

PLANT GALLS IN SOMERSET 2013

Following our note in last year's *Ecology in Somerset* (Parker and Leach 2013), we thought it might be useful to summarise some of the highlights of the last 'galling year'. As we indicated, plant galls – and the organisms that cause them – tend to be poorly recorded, being either deliberately ignored or overlooked by most naturalists, which makes it hard to establish the significance (or otherwise)

of many of our records. However, the British Plant Gall Society (BPGS) database, managed by Janet Boyd, has been a tremendous help in enabling us to put the records into context. With well recorded and popular groups like vascular plants, birds or butterflies, one can be reasonably confident when claiming a 'first county record' for a species; but with a disparate and poorly recorded 'group' like plant galls, induced by such a wide range of gall-causing organisms, any such confidence will often be misplaced. The best one can say, in many cases, is that a lack of Somerset records in the BPGS database *might* mean that a species is new either to one of our vice-counties or to the county as a whole; or, equally likely, it could just mean that records for it exist, but that they are simply not (yet) entered onto the database!

Some gall-causers are known to be recent arrivals in Britain, and our first records for these are quite likely to be true 'firsts' for the county. Take the gall midge *Obolodiplosis robiniae*, for example: a North American species causing leaf-roll galls on False-acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), it first appeared in Europe (Italy) in 2003, from where it spread to a number of eastern European countries such as Romania and the Czech Republic. The first record of it in Britain was six years ago, in Oxfordshire, since when it has started to turn up at a scatter of localities across southern England. It is widely considered to be a pest of False-acacia, and so its recent spread is of some concern to arboriculturalists. In Somerset, our first records of *Obolodiplosis* galls were in 2013, when one of us (SJM) found it on two trees in Victoria Street, Taunton. It was subsequently located at a second site in Taunton and on a tree at Hestercombe. The galls are quite distinctive (Fig. 1) and especially obvious in late summer and autumn.

Another recent colonist is the gall wasp *Andricus grossulariae*, the asexual generation of which induces a 'hedgehog' gall on oaks (Fig. 2). It was first recorded in Britain (Berkshire) in 2000, and has since spread rapidly across southern counties; our first record of it in Somerset was in 2011 and it is clearly increasing here, having now been seen in a total of eight 1-km squares in VC5, six of these new in 2013.

We summarise below some of the more interesting records made during 2013, concentrating on those that we believe could represent new vice-county or county records. Most of the records are our own (SJP and/or SJL), although some were



Fig. 1 Leaf-roll galls on False-acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) caused by the gall midge *Obolodiplosis robiniae*

gathered during field meetings of SANHS or the Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG). In addition, Ian Salmon (IS) has submitted observations of a number of plant galls, including many new sightings of the poplar 'spiral gall' caused by the aphid *Pemphigus spyrothecae*. We hope that this report will encourage others to submit records in future years. In the list below, we indicate the possible significance of each record, together with brief details of location, date, recorder, etc. Host plants of each gall-causer are given, and for those featured in Michael Chinery's excellent photographic guide (Chinery 2011) we give the page numbers on which they are illustrated.



Fig. 2 'Hedgehog' gall on acorn cup of Pendunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) caused by the gall wasp *Andricus grossulariae*

Aceria ilicis (a gall mite on EVERGREEN OAK, *Quercus ilex*) (Fig. 3) – Watchet (ST0743), 12 Oct, SJL. Further records in Wellington (ST1320), 15 Dec, SJP, and Taunton (ST2628), 30 Dec, SJL; not previously reported from Somerset, either overlooked or a recent colonist now spreading.



Fig. 3 'Felt' galls on Evergreen Oak (*Quercus ilex*) caused by the gall mite *Aceria ilicis*. This shows dark-brown erinea on underside of leaf; upper surface is smooth and slightly raised or blistered

Andricus nudus (a gall wasp on OAK) – Langford Heathfield SWT nature reserve (ST1023), 10 Aug, SJP & SJL, SANHS field meeting; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Andricus grossulariae (a gall wasp on OAK) (Fig. 2) – six new 1-km square records in 2013, all in VC5, now giving a total of eight 1-km square records in the county; still not recorded in VC6, as far as we are aware. [Chinery, p. 20.]

Anisostephus betulinus (a gall midge on BIRCH, *Betula pendula* and *Betula pubescens*) – Westhay Moor (ST4543), 25 Jul, SJP; possibly first record for VC6 and Somerset.

Dasineura dioicae (a gall midge on COMMON NETTLE, *Urtica dioica*) – Middle Hope (ST3366), 1 Sept, SJP; possibly first record for VC6 and Somerset.

Dasineura pustulans (a gall midge on MEADOWSWEET, *Filipendula ulmaria*) – Langford Heathfield (ST1022), 10 Aug, SJP & SJL, SANHS field meeting; subsequently seen at Thurlbear (ST2620 & 2720), SJL, and Wellington (ST1520), SJP. Possibly overlooked and under-recorded, these appear to be the first records for VC5 and Somerset. [Chinery, p. 81.]

