TRY!

The Recorder's Year

Target species 2024

Highland Biological Recording Group

What is TRY?

The Recorders' Year is an attempt to encourage naturalists to record wildlife throughout the year, stimulating interest, improving skills, and adding to our knowledge of Highland wildlife. The species reflect a variety of wildlife, most of which can be found relatively easily, all easy to identify with confidence, and all under-recorded in Highland.

How do I take part?

Look at the species pages to find out what we are targeting in the current month and how to recognise it. Look for the target species wherever you may be - in the house or garden, on a walk, in the supermarket car-park. Often, you will be looking first for something obvious – Honeysuckle or an Oak Tree - and then more closely for animals or fungi that live on it. The most important thing is to be alert to the wildlife around you, wherever you may be.

What do I do if I find the target?

Report the details to HBRG. Advice on how to do this is available on our website. Once we have the record, it will be added to our database and placed on the NBN Atlas website.

Are there any snags?

We are dealing with wildlife, so nothing is absolutely predictable! You may need to examine a number of trees, or take several walks before you find your goal. Some things may be very common one year, and very scarce the next. Some species may be common in one part of the area but absent elsewhere.

So that is a bit discouraging?

Not at all. Even if you have trouble finding the target species, keeping your eyes open will reveal a host of unsuspected delights, and all of these are of value - as useful records and in widening your knowledge of what fascinating wildlife we have around us.

How can I get help?

If you are unsure about your identification, contact records@hbrg.org.uk, or consult one of the identification resources listed on our website. Often a photograph will resolve any queries. Sometimes a specimen might be needed.

Text by Sue Tarr and Murdo Macdonald

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TRY! targets, and their main seasons

	Mar	*Apr*	*May*	*Jun*	*Jul*	*Aug*	*Sep*	*Oct*	*Nov*	*Dec*	*Jan*	*Feb*
Tree Bumblebee												
House-fly												
Willow-herb Psyllid bug												
Solomon's Seal Sawfly												
Bird Cherry Fungal Gall												
Honeysuckle Rash fungus												
Shieldbug Fly												
Bee-beetle												
Spiked Shieldbug												
Oak Knopper Gall												
Ergot												
Daddy Long-legs Spider												
Painted Woodlouse												
Beech Scale												
New Zealand Flatworm												

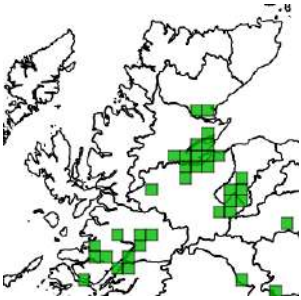
Tree Bumblebee
Bombus hypnorum

Highland Biological Recording Group

Identification:
The Tree Bumblebee is easily separated from other bumblebees by its neat brown-black-white pattern, one shared by queens, workers and males. Abrasion on the thorax often results in a bare black spot in the middle. Confusion might arise from some hoverflies, but all bumblebees have long antennae (12-13 segments)while those of hoverflies are very short (3 segments).

Tree Bumblebee
Bombus hypnorum.
Photo © Andre Karnwath.

Distribution:
The Tree Bumblebee was first recorded in the UK in 2001, in S England. Since then it spread rapidly northwards, and arrived in Highland in 2019. It appears to be colonising Highland from two directions - up the Great Glen, and along the Moray coast – and can be expected to expand much farther.



The distribution of records of the Tree Bumblebee in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
Our data are too few to be sure about the flight season in Highland, but queens emerge relatively early and might be expected from May or earlier. Workers and males persist at least to August. They are frequent visitors to gardens, and typically nest in cavities, including bird-boxes.

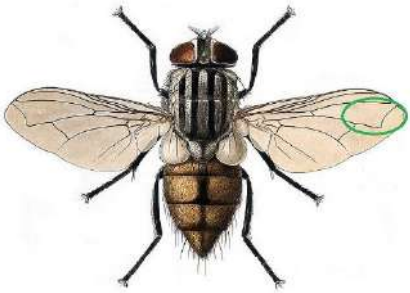
Similar species:
Other bumblebees have white tails, but never in combination with a rich brown thorax and black midriff. The carder bees with a brown thorax never have a white tail.

