

Recent records of *Nathrius brevipennis* (Mulsant) (Cerambycidae) in London

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On 18 July 2010 I found a specimen of this curious little beetle, crawling on my arm, as I read the newspaper at the end of my garden (TQ343743, VC 17 Surrey). It took a few moments before I realized what it was. Actually, it took a few moments before I realized it was a beetle. Its size, speed and agile gait made me first think it was an ant. Then, its lack of geniculate antennae made me think it might be one of the small wingless ichneumons. Luckily I was doing the crossword, so had my reading glasses on, and a final close focus brought the realization that it was *Nathrius*.

This longhorn is at once distinctive because of its short elytra, although it is smaller (my specimen 4mm) than both *Molorchus minor* (Linnaeus) and *Glaphyra umbellatarum* (von Schreber), and unicolorous pitchy or black.

The beetle's exact status in Britain is not readily ascertainable. It was not included in older works, but was known by Joy (1932) who offered the relatively unhelpful comment 'chiefly in old willow baskets'. The conclusion must be that most specimens were imported in these goods, and that it was, in reality, a southern European species. It was however reared from dogwood branches (Duffy, 1953) and other small-diameter timbers, so was accepted as established in Britain by Uthhoff-Kaufmann (1990). Of the scattered dozen or so localities indicated in the atlas by Twinn & Harding (1999), which lists the beetle as an 'introduction - apparently naturalised', only one is modern (1970-1998), so if *Nathrius* is now breeding in the UK, it remains a very rare and elusive insect.

A request through the British beetles internet group elicited three widespread records. On 26 May 1999, the owner of an Edinburgh house took numerous specimens into the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, stating that they had appeared in association with some unidentified decorative twigs (Geoff Hancock, pers. comm.); John Meikeljohn took one in Burley Dene Meadows, Worcestershire, on 11 June 2005 (pers. comm. via Harry Green) and Peter Hammond recorded it in the Natural History Museum wildlife garden 'some time ago' (Max Barclay, pers. comm.).

Finding the beetle myself, however, brought to mind another recent London record. I carried out some survey work in Battersea Park in 1998-2003 and was given a copy of the then management plan (Scott, 1998). It includes a list of insects reproduced from an earlier survey by Sorensen *et al.* (1993) and *Nathrius* is included in this bald list, as *Leptideella brevipennis*. It is difficult to know how much credence to give this record. The list comprises 178 mostly very common species of insects and other invertebrates. In Scott's (1998) commentary, only the nationally rare (red data book category 3) flower bug *Anthocoris minki* Dohrn Anthocoridae, the nationally scarce (notable) hoverfly *Volucella zonaria* (Poda) Syrphidae, the lily beetle *Lilioceris lili* (Scopoli) (Chrysomelidae), and the lesser stag beetle *Dorcus parallelipedus* (Linnaeus) (Lucanidae) are specifically mentioned in the text. The original report by Sorensen *et al.* (1993) comments on these and a few other very common species, but seems to ignore *Nathrius* except to list it with the other finds in an appendix. When I first read the report, I considered that this record of *Nathrius* may just have been a misidentified small specimen of *Grammoptera ruficornis* (Fabricius). Now, I am left wondering.

References

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