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### Searching for six-legged jewels in an old quarry Joe Gray

On 27 April 2015, I made a first trip to Waterford Heath in search of bugs (Heteroptera). The site is a former sand and gravel quarry that is located just to the north of Hertford and managed by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT). It was quarried until the early 1990s but now comprises a range of habitats, including grassland, scrub, and woodland (HMWT, 2015).

#### Etymology before entomology

My pre-reading for the visit had been cursory only, but I had noted the site's importance for, among other plants, Viper's Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*). The etymology of the second half of this plant's common name, I learned, can be traced back to the Greek *bouglossos*, which translates to 'ox-tongued' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015). With my research concluded, I was hoping that 'Bugloss' would not be an omen. Instead, the plant ended up being of great significance for my bug finding.

#### Orange-tipped guides

I approached the site from the south with a particular species on my mind: the Brassica Shieldbug



Photo 1. Gorse Shieldbug (*Piezodorus lituratus*) (photo Joe Gray).

(*Eurydema oleracea*). I knew from having checked iRecord that it had been found in April in the vicinity of Waterford Heath but I had not yet seen it for the year. Jack-by-the-Hedge (*Alliaria petiolata*) is among its host-plants (British Bugs, 2015a), and I was thus wishfully alert for Orange-tips (*Anthocharis cardamines*), which I thought might have been able, unknowingly, to help me track some down. The day was slow to warm, though, and my butterfly guides were not yet on the wing, leaving me to search alone.

Nearing the entrance gate I spotted a patch of my cruciferous quarry; however, it proved to be barren with respect to this particular hunt and – my mind turning to my stomach – I picked a few leaves with which to supplement my lunch.

#### Sweeping for bugs

Once in the reserve, and with sweep-net in hand, the finds accumulated quickly. The first record of the day was a Gorse Shieldbug (*Piezodorus lituratus*; Photo 1); and next came a Parent Bug (*Elasmucha grisea*; Photo 2), named for the maternal habit of brooding the eggs and young nymphs. Adults of the Birch Shieldbug (*Elasmotethus interstinctus*) and



Photo 2. Parent Bug (*Elasmucha grisea*) (photo Joe Gray).



Photo 3. Forget-me-not Shieldbug (*Sehirus luctuosus*) (photo Joe Gray).



Photo 4. Rhombic Leatherbug (*Syromastus rhombeus*) (photo Joe Gray).



Photo 5. *Graptopeltus lynceus*, a county first (photo Joe Gray).

Hawthorn Shieldbug (*Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale*) soon followed, as did a nymph of the Red-legged Shieldbug (*Pentatoma rufipes*), which was swept off a lone mature Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*). Following this success with the net, the sight of flowering plants on a sandy bank led me to set the implement down and drop to my knees. Several minutes' careful searching was rewarded with a Forget-me-not Shieldbug (*Sehirus luctuosus*; Photo 3).

#### A satisfying lunch

With two more species added to the day's list – the Birch Catkin Bug (*Kleidocerys resedae*) and a flower bug (which I later confirmed under the microscope as *Anthocoris nemoralis*) – the protests from my stomach got the better of me and so I delayed my walk over to the afternoon's site. This turned out to be a profitable change to the plan. A sunny slope led me to divert my path, and, settling down, I turned my full attention to adding the Jack-by-the-Hedge leaves to a peanut-butter sandwich. This recipe was modified from a peanut-butter-and-ramsons filling credited to Oliver Rackham, the late woodland ecologist (Mabey, 2012).

I had eaten half the sandwich when my eye was caught by a bug walking up a grass-blade. I recognized it as the Rhombic Leatherbug (*Syromastus rhombeus*; Photo 4), a species with just a couple of previous records in the county. I wondered what else there might be on the bank and, after a couple of minutes, managed to tempt a rapidly moving insect into a specimen tube. At home I confirmed that this was *Graptopeltus lynceus* (Photo 5), a species of ground bug (Lygaeidae) that has Viper's Bugloss as its main host-plant (British Bugs, 2015b) and that had not previously been recorded in the county (Gray, 2015). The second half of the sandwich tasted better than the first.

#### About the author

Joe Gray is Hertfordshire's new county recorder for terrestrial Heteroptera. For any queries relating to terrestrial bugs in the county, including record submission, contact him at joe@ecoforestry.uk.

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