

The Gloucester Mecopteran

Celebrating our Scorpionflies

First Anniversary Edition !

Vol 1, No 3 : October 2014

Down in the Forest...

...on a balmy day in June 2014, a wandering mecopterist had the good fortune to see and catch a male Scarce Scorpionfly that was perched on a shrub beside the Cannop Brook. This seems to be the first Gloucestershire record of *Panorpa cognata* away from previously known sites in the Cotswold Hills.

According to the Provisional Atlas of the Lacewings and Allied Insects¹ 'wet woodland' is a recognised habitat for this species, which has more usually been found on calcareous sites. Perhaps it will turn up elsewhere in the Dean or at some damp, shady spot in the Severn Vale.

¹ Colin W Plant, ITE, 1994

Editorial:

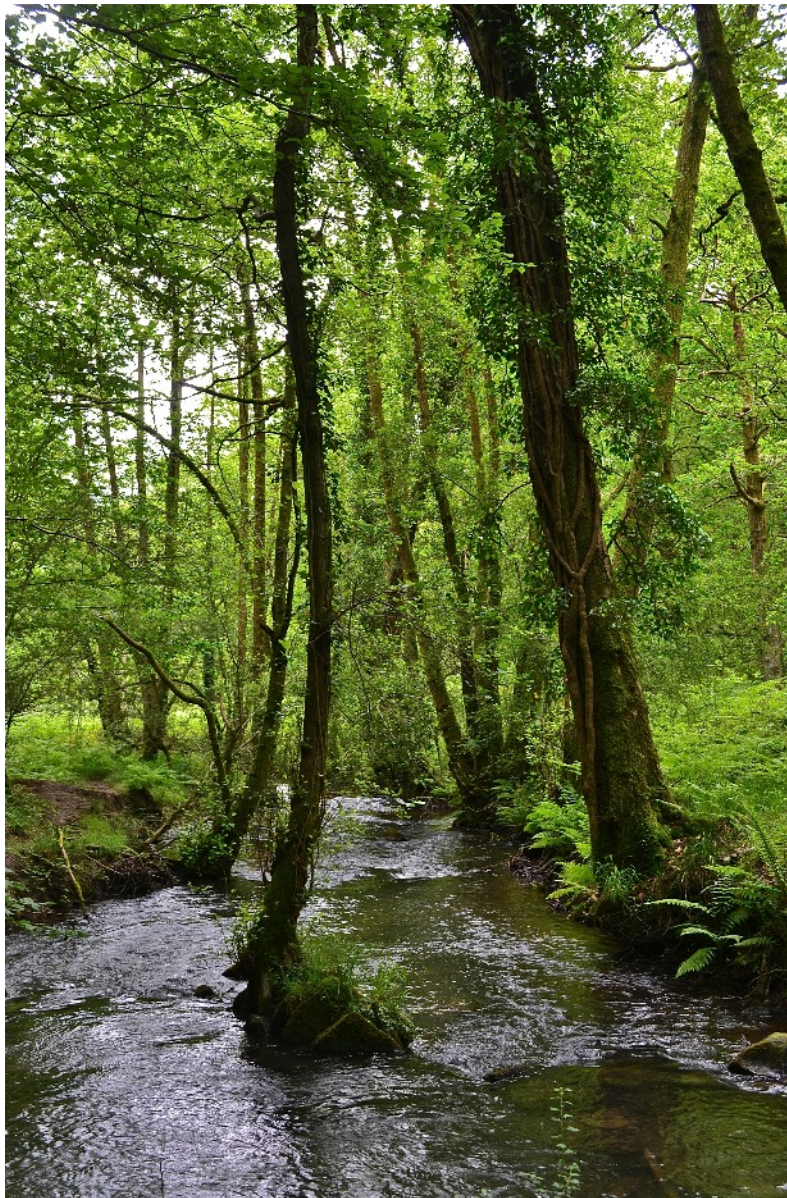
Who could have predicted that, just twelve months after publication of the first issue, *The Gloucester Mecopteran* would already be celebrating its first anniversary?

The task of raising the profile of our favourite insects received encouragement recently when the first two issues of *The Gloucester Mecopteran* were reproduced, in colour, in the pages of Worcestershire Record (the Journal and Newsletter of Worcestershire Recorders and the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre). The editor's thanks go to Harry Green and WBRC for this generous and unexpected gesture.

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Scorpionflies, being persistent scavengers, can often be seen searching for their next meal.

See page 2 of *The Gloucester Mecopteran* for live action photographs of some hungry scorpionflies observed going about their business during recent summer days.



The Cannop Valley - a Scarce Scorpionfly site



The Scarce Scorpionfly from the Forest of Dean

Showing the reduced wing markings of this species and the male's straight V-shaped calipers



What's on the menu?

Rather like people, scorpionflies are omnivores and can enjoy a varied diet. However, whereas human beings may make a conscious choice between, say, coq au vin and bread pudding, or restrict themselves to vegetarian food, scorpionflies are obliged to make do with whatever nature has put on the table at any particular time.

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The female in the top picture appears to be about to tuck in to a moribund beetle. This looks like a difficult dish to tackle, although it's probably more nutritious than most popular breakfast cereals.



The male Common Scorpionfly in the second picture has stumbled upon the detached head of an unlucky bee, and is already enjoying a hearty snack. Just how the bee lost its head is not at all clear but, by a happy coincidence, it seems to have landed conveniently on a horizontal comfrey leaf where it has come to the attention of the scavenging scorpionfly. Somehow this meal strikes *The Gloucester Mecopteran* as the potential main course for a gourmet dining experience.

The third picture takes us to dessert, of course. The composition of pollen varies between different plant species, but it surely provides an exploitable source of protein, sugar and starch for active, omnivorous scorpionflies who need to be fit and healthy when seeking out and dealing with more mobile food.

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Although several scorpionflies may share the same nettle bed or bramble patch they do not appear to have any instinct for communal feeding. All three examples depicted here are eating alone, untroubled by rival claimants to their finds. Sadly, there seems to be no evidence that these delightful insects gather at the end of a hard day's work to share their stories and their suppers at The Bee's Head Inn.