Drisina glutinosa (a gall midge on SYCAMORE,

Acer pseudoplatanus) – Blue Anchor (ST0343), 19 May, SRPG field meeting; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Gymnetron villosulum (a gall-causing weevil found on several species of SPEEDWELL, *Veronica* spp) – Catcott Lows (ST4041), 9 Jul, SJP; possibly first record for VC6 and Somerset.

Hayhurstia atriplicis (a gall-causing aphid on ORACHE species, e.g. *Atriplex prostrata*, *A. patula*) – Walborough (ST3157), 29 Aug, SJP; possibly first record for VC6. [Chinery, p. 83.]

Kiefferia pericarpicola (a gall midge on WILD CARROT, *Daucus carota*) – Ham Hill (ST4716), 18 Aug, SRPG field meeting; possibly the first record for VC5. Also Uphill (ST3158), 29 Aug, SJP; possibly only the second record for VC6. [Chinery, p. 90.]

Lasioptera carophila (a gall midge on WILD CARROT, *Daucus carota*) (Fig. 4) – Ham Hill (ST4716 & 4717), 18 Aug, SRPG field meeting; possibly first record for VC5.



Fig. 4 Galled flower-head of Wild Carrot (*Daucus carota*) caused by the gall midge *Lasioptera carophila*

Obolodiplosis robbiae (a gall midge from North America causing leaf-roll gall on FALSE ACACIA, *Robinia pseudoacacia*) (Fig. 1) – on two trees in Victoria Street, Taunton (ST2324), 24 Oct, SJL; on a single tree in Goodlands Gardens, close to Town Bridge, Taunton (ST2224), 2 Nov, SJL; Hestercombe (ST2428), 9 Dec, SJL & V. Fairfax-Ross; first recorded in Britain in 2007, these appear to be the first records for VC5 and Somerset.

Phanacis hypochoeridis (a gall wasp on COMMON CAT'S-EAR, *Hypochaeris radicata*) – Minehead

Golf Course (SS9945), 30 Jun, SJL & V. Fairfax-Ross; possibly first record for VC5. This gall wasp causes flower stems to become thickened and swollen. [Chinery, p. 72.]

Phyllocoptes populi (a gall mite on POPLARS, *Populus* spp) – on ASPEN (*Populus tremula*) beside R. Tone at Hankridge (ST2525), 21 Jun, SJL & V. Fairfax-Ross, and on hybrid POPLARS at Firepool Weir, Taunton (ST2425), 31 Jul, SJL; possibly first records for VC5 and Somerset. [Chinery, p. 54.]

Puccinia lagenopherae (a gall-causing rust fungus on GROUNDSEL, *Senecio vulgaris*) – Taunton (ST2325), 17 Oct, SJL, plus several records subsequently; strangely, this appears to be the first Somerset record on the BPGS database, yet it seems to be quite common in Taunton and the surrounding area. A native of Australia, and has only been known in Britain since 1961. [Chinery, p. 79.]

Puccinia saniculae (a gall-causing rust fungus on SANICLE, *Sanicula europaea*) – Woodram Copse (ST2218), 16 Nov, SJL; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset, but easily overlooked.

Spanioneura buxi (a psyllid bug causing ‘cabbage-head’ galls on BOX, *Buxus sempervirens*) – Cleve Toot (ST4665), 18 Jul, SJP; possibly first record for VC6. Also recorded at Bossington (SS8948), 2 Mar, SJP, the second record for this gall in VC5. Subsequently also found at Fyne Court (ST2232), 2 Mar 2014, SJL. [Chinery, p. 37.]

Taphrina populina (a gall-causing fungus on POPLARS) – Chilton Moor (ST3843), 8 Aug, SJP; possibly first record for VC6. [Chinery, p. 53.]

Trioza alacris (a psyllid bug causing leaf-roll galls on BAY, *Laurus nobilis*) – Tower Lane, Taunton (ST2224), 12 Dec, SJL; possibly overlooked,

this appears to be the first record for VC5 and Somerset. [Chinery, p. 34.]

Ustilago maydis (MAIZE smut) – Norton Fitzwarren (ST1925), 8 Oct, IS; a species that is spreading in southern England; possibly first record for VC5 and Somerset.

Vasates quadripedes (a gall mite on MAPLES, *Acer* spp, especially SILVER MAPLE and SUGAR MAPLE) (Fig. 5) – On silver maples near entrance to Taunton crematorium (ST2024), 19 Jul, SJP; probably first record for VC5 and Somerset of this recent colonist, first recorded in Britain (London) in 2002.



Fig. 5 Gall on *Acer saccharinum* (Silver Maple) caused by the gall mite *Vasates quadripedes*

References

- Chinery, M., 2011. *Britain's plant galls: a photographic guide*, Basing, Hampshire, WildGuides.
 Parker, S.J., and Leach, S.J., 2013. 'Plant galls in Somerset: an introductory note,' *SANH* 156, 235-8.

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