

## Notes on selected British species of *Oxypoda* (Coleoptera, Staphylinidae)

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### Introduction

The genus *Oxypoda* comprises 29 British species presently placed in seven subgenera. This contribution considers a limited number of those species which may prove difficult to identify and provides visual information as an aid to clarify points of distinction noting also that infraspecific variation creates further difficulty.

Detailed knowledge of the ecology of some species is limited by the relatively small amount of available information on breeding populations. Some species occur in decaying organic matter of various types but they are not coprophilous, less commonly necrophilous (Altunsoy, Turan, Firat & Osman, 2017), while some species have a particular affinity for fungi. Other species occupy subterranean mammal and ant nests, sometimes facultatively, but many records relate to randomly dispersing individuals.

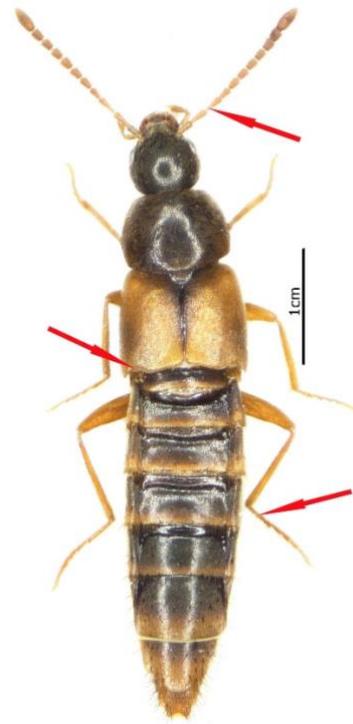
### Discussion

Of the seven subgenera, *Bessopora* Thomson, 1859 includes eight species, *Oxypoda* Mannerheim, 1830 (01, 02, 03, 04) six species and *Podoxya* Mulsant & Rey, 1875 also six species. Together these represent the majority of the British species. *Bessopora* represents mostly small species of which *Oxypoda brachyptera* (Stephens, 1832) and *Oxypoda tarda* Sharp, 1871 are subject to confusion (Joy, 1932; Whitehead, 1996) and require careful separation. The subgenus *Oxypoda* includes the larger species, some of which are distinctive even if sharing particular features. In this group, species are largely subterranean in the nests of mammals and insects and examples may be encountered in pitfall traps as they disperse terrestrially. The subgenus *Podoxya* includes some distinctive species and the superficially similar *Oxypoda brevicornis* (Stephens, 1832) (05) and *Oxypoda induta* Mulsant & Rey, 1861 (06) are considered here. Arrows marked on the figures highlight some key points of distinction cited in the text.

### Identification

This generally requires consideration of finely resolved details. Representatives of the subgenus *Oxypoda* form a reasonably cohesive group in which the third antennomere is at least as long as and frequently longer than the second (01, 02, 03, 04). Beetles showing this character can be assigned in the field. Potential confusion species here are the large *Oxypoda spectabilis* Märkel, 1844 (01) and slightly smaller *Oxypoda longipes* Mulsant & Rey, 1861 (02, 03). These species also have clearly elongate hind tarsomeres (01) and sinuate elytra corners (01, 04); *O. spectabilis* has entirely pale antennae (01). *Oxypoda longipes* has a tendency for the elytra to be marked with oblique pale vittae (02) more evident in immature examples (03, with antennomeres somewhat less elongate than in other examples seen). This may lead to confusion with a third representative of the subgenus *Oxypoda vittata* Märkel, 1842 (04) which has conspicuous elytral vittae and less elongate antennomeres so that the antennae appear more robust; the dilated palpi are here diagnostic. Numerous other points of distinction are apparent under microscopy in particular by examination of the genitalia; features such as head shape are apparent (03, 04) if somewhat subjective.

The subgenus *Podoxya* includes *O. brevicornis* (= *umbrata sensu* Joy) and *O. induta* which can be confused in the field. In this group the third antennomere is shorter than the second (05, 06) and *O. brevicornis* has shorter more robust antennae. Clear distinctions here (05, 06) are that *O. induta* has a narrower smaller head and a less transverse pronotum which is uniformly microverrucose, a distinctive field character which dulls its surface (06). Additionally this species usually has the edges of the pronotum outlined in yellow.



01. *Oxypoda spectabilis* habitus. One of nine trapped on dry inner dunes, Ynyslas, Cardiganshire, 17 October 1998. © P. F. Whitehead.



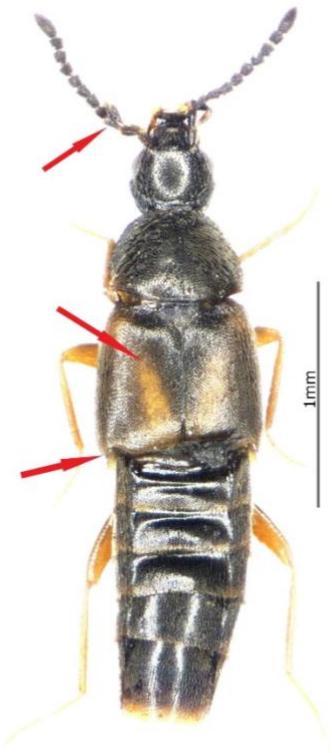
02. *Oxypoda longipes* habitus. In bird hide, Slimbridge, Gloucestershire (VC34), 31 December 2017. Specimen artificially elongated through 'telescoping' after setting. © P. F. Whitehead.



