

SAWFLY STUDY GROUP

NEWSLETTER No. 1

May 1987

The past 15 years have seen a remarkable increase in enthusiasm for biological recording in Great Britain. There are now over 30 national recording schemes for various groups of insects, but, as yet, not one for the Symphyta. In discussing this void with other entomologists, the view generally expressed is that there is too little known about sawflies, they are too difficult to identify, there are too many of them and too few people interested.

The Sawfly Study Group therefore is intended to draw together the existing enthusiasm for sawflies and to facilitate a rapid interchange of ideas with the view to sorting out the problems associated with finding and identifying sawflies and to create a recording scheme for sawflies as soon as possible.

This Newsletter has been sent to more than 20 entomologists who have displayed, perhaps unwittingly, some vestige of interest in sawflies. With it comes the request that, should you be in favour of the formation of the study group, you write back with any ideas about the function of the group, projects which the group could undertake, the direction it should go in furthering the study of sawflies and, not least, with notes and articles for Newsletter no 2. If you know of any other enthusiasts, please tell them about the Newsletter and send any enquiries to me.

Brian Eversham of the Biological Records Centre, Monks Wood, kindly arranged for the production and distribution of this Newsletter, and 3 people have contributed articles. To them I extend my personal thanks for their co-operation. Now it's your turn.

David Sheppard, 10 Stainfield Road, Hanthorpe, Bourne, Lincs PE10 0RE

(A full list of names and addresses appears at the end of this Newsletter)

What is the status of Abia species in Britain?

Adam Wright

Looking at either of the Royal Entomological Society (RES) keys one would be forgiven for thinking that by working areas with large patches of either Devil's-bit Scabious (Succisa pratensis Monch) or Field Scabious (Knautia arvensis (L.)) it would be relatively easy to find Abia sericea L. and possibly A. candens Konow as well.

I have been looking for about 5 years now, not just in Warwickshire, but in Gloucestershire, Devon and Cornwall and have still drawn a blank! Maybe I am just being unlucky, but perhaps these insects have now become scarce. If you are finding Abia species frequently (or alternatively not at all!) please let me know. I would love to have my suspicions confirmed/fears allayed!

Distribution maps of British sawflies

David Sheppard

I have been busying myself in gathering together the records of British sawflies from the entomological literature and a few museum collections. The resulting distribution maps are disappointingly lacking in black dots, or even open circles for that matter, so much so that I began to plot the data as vice-counties as well. That certainly made the maps look blacker!

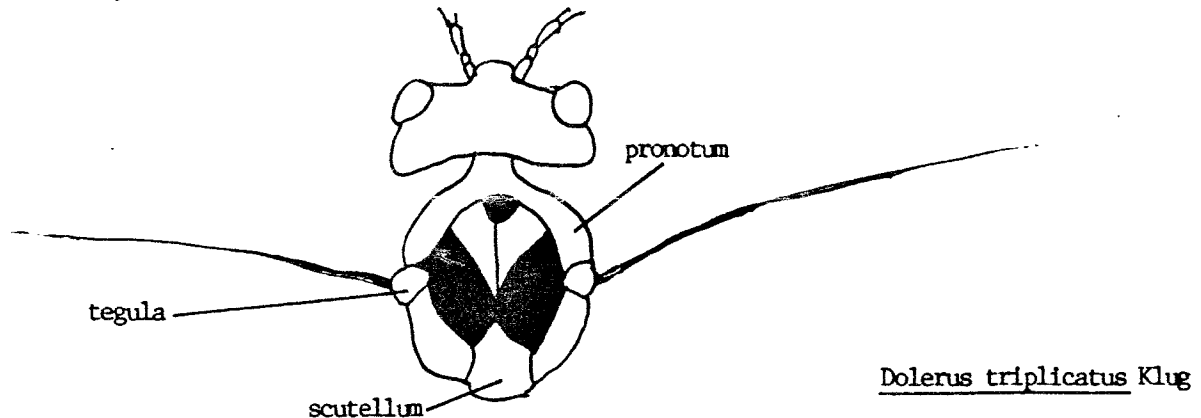
However, rather than wait until the dots begin to show a pattern of distribution, I thought it would be a good idea to produce a few maps in each issue of the newsletter by way of a stimulus for more recording and for correcting existing errors.

To that end, therefore, I intend to produce maps for the 21 species of the families Xylidae and Pamphilidae in the next newsletter. That depends, however, on you sending in your records for those species to me by the end of July.

Field identification of sawflies

Adam Wright

Perhaps one of the most frustrating things about starting on sawfly recording is that so few seem "do-able" in the field. It is hoped that any tips on field identification to species level can be included in the newsletter. To start off, I offer the following field character for the "red group" species Dolerus triplicatus Klug. Although there are several species where the abdomen is entirely or mainly orange/red in colour, D. triplicatus has a very distinctive "horseshoe" mark on the thorax. The side lobes of the mesonotum are black, and there is a small black spot on the front lobe giving the following pattern. I have found it very easy to pick out in the field from this character, which is reliable in both males and females.



Where are those sawfly collections?

David Sheppard

This is a project in which all can participate. The aim is to record the whereabouts and condition of sawfly collections in national and local museums, as well as those in private hands. It is hoped to produce a directory of sawfly collections so as to facilitate the tracing of missing specimens - like the 'only' known British specimens of Strongylogaster filicis. This was collected by James Hardy, identified by Peter Cameron but seems now to have disappeared.

