

A Cockchafer, a bat and a sticky end

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All photographs Paul Whitehead.

Whilst checking *Amaurobius* spider's webs on a timber fence at Nafford, Birlingham, Worcestershire (VC37 SO9434) on 29 June 2024 at a height of some 1.8m from the ground my attention was drawn to a large membranous wing firmly attached to one web.

The wing was removed, relaxed in hot water and photographed (01) when it became apparent that it was the right functional flight wing of a Cockchafer *Melolontha melolontha* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Coleoptera, Scarabaeidae).



01. Right flight wing of Cockchafer *Melolontha melolontha* (L., 1758) from fence-web of spider, Nafford, Worcestershire, 29 June 2024. Paul Whitehead.

This observation invites speculation and I know of no parallels for it. It is of interest that the web was able to restrain an insect as large as a Cockchafer in the first place. Secondly the base of the wing retained fragments of the thoracic exoskeleton of the beetle which had been forcibly separated, something that no spider could achieve.

It seems feasible that a bat encountering the Cockchafer in the web shortly after its arrival removed it whilst leaving the wing in place. This in itself is not unusual for bats such as Natterer's and I have seen Brown Long-eared Bats repeatedly working under glazed verandas in Worcestershire where insects are confined and often webbed. The likelihood that the Cockchafer was finally killed by a bat perhaps actively targeting fence webs is a strong one.

Another beetle in the same web at Nafford and certainly consumed by the spider was represented by fragments of the localised cerambycid *Gracilia minuta* (Fabricius, 1781). This widespread somewhat under-recorded species has a wide range of arboreal hosts and is of frequent occurrence in outgrown hedges flanking the Severn Estuary.

Images

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