment, “the flatworm was identified by Thomas Hughes (?) on the day but I didn’t make a note. I believe it is *Marionfyfea advertor* another recent horticultural import. Are you able to confirm my ID?” The identification was confirmed by Steve Gregory and Chris Owen. So this is yet another new species worth looking out for, and hopefully it will remain an interesting addition to the county list rather than a cause for concern like its larger cousins.

References

Jones, H.D. 2005. British Land Flatworms. *British Wildlife* 16:3, 189-194.
 Jones, H.D & Sluys, R. 2016. A new terrestrial planarian species of the genus *Marionfyfea* (Platyhelminthes: Tricladida) found in Europe. *Journal of Natural History*, 50:41-42 [Accessed 25.04.23]. Earthworm Society of Britain. Available at: <https://www.earthwormsoc.org.uk/Flatworms> [Accessed 25.04.23]. Royal Horticultural Society. Available at: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/biodiversity/non-native-flatworms> [Accessed 25.04.23]. Wildlife Gardening Forum. Available at: <http://www.wlgf.org/Flatworms.html> [Accessed 25.04.23]

Images

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