

Sitaris muralis (Forster) (Meloidae) in Dorset

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In the late morning of 7 August 2015, JM spotted what appeared to be a dead beetle on the pavement of East Street, Wareham (SY924874). On closer inspection it was found to be a female of the very rare blister beetle, *Sitaris muralis* (Forster), in its defensive posture. Realising the significance of the find RP collected the specimen for subsequent photography (see Fig. 1). Listed as Vulnerable in the recent review by Alexander *et al.* (2015), recent UK records of this enigmatic species are very few and far between and this appears to be the first record of the species occurring in Dorset.



Fig. 1 Female *Sitaris muralis* discovered in Wareham, Dorset

Brock (2010) recorded it from Brockenhurst, South Hampshire in 2010 and provided a brief summary of British records.

Like the oil beetles, *S. muralis* is kleptoparasitic within the nests of bee species and has been associated primarily with the hairy-footed flower Bee *Anthophora plumipes* and the much rarer potter flower bee *A. retusa*. The larvae feed on the bee's brood and the species has most frequently been associated with old walls where the hosts have nested (Hyman, 1992). The Wareham specimen was found on the pavement adjacent to residential properties and whilst, from our rather cursory inspection, there was no evidence of mason bee or similar excavations within the walls of the immediate properties, many of the houses along East Street, as elsewhere in Wareham, are very old. Further searches of this area would be very

worthwhile to try to locate more adults and to determine the exact area where they are emerging.

According to Lückmann & Niehuis (2009), *S. muralis* is an eastern Palaearctic species, which appears to be on the north-western edge of its range in southern England as it is absent from Scandinavia and the Baltic. It is rather rare in Germany, where it is encountered most frequently in the southwest of the country, typically in residential areas, such as old, sun-exposed walls and gravel fillings under balconies etc., but also in natural habitat, such as steep Loess slopes (Lückmann & Niehuis, 2009; M. Hassler, pers. comm.; J. Rheinheimer, pers. comm.). In recent years, the range of *S. muralis* in Germany has expanded, perhaps due to climate change (C. Benisch, pers. comm.).

References

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