

***Smynturodes betae* Westwood, 1849 (Hemiptera, Aphididae) on cultivated tomato plants *Solanum lycopersicum* Linnaeus at Little Comberton, Worcestershire.**

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This short note outlines the circumstances surrounding a population of the aphid *Smynturodes betae* Westwood, 1849 (01) that developed on the roots of cultivated tomato plants in a garden at Little Comberton, Worcestershire (SO93, 30 m a.s. l.), during 2021. In June 2021 it was noticed that a number of tomato plants in proximity to each other lacked vigour and eventually began to decline significantly. From 29 June 2021 these plants were removed and their rootlets were found to have been colonised by the apterous aphid *S. betae*.

Although it is known to disperse as alates to a woody plant host *Pistacia* spp. (Blackman & Eastop, 2006), this is a genus of plants that is not native to Britain, so that unless alate aphids are using a different host plant genus here, the populations remain anholocyclic (entirely lacking males), parthenogenetic and subterranean. This was certainly the case at Little Comberton where up to 38 immature individuals were found at the roots of a single tomato plant.



01. Apterous aphids *Smynturodes betae*, Little Comberton, Worcestershire, 29 June 2021. The absence of siphunculi is clear. Paul Whitehead.

The developing aphids were attended intensively by two species of ant *Lasius niger* Linnaeus, 1758 and *Lasius flavus* (Fabricius, 1781). The latter species which nests close by took particular interest in the immature aphids, actively carrying them away in their mandibles from a potential threat. *Smynturodes betae* occurs on the roots of a range of herbaceous plants and is probably under-recorded.

**Reference**

Blackman, R. L. & Eastop, V.F. 2006. *Aphids on the world's herbaceous plants and shrubs*. Two volumes. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, UK.

**Images**

01. Apterous aphids *Smynturodes betae*, Little Comberton, Worcestershire, 29 June 2021. Paul Whitehead.