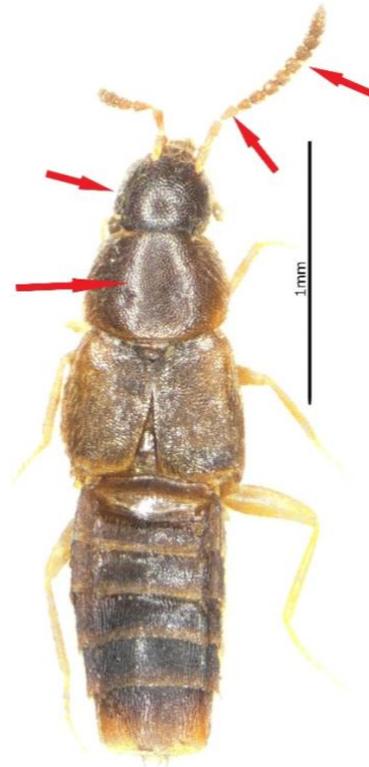
03. *Oxypoda longipes* habitus. Immature example, Mill Meadow, Drakes Broughton, Worcestershire, 2 April 2005 (K. Mc Gee leg.). © P. F. Whitehead.



05. *Oxypoda brevicornis*, habitus. Drying hay, Purlieu haymeadow, West Malvern, Worcestershire, 17 July 2017. © P. F. Whitehead.



04. *Oxypoda vittata* female habitus. In flight, Birlingham, Worcestershire, 9 April 2023. Apical abdominal segments removed for examination of spermatheca. © P. F. Whitehead.



06. *Oxypoda induta* habitus. In active garden compost, Broadway, Worcestershire, 3 May 1988. © P. F. Whitehead.

**Habitat and status**

In most cases larvae are probably fossorial, but evidence is often very limited as reflected in various publications e.g. Alexander (2018) (which for Gloucestershire generally supports these status ascriptions), Darby (2009) and Duff (1993). Species in *Bessopora* are mostly myrmecophilous.

***Oxypoda spectabilis***. In mole nests (Joy, 1932; followed by Duff, 1993); in dead leaves, fungi and carrion (Fowler, 1888); in moss and flood refuse and eight at decaying fungi (James, 2018). Regionally, Tiddesley Wood, Pershore, pitfall trap, 4 February 1997 (D. M. Green *leg.*). Elsewhere, in mole runs, Trellech ridge woodlands, Monmouthshire, 7 July 2013 (PFW *leg.*). **UK status:** Nationally Rare; 15 records this century (NBN Atlas accessed 21 April 2023).

***Oxypoda longipes***. In nests of mole, especially around Oxford (Fowler & Donisthorpe, 1913). In nests of *Lasius fuliginosus* (Latreille, 1798) (Reitter, 1909). Regionally VC37, Malvern Hills (287 m a. s. l. 28 October 2016 (PFW *leg.*); Mill Meadow, Drakes Broughton, 2 April 2005 (K. McGee *leg.*); Elsewhere, tidal drift, Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset, 4 November 2004 (PFW *leg.*, new to VC6). **UK status:** theoretically Nationally Rare; nine records this century (NBN Atlas accessed 21 April 2023).

***Oxypoda vittata***. With the ant *Lasius fuliginosus* mostly southern England (Fowler, 1888; followed by Duff, 1993); with the ant *Formica rufa* L., 1761 and in nests of *Bombus terrestris* (L., 1758) (Reitter, 1909). According to Fowler & Donisthorpe (1913) 'treated indifferently' by *Lasius fuliginosus*. Regionally VC37, Bredon Hill footslopes (PFW *leg.*, April, 2020); in flight GWR embankment, Broadway, October 2007 and Birlingham, 9 April 2023. This last example (04) occurred in proximity to a population of the ant *Lasius fuliginosus*. **UK status:** theoretically Nationally Rare; nine records this century (NBN Atlas accessed 21 April 2023).

***Oxypoda brevicornis***. Haystack refuse, dead leaves, old faggots (Fowler, 1888); decaying plant matter (Reitter, 1909). In wet woodland detritus and decaying fungi, decaying foliage on woodland floor (Koch, 1994). Regionally (PFW *leg.*) somewhat hygrophilous in sedge and other litter in woodlands, carr woodland, garden compost, 10 under herbage mats of *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum* Broadway Gravel Pit, Worcestershire, 30 June 1988; in marshes and wet woodlands on the dip slope of Bredon Hill; nest litter of badger *Meles meles* (L.), Westmancote, Worcestershire, 17 July 1992. Elsewhere occasionally necrophilous, e.g. at dead cat and dead badger in Forest of Brandbergen, Haninge, Sweden (Ferrer, Gomy, Snäll & Whitehead, 2004; Ferrer, Whitehead, Collingwood, Gomy & Snäll, 2006). Very local in Somerset (Duff, 1993). **UK status:** widespread, frequent, 161 records this century (NBN Atlas accessed 21 April 2023)

***Oxypoda induta***. Detritophilous with some evidence for hygrophily. Haystack refuse, uncommon (Fowler, 1888); very rare (Reitter, 1909). Regionally (VC37, PFW *leg.*) in nest litter of badger, Westmancote, 19 February 1993; in garden compost, teneral examples, Broadway, 5 May 1988. In stable bedding, Broadway, 4 March 1991. Apparently associated with Cotswold footslopes and hill drainage; several records along the lower slopes of Bredon Hill. In flight, Evesham town suburbs, 28 November 2019. Not cited by Duff (1993) or Boyce & Duff (2009). **UK status:** theoretically Nationally Rare; one record this century (NBN Atlas accessed 21 April 2023).

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**Images**

01. *Oxypoda spectabilis* habitus. One of nine trapped on dry inner dunes, Ynyslas, Cardiganshire, 17 October 1998. © P. F. Whitehead.
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**Author's Footnote**

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