

Osphysa bipunctata (Fabricius) (Melandryidae) in profusion in West Suffolk and notes on its biology

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The stronghold in Britain for this enigmatic beetle, *Osphysa bipunctata* (Fabricius), is the area between Peterborough and Cambridge. The only previous records of this species from Suffolk and Norfolk are single individuals from Flixton Pits (East Suffolk VC 25) and Croxton (West Norfolk VC 28) (Steve Lane, pers. comm.).

Between 6 and 12 May it was found at 12 separate sites in West Suffolk (VC 26) across a swathe of land between Bury St Edmunds and Sudbury, from Boxted Park in the west to the edge of Lavenham in the east (Church Grove TL822504, Carnalfield Grove TL827508, Bridewell Grove TL830502, East Hills Wood TL835507, Avey Wood TL861506, Paddock Plantation TL865 486, Hospital Grove TL857503, Alpheton Hall Wood TL874515, Thorn Court TL887528, Lavenham Park Farm TL894510, TL898506, and Bright's Lane Wood TL905498). The species was not found at sites further to the west of Lavenham. Interestingly, this whole area has been rather neglected in terms of insect recording.



Fig. 1 (left) *Osphysa bipunctata* alpha and beta males. Apart from the enormous difference in size, note the very enlarged femora of the alpha and the tibial and femoral spines that are used to grip aggressors and probably opponents.

Fig.2 (right) *Osphysa bipunctata* females. Considerable size difference.

In total, 57 individuals were found, nearly all from beating Hawthorn blossom in woodland glades/rides and sunny woodland edges. The largest concentrations were

found in Boxted Park and Aveley Wood, with the latter also having the largest proportion of the very distinctive alpha males. The dimorphism of the males in this species (Fig. 1) suggests a very interesting mating system, where the large alpha males may use their enlarged hind legs in courtship battles, while the smaller beta males may be able to avoid contests and to mate sneakily. Females (Fig. 2) also have a large range in size.

In warm weather, both sexes fly very readily and strongly. The males, when handled, pinch using their enlarged and armoured hind legs. The larvae have been found in the Czech Republic in thin, dead oak branches on the ground (Petr Šváchapers, pers. comm.) My only previous encounter with this species was a single gravid female from a vane trap attached to a standing dead oak in a small area of woodland near Peterborough. The female's ovipositor (Fig. 3) is extremely long and has an eversible process near its tip, adaptations that probably facilitate the laying of eggs into into the favoured substrate. More studies of this species, especially in Aveley Wood, may yield more insights into its biology.



Fig. 3 (left) *Osphya bipunctata* ovipositor) **Fig. 4** (right) ovipositor tip with eversible process.