

**DELETION OF THE GENUS *ASPICOLPUS* WESMAEL, 1838
FROM THE BRITISH LIST, AND A NEAR-CERTAIN HOST
FOR *VADUMASONIUM VARDYORUM* VAN ACHTERBERG
& BROAD, 2013 (HYMENOPTERA: BRACONIDAE,
BRACHISTINAE, DIOSPILINI)**

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INTRODUCTION

Errors of various kinds, including records of country occurrence and biological properties, that creep into the published entomological literature always cause problems because they are very difficult to expunge, even when it becomes clear from later experience that they really must be errors. For species of parasitoid wasps these problems of misinformation are so great that they encourage the view that citations from the abstracted literature, especially on host associations (Shaw, 1994) but also of country occurrence (van Achterberg & Shaw, 2016), are best simply set aside when reviewing the evidence for either, in favour of the direct evidence available to the authors themselves. In order to improve this rather dire state of affairs, or at least to curb it, it is important to try to correct errors (or suspect speculations) when they come to light, so that a careful assessment of the published literature will at least reveal the challenge. Two, related, cases are dealt with here.

Removal of *Aspicolpus* from the British list

For rather complicated reasons, the inclusion of the generic name *Aspicolpus* Wesmael, 1838 on the most recent British checklist of Braconidae (Broad, Shaw & Godfray, 2016) was based on the incorrect determination in 1995 of a single specimen in the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) from Wychwood Forest, Oxfordshire, collected by Malaise trap 17.vii–14.viii.1990. As no British specimen of the true *Aspicolpus* is known, the name (along with its synonym *Aspidocolpus* Agassiz, 1846) should be removed from the British list, as also should the species entry *?clipealis* (Tobias, 1967). The specimen concerned is now re-determined as *Vadumasonium vardyorum* van Achterberg & Broad, 2013.

Probable host of *Vadumasonium vardyorum*

A long series (11 ♀, 13 ♂) of *V. vardyorum* was subsequently reared in the period 6.vi–21.vii.2000 by Jim Brock from fallen ‘stags-horn’ wood collected below a living *Quercus* tree by John White (Project Manager) at Sydenham Hill Wood, Greater London, and given to me for the NMS collection. Similar numbers of adults of the melandryid beetle *Conopalpus testaceus* (Olivier, 1790) were also reared and given to Richard Jones, but very little else emerged from the wood (Jim Brock, pers. comm.); certainly no other beetles large enough to be the host (Richard Jones, pers. comm., and see Jones, 2002). Van Achterberg & Broad (2013), basing their view on the labelling of specimens from the Hedqvist collection included as paratypes, bluntly stated *V. vardyorum* to be a parasitoid of the anobiid beetle *Ptilinus pectinicornis* (L., 1758); which, however, seems very unlikely to be the case (not least on size grounds but also because, if it were so, then surely more reared specimens would have been

found from such a commonly reared beetle). ‘Substrate rearings’ (i.e. in which the actual host was not observed, nor its remains recovered) are always at least somewhat open to question. Nevertheless, the quantitative ‘substrate rearing’ along with similar numbers of *C. testaceus* recorded here provides the first compelling evidence of a credible host for *V. vardyorum*.

Conopalpus testaceus is a rather infrequently encountered beetle, although widespread in open woodland and parkland in the southern half of Britain (www.ukbeetles.co.uk, consulted 8.xii.2022), whose larva develops in long-dead wood. It is widely regarded as an indicator of ancient wooded habitat (e.g. Jones, 2002). *Vadumasonium vardyorum* is similarly rarely encountered in Britain (the material recorded here in NMS, and one recently collected in Richmond Park, Greater London in the Natural History Museum, London (Gavin Broad, pers. comm.) in addition to the type material recorded by van Achterberg & Broad (2013) is all that is known to me). This, and especially the rearings reported here, may suggest that both host and parasitoid are largely canopy insects and usually develop in dead wood on living trees, which might lead to them seeming rarer than they really are.

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