

## Western Bee-fly *Bombylius canescens* at the Knapp and Papermill Nature Reserve

Neil Harris



01. Western Bee-fly at the Knapp & Papermill Nature Reserve.  
Neil Harris.

It was a warm, sunny day on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2023 when my family met up with friends at the Knapp and Papermill Reserve near Alfrick, Worcestershire to enjoy a walk through this wonderful reserve.

After a gentle walk through the orchard and along the Leigh Brook, we emerged into Big Meadow. Insects were buzzing about and the meadows were beginning to burst into bloom. Before the pathway leads into the woods at the further end of Big Meadow, a smaller path leads up the hill alongside the woodland until a bench is reached. It was here we all decided to have our lunch after an inspection of a large, flowering Wild Service tree which was visited by a good selection of species of mining bees and hoverflies.

As we sat eating our packed lunches, I noticed a small bee-fly hovering over a patch of bare earth six feet from the bench. It was very small and uniformly light ginger-brown in colour and didn't look right for the common Dark-edged Bee-fly *Bombylius major* and Western Bee-fly *Bombylius canescens* crossed my mind. Eventually it settled and I managed to take some photos. Close inspection of the photographs confirmed that it was indeed a Western Bee-fly (01), the first I have seen in Worcestershire and possibly the first for over a century.

Western Bee-fly is a scarce species known mostly from South Wales and South West England (S. Falk Flickr Site). It is a summer-flying, clear-winged bee-fly flying from early May to early-July, which makes it distinct from the two larger *Bombylius* species, Dark-edged and Dotted *Bombylius discolor*, and most closely resembles the very rare Heath Bee-fly *Bombylius minor*. Close inspection of the colour of the facial hairs is required (Dipterists Forum), though in Worcestershire no such comparison is needed.

I intend to return to this location in late May / early June in 2024 and see if there are any further signs of this rare insect.

Postscript: Brett Westwood visited the same site at Big Meadow on June 19 2024 and saw a single *Bombylius canescens* investigating burrows of *Lasioglossum* bees on a patch of bare ground which it shared with a basking Downland Villa *Villa cingulata*.

### References

Falk, S. Flickr Site. Available at:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/63075200@N07/albums/72157629234867908/> [Accessed 01.07.24]  
Dipterists Forum web site. Available at:  
<https://soldierflies.brc.ac.uk/node/81> [Accessed 01.07.24]

### Image

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