

STRETTONS AREA COMMUNITY WILDLIFE GROUP

Projects Update (Penny Bienz)



Autumn Aliens Spotted in the Strettons!

This time of year we get reports of *alien* type creatures appearing in houses and gardens locally. Fortunately they are all harmless creatures that are only around this time of year, but are designed to scare away predators, either by their coloration or behaviour. Here are a few that have already been reported around the Strettons.

Photo: Elephant Hawk Moth (*Deilephila elpenor*). Source: Rolling Harbour Gallery.



This harmless creature is the largest caterpillar native to our country at 2 inches plus. It feeds on Rosebay Willowherb and is found wandering before it pupates on or under the soil. If disturbed it can pull the head back into the large area with “eye” markings- and the swollen area- together with snaky movements can “...give the creature a rather wicked look from which the uninitiated would be likely to retreat.” It is perfectly harmless and may be handled. It is one of few insects that is named after the larva- because of its likeness to an elephant’s trunk.

Giant Wood Wasp (Horntail) (*Urocera gigas*). Source: Insects of Britain.



This large wasp-like creature is actually a Sawfly and its fearsome looking appendages are merely for boring into wood (conifers- usually unhealthy trees). Usually only the females are found this time of year as males keep mainly to treetops. The larvae spend their time tunnelling through wood which can make it unpopular with timber merchants- although like a lot of other creatures they only show you’ve already got a problem!

Southern Hawker Dragonfly (*Aeshna cyanea*). Source: Natur Foto.



Anyone who has a garden pond may have seen the larval cases of this insect attached to the emergent plants in mid-summer. The pictured male has light blue markings, whilst in the female they are green. It is the only dragonfly that appears to be insatiably curious, unafraid of humans and has been recorded entering houses and shops in the town. Some female dragonflies have an ovipositor which appears scary and because they like the insects that cattle and horses disturb has given them the country name of "horse stingers." All dragonflies are harmless and in the Tropics some species are used in the control of mosquitoes.

Common Harvestman (*Phalangium opilio*). Source: Marcus Kuntze.



The Opiliones are an order of arachnids colloquially known as Harvestmen, harvesters, or daddy longlegs (though not to be confused with Craneflies). They are not Spiders- although superficially similar- they have no waist. Their legs are often several times longer than their body. Harvestmen are omnivores being both predators and scavengers. They use fang-like mouthparts to grasp and chew their food. However, harvestmen aren't known to bite humans and are not considered a danger to households. The name Harvestmen comes from their being seen more commonly in late summer and Autumn- at Harvest time.

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