

THE STATUS OF THE FLOWERING-RUSH WEEVIL *BAGOUS NODULOSUS* IN SOMERSET

Bagous nodulosus (Order Coleoptera; Family Curculionidae), the Flowering-rush Weevil, is something of an enigma. It has always been rare in the UK: Hyman and Parsons (1992) list ten English counties with records, but it is thought to occur only in Somerset. It is understood to be a monophagous species closely associated with the Flowering-rush (*Butomus umbellatus*), although larvae have apparently never yet been observed in Britain. Unsurprisingly, it is regarded as a threatened species, classified as Endangered in the *Red Data Book* (Shirt 1987), a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (2007), and a 'species of principal importance in England' listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006).

In Somerset, this weevil used to be known from a ditch on West Moor (ST42352220). It was discovered there in a 1983 invertebrate survey, commissioned by the Nature Conservancy Council, in support of the proposed Site of Special Scientific Interest boundaries for the Somerset Levels. At this time the Flowering-rush was described as occurring in large stands (Drake *et al.* 1984). Duff (1993) lists further records from this site in 1984 (by P.J. Hodge) and 1986 (by M.G. Morris), the last record appearing as 'Kingsbury Episcopi'. The Flowering-rush has now vanished from that ditch and the habitat looks degraded; indeed, the weevil's food-plant seems to have gone from West Moor almost entirely – a search in 2010 turned up just two clumps. The weevil has been looked for repeatedly on West Moor since the mid 1990s without success, and is now presumed extinct there.

There is also a record from Middelney (1996), based on possible larval feeding signs; however, it is now believed that these signs could equally have been made by a fly and therefore that this record is unsafe and should be discounted (D. Bilton *per* G. Foster).

B. nodulosus was most recently recorded in Somerset in 2007, when Martin Drake took single specimens in two ditches during a survey being undertaken for Buglife – at Tealham on 4 May, and West Sedge Moor on 1 June. These records are rather puzzling, as neither ditch contained any Flowering-rush; *Butomus* is very scarce on West Sedge Moor, although it has been found to be frequent in one ditch on Tealham (ST40374549) quite close to where

Martin Drake took his specimen. Andrew Duff (pers. comm.) has both specimens in his collection and confirms that the original identifications were correct.

I investigated both these sites in May 2010, along with ditches at Middelney (ST41662357), Curry Moor (ST33362833) and Southlake Moor (ST37022049). To seek out *Bagous* weevils a profitable tactic is to net a ditch and bring the debris home for extraction in a Bursell funnel. This did produce several of the more frequent species, *B. subcarinatus*, *B. glabrioris* and *B. alismatis*, but there was no sign of *B. nodulosus*. The Curry Moor ditch had large amounts of Flowering-rush in 2008, but unfortunately in 2010 it had all but disappeared following ditch-cleaning operations. The other ditches examined had enough of the food-plant to offer encouragement, and it would certainly be worth carrying out further searches of these areas – one ditch on Curry Moor (ST32402792) looked potentially suitable. There are good amounts of *Butomus* in ditches at Pawlett Hams (ST26524329), and these also may be worth investigating.

While it appears that there are no extant colonies of *B. nodulosus* at any of its British localities, it is too early to say whether this weevil is extinct in England. However, if it does still occur in Somerset, its foothold must surely be a precarious one. I hope to continue sampling these old or suitable-looking sites in the coming years and, to that end, would be pleased to hear from anyone who knows of any grazing-marsh or fen ditches, canals or ponds supporting stands of Flowering-rush. I can be contacted either at the following address:

[Redacted address block]

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References

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