

figured. This could be due to individual or geographic variation, or possibly the specimens figured are another species.

The *pentas* group can be distinguished from the *pumila* group in that members of the former group have three ridges on hind tarsal segment two, whereas the latter group have only two ridges on this segment. This character can be difficult to see unless the specimens are well set. *M. secreta* in general appearance is very like the rather variable *M. pumila* (Gyllenhal) and the shape of the parameres, phallobase and the apical part of the penis are also very similar, so it is possible that *M. secreta* may well turn up amongst material standing as *M. pumila* in collections.

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SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

***Nysius senecionis* (Schilling) (Hemiptera: Lygaeidae) feeding in large numbers on Guernsey fleabane**—On 22.ix.1998, whilst visiting a derelict site in Wandsworth, West London (VC17, 'Surrey'), I was startled by the abundance of Guernsey fleabane, *Conyza sumatrensis* (Retz.) E. Walker (Asteraceae). The site, on the River Thames at the outlet of the River Wandle (TQ253752), had previously been a storage facility for Shell, and the large circular concrete bases of the storage tanks were still present amongst the acres of rubble. The fleabane was growing out from almost every available crack and piece of bare ground. Thinking it might be a novel foodplant for some insect or other I swept a small patch and was rewarded by a sweep net crawling with about 200 specimens of a ground-bug, a *Nysius* species—both adults and nymphs. Beating other patches of the plant over the net confirmed that the insect was incredibly abundant. The *Nysius* was easily determined later as *N. senecionis*, using the description and figures given by Hodge & Porter (1997).

As its name suggests, *Nysius senecionis* is well known to feed on ragworts, *Senecio* species, and since the insect's discovery in Britain in 1992, it has been fairly widely recorded in south-east England on these common plants (Hodge, 1997; Kirby, 1997).

Guernsey fleabane is not unrelated to ragworts, but its use as a foodplant for the bug is a little surprising. What is even more surprising, however, is the amazing abundance of the bug on the fleabane at this site. It was not possible, in the limited circumstances of the visit, to make anything other than a rough guess of the bugs' numbers, but a few sweeps of the net produced easily over 100 specimens from a small patch of the foodplant. Several hundreds of thousands must be a conservative estimate of the insect's numbers at this site.



Fig. 1. Capitula of Guernsey fleabane, *Conyza sumatrensis*, showing the rather insignificant 'flowers' as some go to seed at the end of September.

Having found this 'new' bug so commonly at Wandsworth, I thought to check other *Nysius* specimens I had collected recently. Three of them turned out to be *N. senecionis*: Wandle Mouth, TQ256752, VC17, 18.vi.1998 (just the other side of the River Wandle from the Shell site); Deptford Creek, TQ379779, VC16, 23.ix.1997 (also on the River Thames, but on the other side of London); Woodlands Farm (Shooters Hill), TQ450765, VC16, 18.vi.1998 (about 2 miles from the Thames at Woolwich). Unfortunately, these specimens had been taken by general sweeping, and there was no clear connection to any particular foodplant at any of the localities. Ragworts occurred at every site, but so too did the Guernsey fleabane.

Despite its English and scientific names, Guernsey fleabane is a native of South America; it was first introduced into the Channel Islands (Stace, 1991), and then into the London area (Burton, 1995). Since its arrival in the capital in 1983, it has become very common and widespread, increasing more rapidly than any plant species at least since

Oxford ragwort in the 1930s and 1940s (Burton, 1995). It is now reckoned to occur in over 25% of the 400 or so tetrads which cover the urbanized area of greater London (N. Bertrand, personal communication).

Guernsey fleabane is a large and obvious plant, but because of the insignificant flowers (capitula), it is easily overlooked. Since it was first pointed out to me at the Shell site, I now see it wherever I go in London. It is rather similar to Canadian fleabane, *Conyza canadensis* (L.) Cronq., but is often taller, to 1.5 metres, with a more conical inflorescence (Figure 1), and with the phyllaries (green sepal-like structures around each capitulum) quite pubescent.

Since finding *Nysius senecionis* on Guernsey fleabane, I have been examining the plant whenever I come across it, so far without further success. However, given the plant's rapid spread across (and out of) London, and the bug's huge numbers on the banks of the Thames corridor, it seems quite probable that this South American plant will be worth examining by all entomologists wherever they find it. A photograph of the plant is included here to stimulate this search.

My thanks to Valerie Selby of Wandsworth Borough Council's Nature Study Centre for negotiating access to the Wandsworth Shell site, and to botanist Nick Bertrand for his comments on Guernsey fleabane and for pointing it out to me 'in the field'.—RICHARD A. JONES, 135 Friern Road, East Dulwich, London SE22 0AZ.

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***Oedalea ringdahli* Chvála (Diptera: Hybotidae) in northern England.**—On 10.vii.95 at Forge Valley Woods Nature Reserve, near Scarborough (SE984874), I collected a female *Oedalea* which I was subsequently unable to identify. The specimen was swept in damp shady deciduous woodland close to the River Derwent, which at that point is little more than a shallow stream.

Attempts to name the specimen using the keys in Collin (1961) and Chvála (1983) failed at the first couplet because the antennal style is neither ‘bristle-like’ (or ‘slender’) nor ‘stout’, but somewhere between the two extremes. As the legs are predominantly dark brown I put the specimen on one side for further study and noted that it was probably ‘close to *ringdahli*’.

The Fourth International Congress of Dipterology, which was held at Oxford in September 1998, provided an opportunity for me to ask Dr Milan Chvála to look at the specimen, which he kindly did, and he suggested that it was probably *ringdahli*. I later submitted it to Dr Adrian Plant who had described the female of this species from specimens collected at Cwm Sere in the Brecon Beacons (Plant, 1991), and he has confirmed that it is, indeed, *Oedalea ringdahli*. As far as can be ascertained, this record constitutes the first for northern England.

O. ringdahli was first described in 1983 from a single male from Sweden (Chvála, *op. cit.*) A single male was found in northern Scotland in 1984 (McLean, 1991), and a further single male in the Black Wood of Rannoch (MacGowan, 1991). Subsequently both males and females were found at Cwm Sere (Plant, *l.c.*).

Two dark-legged male specimens of what were originally taken to be *Oedalea holmgreni* Zett., were noted by Collin (*op. cit.*). One of these, leg. J. H. Wood at Cusop Dingle, Herefordshire, 16.vi.1914, and now in the collection of the Natural History Museum, has proved to be *O. ringdahli* (McLean, *l.c.*). The second, which might also be of this species, leg. B. R. Laurence at Harpenden, Hertfordshire 22.vi.1950, cannot be located at present (MacGowan, *l.c.*).

I am obliged to Dr Chvála for his advice, and to Dr Plant for kindly identifying my specimen and for helpful comments.—ROY CROSSLEY, 1 The Cloisters, Wilberfoss, York YO41 5RF.

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