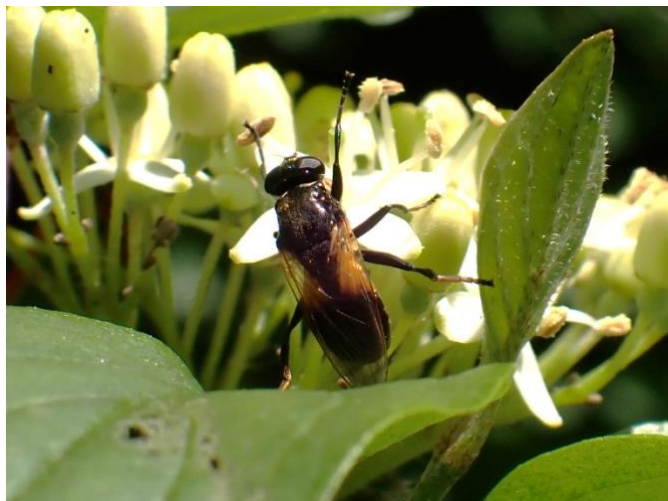


Orange-belted Spineleg hoverfly *Myolepta dubia* at Blackhouse Wood June 2024

Brett Westwood

On June 8th 2024 while walking along a ride at Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's Blackhouse Wood reserve near Longley Green SO734522, I noticed an unfamiliar hoverfly nectaring on Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* blossoms. I managed to grab a few quick photographs, though the partial shade and the height of the blossoms made for less-than-ideal conditions. Examining the pictures later I strongly suspected that the fly was the Orange-belted Spineleg hoverfly *Myolepta dubia* (01) a Nationally Scarce species whose distribution in the UK is strongest in southern and eastern England.



01. *Myolepta dubia* nectaring on Dogwood, Blackhouse Wood 08.06.24. Brett Westwood.

I posted my photographs on the UK Hoverflies Facebook page and was pleased to have the identification confirmed and accepted on iRecord. This was the first time I had seen this fly, but I was aware of its presence in the county from the Shrawley Wood book (Green et al 2022) in which Mick Blythe mentions *Myolepta dubia* emerging from rot-holes in stumps of coppiced Small-leaved Lime *Tilia cordata* in Shrawley Wood. A Malaise trap positioned over a hole containing "a pool of water and sodden debris up to 18cm deep" yielded three females in early July 2017.

As far as I know, free-flying adults have not been seen in Blackhouse Wood before my observation, which supports the suggestion that the flies may disperse to the tree canopy after emergence, though they are also said to nectar on umbellifers.

The larvae, which revel in anaerobic sludge are, unsurprisingly, equipped with a breathing tube or siphon which they can extend to the surface of the water to take in oxygen through spiracles.

The adult fly is a dark insect with broad yellow-ish orange sides to the abdomen leaving a central black stripe and if seen well, is distinctive. There is a similar but very rare species *Myolepta potens* which is Critically Endangered and unlikely to occur in our area. *Myolepta dubia* is a specialist hoverfly of old trees in woodland and is known to use Beech *Fagus sylvatica* and Horse-chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum* in parts of southern England. Small-leaved Lime is also useful to them, though rarer throughout the bulk of their UK range, and it may be no coincidence that, like Shrawley Wood, Blackhouse Wood contains a population of this tree and also has the rarer Large-leaved Lime *Tilia platyphyllos*.

References

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Images

01. *Myolepta dubia* nectaring on Dogwood, Blackhouse Wood 08.06.24. Brett Westwood.