

Do you have **the bug?**

HIGHLIGHTS 2023

Wild about Stroud

Work and family has kept me in and around Stroud and the Cotswolds this year.

The years of motorway driving for interpretation projects is over. Most business is now very local. That which is not can be handled virtually.

Family is growing in number. The garden is now a major part of my life, inspiring and feeding into **Do You Have The Bug** and **Garden Guardians**.

I still have Stroud and the Valleys to explore and a few places just a short distance away. The camera is always at hand.

This supplement has some of my favourite insect photographs from 2023. It isn't just about the image. It may be about the story behind the image or another reason why I have chosen it.

Why the Snipe Fly (right)? Simply that some of the predatory flies - snipe, robber, empid are personal favourites - to watch, to illustrate.

Footprint Stroud: Designing for people in Nature
www.footprintdesignstroud.co.uk



13 June
Snipe Fly
Stratford Park Stroud

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17 March: Stroud garden

Drone Fly (*Eristalis tenax*)

Winter is transitioning into spring. Just occasionally the odd insect may make an appearance late February, but it's usually around mid-March that a few species begin to show to herald another year of insect watching in the garden.

Those first photos are always rewarding, even if I have photographed the species many times before. This hoverfly was making the most of a weak sun and any warmth from the stone.



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23 May: Rodborough Common

Green Hairstreak

Rodborough Common remains one of the greatest sites to explore for insects. It draws people from all over the country who come to look for its butterflies.

My interest is in other kinds of insects. However, I know the spots where I am likely to find some of my favourite butterflies, such as the Green Hairstreak. On the south and south-west facing slopes where there is a little scrub, I often find them on the smaller Hawthorn trees, where they disguise themselves as leaves.



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3 August: Capel's Mill

Meadow Grasshopper (male)

Maybe due to their more secretive nature, the way they disguise themselves among the lowest grasses and vegetation, our grasshoppers and crickets tend to get overlooked. But they are wonderful insects.

I like this image because it really shows the structure and physiology of the grasshopper.



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1 August: Cotswold Canals

Emperor Dragonfly

Yes, the image is taken through some vegetation, but having watched the dragonfly hunting on the wing for 15 minutes, back and forth, I had almost given up getting any kind of shot.

Then it landed a few metres away along the canal bank. I moved slowly, bending down on the towpath close to where it had landed. Could not get a clear view.

The canal is bringing this species right into the heart of Stroud. The largest of the UK dragonflies and now extending its range from southern England northwards.



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26 June: Pockett's Orchard

Horse Fly (*Chrisops relictus*)

Horse flies do not endear themselves to people. The females suck the blood of a range of mammals, including us, biting through the flesh first with their blade-like mouthparts.

Although common, I had not seen this species before, but you can see how it caught my 'eye'.

A species that never strays far from water. The orchard stands on the banks of the Stroudwater Navigation



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3 August: Rodborough Common

Rove Beetle:

A fresh cow pat. An ecosystem in its own right, attracting a range of flies and beetles in particular to feast on its rich soup. While they feast, they might be distracted and fall prey to this rove beetle.

It moves quickly over the surface, disappearing quickly over the edge of the pat and then re-emerging in a different place. Not easy to get a good shot.



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1 June: Stroud Garden

Beautiful Demoiselle

The least common of the two most familiar demoiselles, the banded being the other species, this female Beautiful Demoiselle paid a fleeting visit to the garden. Never seen it previously or since.



Because I rarely venture into the garden without the camera, I was able to get a few shots of it. Although we are just five minutes from the town centre, we have a nearby stream with its wooded shelterbelt. Some species of Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies) will wander away from water.

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6 September: Stroud Garden

Common Darter

I have many images of this species photographed close to water on any number of perches and grassy stems.

Never on the head of a poppy, so nice to catch this female on a warm, sunny September day.

The deep blue stain of the timber garden shed providing the contrast in the background.



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25 June: Rodborough Common

Robber Fly (Asilidae)

Slightly out of focus. I was leaning well forward trying to reduce the distance between lens and subject. In trying to gently sit down or squat close to an insect, I often frighten them into flight or a jump.

I wasn't exactly sure at first what I was photographing. I could see the one robberfly facing towards the top of the stem and assumed it had some prey.

Then realised this was a pair mating.

