

How much we forget ...

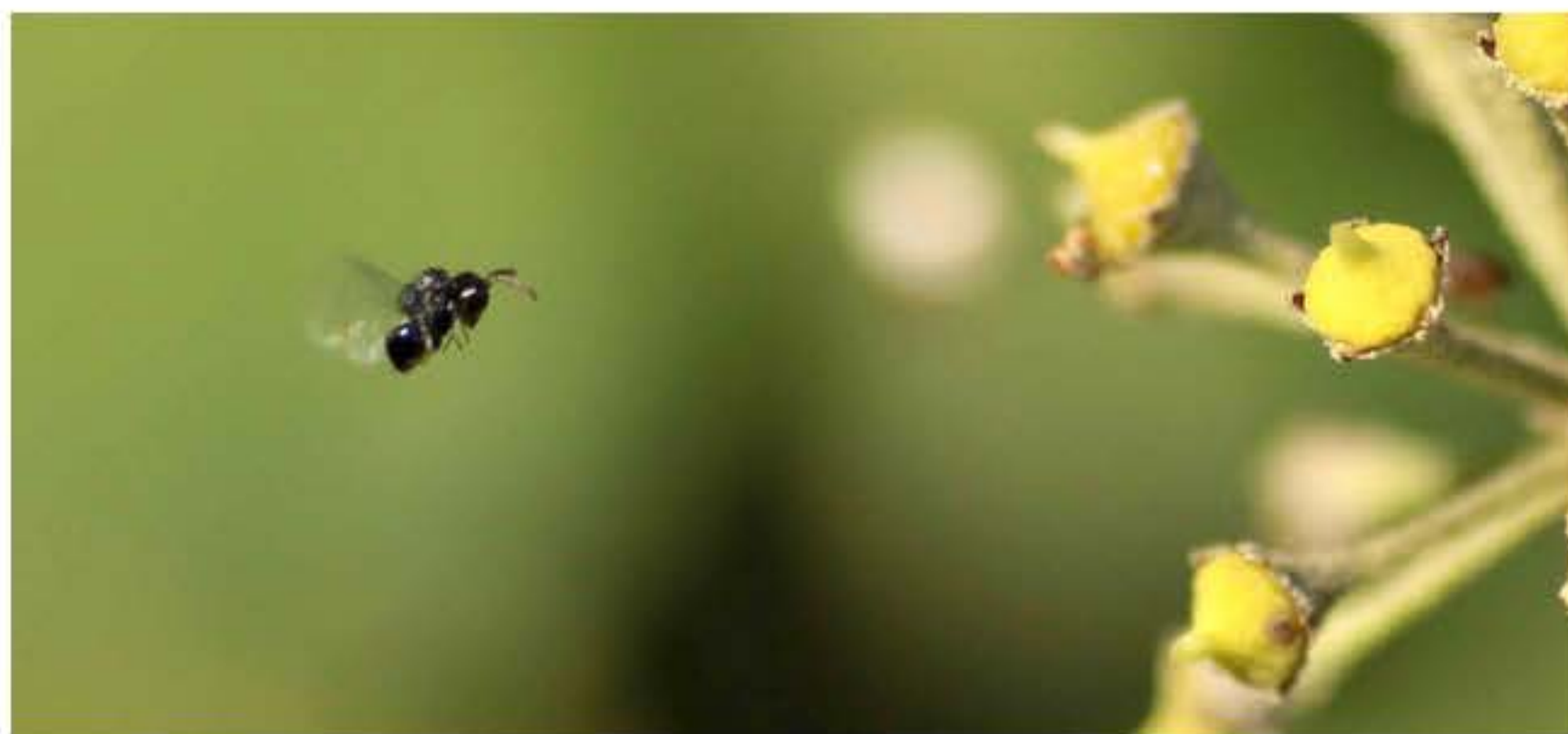
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I am often dismayed to see in a publication the claim that some observation or other is being made “for the first time” when I know full well that it has been published before, often long ago. It is, of course, difficult for even the best active scientist (or perhaps especially for him or her) to keep aware of what is already in the literature in these pressured times, but I do sometimes feel that if it is not readily accessible via the simplest search on the www, published information is far too widely treated as non-existent.

Here, anyway, is an example of my own forgotten knowledge. On 16 January 2014, deep in the heart of the Scottish winter, I was dissecting some overwintering ichneumonoid cocoons resulting from a survey of oak-feeding macrolepidoptera conducted by Jim Connell and colleagues near Vienna (Austria) during May 2013, to see at exactly what stage the contents were passing the winter. One such was a cocoon of *Scirtetes robusta* (Woldstedt) (Ichneumonidae: Campopleginae), a univoltine species that flies early in the year and commonly parasitizes larvae of the *Orthosia* and not especially related *Cosmia* (both Noctuidae) species feeding on the “spring flush” foliage of oak and other trees over much of Europe (actually the *Cosmia* mostly eat other caterpillars). It is well known that many temperate ichneumonoids that parasitize hosts available very early in the year overwinter as unemerged but fully-formed adults in their cocoons, as this enables them to be ready for action in early spring

without having to spend precious degree-days on metamorphosis (it is a surprisingly common alternative to overwintering as a free adult). And indeed *Scirtetes robusta* is one such species. However, in the cocoon of it that I opened I found a living and perfectly formed male *Perilampus ruficornis* (Fabricius) (Chalcidoidea: Perilampidae) [teste R. R. Askew], evidently performing the same trick. Although *Perilampus* species as a whole have quite a span of hosts, this species is a well-known “true” secondary parasitoid of Lepidoptera caterpillars through Ichneumonidae and also Tachinidae (Diptera), contacted by its planidial larva. Nothing new there, but I was very interested to find the adult overwintering in this way, I believed “for the first time”. So I asked one or two people particularly knowledgeable about chalcidoid biology and behaviour, and they told me they had not heard of it either. But before writing my little “for the first time” note on it, I fortunately consulted C. P. Clausen’s (1940, reprinted 1972) wonderful compendium, *Entomophagous Insects*, where I learned (or rather re-learned, for I had read it from cover to cover at least twice in the early 1970s... and clearly ought to do so again!) that H. S. Smith (1912: *U.S. Bureau of Entomology Technical Series* 19(4): 33-69) had deduced as much for the N. American *Perilampus hyalinus* Say, and Clausen himself adds “The European *P. cuprinus* Foerst. has this habit” (without giving a reference).

So there we are. The observation that had so interested me was not “for the first time” at all, at least as far as the genus is concerned, and I am glad to have avoided claiming that it was. Come on, though, be honest – how many of you chalcidologists already knew, or remembered, that? •



Perilampus visits flowers in France. Photo by Alain C. (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) <https://flic.kr/p/dngo3H>