

New Vine Weevil discovered

Written by Alison Grange

Wednesday, 02 July 2008 14:04 - Last Updated Monday, 14 July 2008 14:05



A vine weevil called *Otiorynchus aurifer*, a new insect species for Herefordshire, has been identified by an expert collection volunteer at Herefordshire Council's Museum Resource & Learning Centre.

With vine weevils at the peak of their egg laying capacity, Herefordshire gardeners may have another pest to contend with.

Above: Black Vine Weevil - a related species to *Otiorynchus aurifer* [Source Wikipedia Commons]

The insect, a large type of vine weevil, first came to Britain from Europe about 15 years ago. The species has been breeding in southern England since then, but had not been reported in Herefordshire until now.

The creepy crawly was found in the attic of a house in Hereford city and brought into the museum to be identified.

Michael Leech, the volunteer entomologist, at the Museum Resource & Learning Centre, checked the specimen against the collection and then the specialist reference books and identified that the insect was not present in the collection and was in fact a new type of vine weevil not previously known from Herefordshire.

After asking advice, the weevil was confirmed to be *Otiorynchus aurifer*, a European species new to Herefordshire.

This weevil is larger than the common vine weevil and has a different pattern of markings on the wing cases but has a similar life style. All the beetles are female and so all of them can produce fertile eggs. Egg laying starts in May and will be at its peak now in June.

The eggs hatch into grubs and these eat the roots of plants, especially plants in peat based compost in pots and especially plants with succulent roots like fuschias, primulas and sedums. The damage can cause the plant to quickly wilt and die.

The Museum Resource & Learning Centre in Hereford houses the county museum collections including several thousand insect specimens that make up the entomology collection.

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Expert volunteers work alongside curators, sorting, cataloguing and re-packing collections following the completion of the centre last year. The museum also offers an identification service.

Michael Leech is one of a team of regular volunteers based at the Museum Resource and Learning Centre. New volunteers are always welcome.

The entomology collection was moved to its new specialist storage room via a week in the walk-in freezer, in early 2008 and work is currently under way on creating a systematic order of specimens.

The work on the entomology collections is part of a much larger scale programme of work associated with the Museum Resource and Learning Centre, officially opened by HRH Princess Alexandra in April 2008 and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Herefordshire Council.

The specimen of *Otiorhynchus aurifer* has now been added to the collection as the first recorded occurrence in the county. The collections form an important record of county biodiversity.

More than 100,000 objects form the Herefordshire county museum collections housed at the Museum Resource & Learning Centre and they are an important resource for identifying objects.

Anyone interesting in volunteering should call 01432 383383.