



**ColSoc**  
Coleopterists Society  
of Britain and Ireland

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## ColSoc field meeting report

Wye Gorge, Gloucestershire - 3rd & 4th June 2023



**Fig.1:** Wye Gorge field meeting attendees at Highbury Farm, left to right: Martin Harvey, Wil Heeney, Charlie Barnes, Simon and Claire Van Toller, Martin Collier, Nicola Cooke, Keith Alexander (with Janet Lister behind) and Alastair Stevenson. Photo by Andrew Duff.

**Field Meeting Leaders: Andrew Duff (ColSoc Field Meetings Officer) and Keith Alexander (Associate of the Species Recovery Trust and formerly Gloucestershire beetle recorder and Soldier Beetle Recording Scheme organiser).**

The primary purpose of this meeting was to try and confirm the continued presence of the rare Cosnard's Net-winged Beetle *Erotides cosnardi* (Lycidae) and in particular to obtain a live specimen or two which could be used for pheromone analysis on behalf of the Species Recovery Trust. We also carried out general beetle surveys as there are rather few records for the two study sites – Highbury Wood NNR and the Woodland Trust's Cadora Woods.

Cosnard's Net-winged Beetle is currently only known in Britain from the Wye Gorge and from the border country between the downs of West Sussex and the Weald Edge Hangers of Hampshire. Only about 20 specimens have ever been found in the Wye Gorge woodlands, with records from sites in

Monmouthshire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. It currently has Endangered status in Britain; larvae are unknown and hence undescribed. Recent research has focused on the Monmouthshire side of the Gorge – commissioned by Natural Resources Wales - and the English side, commissioned by the Woodland Trust and the Species Recovery Trust. The Herefordshire site has received special attention recently and so ColSoc decided to focus on the two known sites in Gloucestershire. Single specimens had been found at two locations within Cadora Woods in 2002 as part of a commissioned survey for the Woodland Trust and what appears to have been a lek site found in Highbury Wood in 2017, where up to seven males had been recorded daily on a cut double stump and where mating pairs had been observed. No further specimens had been observed in either wood subsequently despite careful inspection of other cut stumps and even with Natural England providing some cut stumps in Highbury Wood specifically with the beetle in mind.

The meeting started in Highbury Wood at 10.30am on the Saturday. After the usual introductions and health & safety advice, it was suggested that parties should explore the upper areas in the morning and concentrate on the lower slopes in the afternoon. The wood straddles a limestone escarpment with a series of large old beech and yew trees along the upper ridge, flanked by areas of old lime coppice and with ash coppice on the lower gentle east-facing slopes, eventually dropping down to a spring-line with many small streams and patches of old alder coppice. The weather was hot and sunny, and the area had already been suffering drought conditions for several weeks. The upper areas were accordingly very dry and the ground flora wilting but thankfully the lower slopes had remained in better condition. Sweep-netting of the extensive beds of flowering ramsons produced a male *cosnardi* in the morning (W. Heeney) and a female in the afternoon (A. Duff), a level of success that could only have been dreamed of earlier in the day. Other species of interest found included: *Dasytes plumbeus* -second county record (K. Alexander); *Anaspis thoracica* – third county record (K. Alexander); and *Platystomos albinus* – second county record (K. Alexander).

The next day, we were able to park the cars in Cadora Woods, thanks to Richard Brown, the Woodland Trust site manager, who also gave us a brief presentation about the site. The early history of the site has included periods of industrial-scale coppicing but also some wood pasture type of management, and most recently partial conversion to conifer plantations. The Woodland Trust has been gradually clearing the conifers and replanting with native broadleaved trees. A few mature and veteran trees are present along the upper slopes and boundary, including ancient lime pollards and mature beech. Parties then set off in various directions to see what they could find. Longhorn beetles were prominent with *Pachytodes cerambyciformis* notably abundant. Other finds included *Mordellistena variegata* – 3rd modern county record - and *Ischnomera cyanea* (K. Alexander). No further *Erotides cosnardi* were found by us but it was reported that one had just been taken by Jon Cooter in a flight trap at nearby Lady Park Wood NNR.

The leaders are most grateful to Charlotte Targett (Natural England) and Richard Brown (Woodland Trust) for permission to record beetles in these sites and for arranging permission to take live specimens of *Erotides cosnardi* for research purposes. The two from Highbury Wood had been placed in a single container and were found to be *in cop.* on Sunday morning. Unfortunately, we heard late on Sunday that the pheromone expert was off sick and unable to accept live beetles. The Species Recovery Trust quickly moved forwards on the fall-back position of attempting captive-rearing and one of their partner organisations, Sparsholt College, were able to offer facilities. The beetles were posted to them first thing on Monday and arrived safely. The aim is to rear any eggs that may be produced, to keep a sample of larvae for scientific description, while bringing the rest through to the adult stage and used for pheromone research next year. Fingers crossed for successful rearing!