

Variation in adult British *Taeniapion urticarium* (Coleoptera, Apionidae)

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Introduction

In Britain *Taeniapion urticarium* (Herbst, 1784) is a somewhat localised weevil breeding in the stems of Stinging Nettle *Urtica dioica* L. According to Morris (1990) the elytra are dark red or reddish brown and the British range is dominantly to the south of Leicestershire. According to NBN Atlas (accessed 5 July 2024) there are also records from Liverpool made during 1989 by the late Mr T. Eccles and from the University of York during 2022; generally, however the insect remains largely southern in England.

Worcestershire records on the NBN Atlas are limited to three, most recently at Croome Court during 2016. The earliest record claimed is for 2004 which may require review as the accompanying map reference suggests built development within the conurbation of Bewdley.



01. Mr J. W. Meiklejohn awaiting the emergence of *Taeniapion urticarium*, Lower Smite Farm, Hindlip C.P., 19 April 2007.

Discussion

My first acquaintance with *T. urticarium* in Worcestershire was when the late Mr J. W. Meiklejohn observed adult beetles on *Urtica dioica* at Lower Smite Farm, Hindlip C. P. (VC37 SO8859 46m O.D.) on several dates during April 2007 (01) and passed specimens to me. There the landscape matrix is dominantly an agricultural one.

Since 2019 it has become apparent that *T. urticarium* is an established denizen of *Urtica*-fen on the floodplain of the lower valley of the Warwickshire Avon, in particular in the Birlingham area of Worcestershire, with adults recorded during May (02), June and October (03). This habitat is an important regional one for *T. urticarium* where it apparently occurs sporadically and at low density.

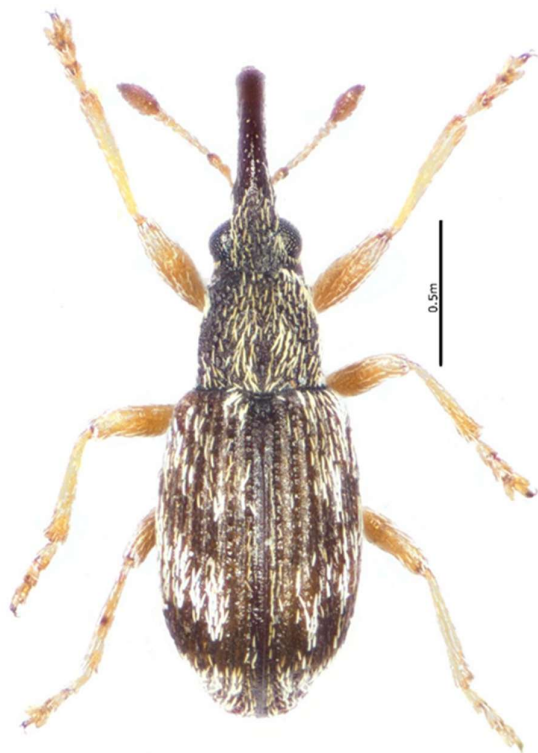
Elsewhere it was noted on Bredon Hill in Eckington C. P. (VC37 ST9440 80m O.D.) on 6 June 2020 (04) with a more recent record at Battlesbury Hill, Warminster C. P., Wiltshire (VC8 ST8945 114m O.D.) on 11 May 2024 (05). The vast majority of these examples are female but when viewed together show a significant range of variation which is illustrated here. In particular the female from Battlesbury Hill is essentially black with the pronotal scaling almost white whereas examples from the Avon valley are paler with pronotal scaling yellowish. It is not presently confirmed whether a darkening trend of adult beetles correlates in any way with either altitude or habitat.



02. *Taeniapion urticarium* male habitus, *Urtica*-fen, Birlingham, Worcestershire, 13m O.D., 5 May 2019. The rostrum is somewhat shorter and more distinctly scaled than that of females.



03. *Taeniapion urticarium* female habitus, *Urtica*-fen, Birlingham, Worcestershire, 13m O.D., 29 October 2023.



04. *Taeniapion urticarium* female *habitus*, Bredon Hill, Eckington, Worcestershire, 80m O.D., 6 June 2020.



05. *Taeniapion urticarium* female *habitus*, Battlesbury Hill, Warminster, Wiltshire, 114m O.D., 11 May 2024.

Slight differences in plan-form that are not gender-based can also be observed in the figures. I discussed this matter with Professor Marek Wanat (*in litt*, 23 November 2023) who has extensive knowledge of European apionids and he confirmed that there are significant variations in *T. urticarium* in the wider context of Europe in particular with regard to rostral length but also other features.

A related European species *Taeniapion rufulum* (Wencker, 1864) is associated with Annual Nettle *Urtica urens* L. but is believed to be in significant decline in parts of Europe due to land use changes. The genitalia of these species of *Taeniapion* were figured by Alonso-Zarazaga (1990) noting that the male genitalia are not highly differentiated.

Acknowledgements

I thank Professor Marek Wanat, Wrocław, Poland, for informed discussion.

References

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Morris, M.G. 1990. Orthocerous Weevils. Coleoptera Curculionoidea (Nemonychidae, Anthribidae, Urodontidae, Attelabidae and Apionidae). *Handbook for the identification of British insects* **5**(16):1-108.

Images

01. Mr J. W. Meiklejohn awaiting the emergence of *Taeniapion urticarium*, Lower Smite Farm, Hindlip C.P., 19 April 2007.
02. *Taeniapion urticarium* male *habitus*, *Urtica*-fen, Birlingham, Worcestershire, 13m O.D., 5 May 2019. The rostrum is somewhat shorter and more distinctly scaled than that of females.
03. *Taeniapion urticarium* female *habitus*, *Urtica*-fen, Birlingham, Worcestershire, 13m O.D., 29 October 2023.
04. *Taeniapion urticarium* female *habitus*, Bredon Hill, Eckington, Worcestershire, 80m O.D., 6 June 2020.
05. *Taeniapion urticarium* female *habitus*, Battlesbury Hill, Warminster, Wiltshire, 114m O.D., 11 May 2024.

Editor's note.

There is a record for *T. urticarium* from Hampton, Evesham 10.09.2018 which is not shown on NBN. The specimen was swept from nettles on the edge of a horse-grazed paddock. See below.



Taeniapion urticarium from Hampton, Evesham 10.09.18.
Gary Farmer.