Some museum collections have been catalogued, such as those at Coventry and Newcastle upon Tyne, but many private collections, including my own, are uncatalogued and the origin of some amalgamated collections are probably lost in the dust of Anthrenus. The directory should go somewhere towards identifying the surviving collections and perhaps even in reconstructing old dispersed collections.

The data required are:

1. Name of depository
2. Name of collection
3. Name of collectors whose material is included
4. Description of collection eg British/foreign, identified/unidentified, arranged/mixed, good/bad/fair/destroyed condition
5. Description of housing eg 16 store boxes, 20 drawer cabinet
6. Size (approximate number of specimens/number of drawers or boxes)

Additional details may be submitted if you wish and even negative data is of value (eg no collection at Bourne Museum).

Send your entries to me and the results will be produced in a future newsletter.

Catalogue of the sawflies in the collections of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry

In 1986 the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum published an annotated catalogue of their sawfly collections, which are comprised largely of material from 2 historic collections: the John William Saunt collection and the Harold William Daltry collection. Together with material collected by museum staff, they total 5500 specimens of over 350 species on the British list.

Apart from cataloguing these historical collections, the publication gives a reasonable idea of the relative abundance of species, and, of course, much locality data for England and Scotland (and what I hope is a useful bibliography). Copies are available at £2.50 each (plus p&p) from Adam Wright, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5RW.

Where next?

A D Liston

The three RES handbooks written by R B Benson from 1951 to 1958 are undoubtedly the "bible" of any serious student of sawflies in the British Isles. However, no work of this kind can remain completely up-to-date for long. Some of the minor pitfalls that await a user of the handbooks c. 30 years after their publication are worth considering - not least because the way in which the work has "dated" points to interesting areas in which we can contribute further new information.

Firstly, by my reckoning there are 11 species discovered in Britain since the handbooks (including the 1981 revision of Part a) were published. Interestingly, all but 2 of the species are Nematinae (*Xiphydria longicollis* and a *Macrophya* species are the exceptions). Probably the greater number of future novelties will also be Nematines. But there is also a smaller number of species which should be regarded as separate according to recent European studies that are not distinguished in the handbooks.

Secondly, a great deal more needs to be discovered about the hostplants of British Symphyta. The brief information in the handbooks is very often based on continental rearing records, a few of which are really quite suspect. Also, no comprehensive key to larvae yet exists in any language.

Thirdly, the distribution of many species is much wider than indicated; but without a great deal more collecting activity, we will never have much more than the vaguest idea of the true distribution.

Fourthly, significant numbers of specific names used by Benson have been found to be incorrect under the rules of nomenclature. Not all of these changes are listed in the latest RES Hymenoptera checklist. Many species are therefore named differently in recent continental publications. I feel that it might be of use critically to revise the British checklist of Symphyta in the not-too-distant future.

Having fielded the above remarks, I must however emphasize that it is difficult to go very far wrong when using Benson's keys carefully.

PS A note on *Macrophya parvula*, new to Britain, with identification key, will appear in Ent. Gaz.

Invertebrate Site Register national conservation review of selected groups of British Hymenoptera

Steven Falk

In the summer of 1987 the Nature Conservancy Council's Invertebrate Site Register will begin a conservation review of British Hymenoptera. This will lead to the production of detailed data sheets for our rarer species with information on distribution, habitat, ecology, status, threats and management. These should greatly assist those responsible for the management of conservation sites and other areas to take into account the needs of the more vulnerable Hymenoptera. It is hoped that as many hymenopterists as possible will become involved in this project to ensure a detailed and accurate final product. My initial task will be to identify which groups within the Order are sufficiently recorded and understood to assess the status of species and their conservation needs and then to form a consensus of opinion concerning which are the rarer and more threatened species. This will be done by consulting as many entomologists as possible who have experience of studying British Hymenoptera, and it is anticipated that the sawflies and aculeates will be the groups treated in most detail. The data sheets will also be drawn up on the basis of consultation with entomologists combined with abstracting data from the literature and museum collections. The national review of Diptera is almost finished after 2 years' work and has been a

great success. Some 1650 species have been covered and our understanding of the needs and status of many critical species has been considerably improved. It is hoped that this will also be achieved for Hymenoptera, providing a sound basis for their future conservation in Britain.

Stethomostus funereus (Klug)

Adam Wright

It would seem this insect is even rarer than previously thought, since the second British record mentioned in Benson's RES handbook (Symphyta section (b) page 100) must now be deleted. The specimen, a female taken by J W Saunt at Sharpham, Somerset, on 6 June 1927 and determined by Benson is, sadly, a mis-identification. I have re-determined the specimen as Nesoselandria morio (Fabricius). However, the good news is that Dave Sheppard has found a further male of S. funereus.

Microdiprion pallipes (Fallen)

Adam Wright

Following the recent discovery of a single female of this species in central England (Wright 1987 in press) I am prompted to wonder whether any other of our Caledonian forest species are spreading southwards to coniferous plantations. I certainly hadn't expected to find M. pallipes in my area, but I am now wondering whether I should be looking for Gilpinia species as well! If the Diprionids are colonizing new areas, then by paying more attention to Pinus and Larix when sawfly hunting we may be able to build up some revealing distribution maps. Keep your eyes peeled!

Breeding sawflies out from larvae

Adam Wright

With infuriating regularity, I am finding my sawfly larvae will quite happily pupate - never to emerge as adults, or with very low success of hatch rates. Other people seem to have similar problems. If anyone has a foolproof (or even reasonably successful!) means of persuading the adults to emerge from pupae, perhaps they could reveal the secret in a future issue of the Sawfly Study Group newsletter.

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