

## OTHER INSECTS

These are observations noted whilst going about the tasks of managing the woodland, not a thorough survey.

**Wood ants.** When the weather warms up the wood ants emerge, each year they rebuild their nests in the same place, in part dictated by the availability of suitable material, typically pine needles.



On the first really warm day they emerge as a seething mass, before organising themselves for the main task.

**Ladybirds.** Unfortunately the Harlequin ladybird, *Harmonia axyridis* is a recently arrived invasive species, with a large variety of colours, confusing identification with native species. According to the Field Studies Council identification chart there are over 100 colour patterns for the Harlequin ladybird. The species originated in Asia but have been used as a biological control agent in the USA and mainland Europe and have now crossed the Channel, clearly completely unaware of Brexit. They can reproduce throughout the year and are the most invasive ladybird species on earth out-competing native species and will eat the eggs and larvae of other insects if sufficient food sources are not available. The group on the right were uncovered when removing a temporary tarpaulin roof covering on the sawmill barn during repair of the roof.



**Beetles.** The front pair of wings of beetles are hardened into wing-cases, distinguishing them from most other insects. Beetles (*Coleoptera*) are known to include some 350,000 species, and are the largest group of animals on earth. In the United States, there are nearly 30,000 kinds of beetles known. These figures are rising constantly due to the naming of new species by taxonomists. [Smithsonian Institute].

The ladybirds above are beetles.

Recently a Green Tiger Beetle *Cicindela campestris* was identified in the wood. My concern was that it might have been the invasive Emerald Ash Borer; however it was not!

When the field was topped in June last year nettles in a large clump in the centre were left as they were harbouring the jet black caterpillars of the Peacock butterfly. Unfortunately there were also thistles in the area, about to seed. Whilst the thistles are brilliant for the butterflies they are uncontrollable if allowed to seed. Selective cutting of the thistles to prevent seeding was complicated

as they were covered with many pairs of mating Common red soldier beetle, *Rhagonycha fulva*.

It is quite complicated managing nature, which used to get on quite well on its own, left to its own devices!



Dominic Greves took this photograph of a Nettle weevil *Phyllobius pomaceus* in the wood on a bluebell. Another beetle!

**Crickets and Spiders.** In November 2011 on a mild evening, whilst researching the habits of the flightless female winter moth, which involved examination of oak tree trunks at dusk, there was a myriad of insect activity

and very often a single green cricket, probably a Great Green Bush-cricket, *Tettigonia viridissima*.

The flightless female winter moth (left) can only walk and climb, when it emerges in the winter, there are several



species, having pupated and lived in the ground during the summer, under the oak tree from which it descended. If found on the oak by the males, the eggs are laid at the top of the tree and if the emerging larvae arrive at the appropriate time, they can completely defoliate a mature oak in a matter of weeks.

More recently I disturbed several spiders which appeared to be clasping a large egg sac.

It is a Wolf spider, *Pisaura mirabilis*, which unusually does not use a web; but catches its prey by running. It only spins a web for the young when they are ready to hatch.

**Flies.** St Mark's flies are easily distinguished by their long black dangling legs when they fly. *Bibio marci* or St. Mark's fly is a species of flies from the family *Bibionidae*. It is found across much of Europe. Their common name comes from the fact that the adults usually emerge around St Mark's Day, 25 April.

In 2011, under some fallen oak boughs I encountered larvae which once exposed were able to burrow into the soil in a matter of minutes, see the photograph on the right. If you look closely you will see that they have backward facing barbs which enable them to burrow so rapidly. An evolutionary advantage! They were probably larvae of the St Mark's flies.

Other species of fly rapidly congregate on the foul smelling viscous material on the tip of the Common Stinkhorn fungus, also aptly named *Phallus Impudicus*. They then spread the spores. Another evolutionary advantage!



**Bees, Wasps and Hornets.** On a warm day in May, the grove of Alder Buckthorn, hums with the sound of the small bees attending the inconspicuous flowers of the same. The bees almost certainly come from a nest in a hole in a mature sweet chestnut tree about 50m away.



In 2018 Hornets built a nest in the cleft of an oak near the sawmill. Dominic Greves provided the photograph of the hornet!



Wasps however provide the more fascinating tale. Except when they compete for your jam sandwich late in the summer, or your garden fruit, they are a very beneficial contributor. At the end of the Summer there is unlikely to be a single survivor from a wasps' nest. This is fortunate, as a single surviving queen can produce 60,000 progeny the following year.

If the queen survives the winter, she then builds a very small nest, with maybe 12 – 15 cells in it and lays the eggs and natures the small team of workers. You can often see such abandoned nests about the size of a table tennis ball. The queen, with her team, then embarks on the main task to establish a large nest and colony.

The engineering structure of a nest with multiple layers and support trusses is extraordinary. The skills and knowledge are not learned, they are born with them. I had the luxury of such a

nest being built inside an abandoned blue tit nesting box. The wasps nest was then destroyed almost certainly by a woodpecker. On the left is an intact nest structure on a beech tree branch. On the right is the internal structure shown from the nest in the bird box, showing the layers and the undeveloped cells disturbed by the attacker.