Notes:
If you find a Tree Bumblebee, please photograph it for confirmation.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

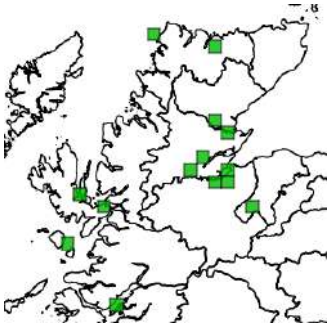
‘The’ House-fly
Musca domestica

Identification:
‘The’ House-fly has no orange on the legs, no blue or green colour, and no dark mark on the wing. If you see a fly indoors, 5-7mm with a sharply curved vein in the wing (circled green), alternating pale and dark stripes on the thorax, and some orange on the sides of the abdomen you *might* have one. A good pointer is its habit of invading your personal space at mealtimes.



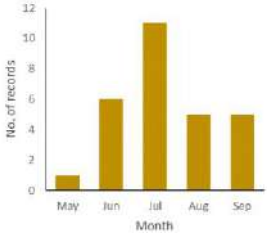
House-fly *Musca domestica*.
Photo © A.J.E. Terzi.

Distribution:
We have records across our area, but they are remarkably scarce. We have only 28 records in the last 10 years, with often none and no more than 7 in any one year.



The distribution of records of the House-fly in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
All our records are between May and September, though as it is usually found indoors a longer season would be expected.



Similar species:
There are many superficially similar flies, and specialist identification is needed, so please submit a photograph or specimen for confirmation.

Notes:
Increased hygiene seems to have caused a huge decrease in numbers in the past several decades, but not the concern that something prettier would induce!

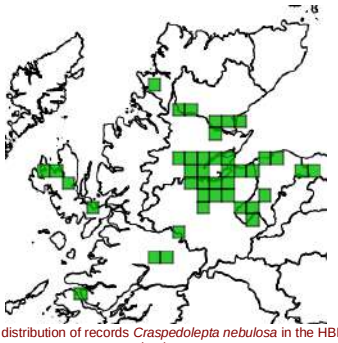
Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

A Psyllid bug
Craspedolepta nebulosa

Identification:
A tiny bug around 3mm long is not the sort of thing you would expect a non-specialist to recognise, but this one is an exception. It lives on Rose-bay Willow-herb, and has a unique star pattern on the wing. Look at the young tops of the plants in June, before the flowers open. The bugs can be detected with the naked eye, and a lens will show the wing pattern.

Craspedolepta nebulosa.
Photo © Michael Talbot.

Distribution:
It was not mapped in Highland until Seth Gibson highlighted it after finding it on Skye. Then it was found almost on demand in the east of Highland, but also over to NW Sutherland and even Stornoway. We might expect it anywhere that the host plant grows – even at 400m on Ben Wyvis.



The distribution of records *Craspedolepta nebulosa* in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
It is easiest to find during June.

Similar species:
The combination of the host plant and the wing-pattern will remove all doubt.

Notes:
The map shows clear evidence that stopping at patches of willow-herb on roadsides (A9, A96, A82, A837 are very obvious!) is a good way to fill gaps.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

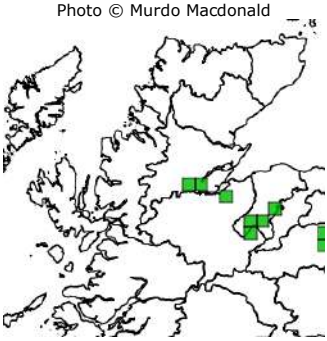
Solomon's Seal Sawfly
Phymatocera aterrima

Highland Biological Recording Group

Identification:
This garden pest is best recognised by the defoliation of any Solomon's Seal plant it colonises. Adults are black and similar to many other sawflies, but the pale grey larvae, munching on the host plant until only midribs remain, leave no doubts.

Solomon's Seal Sawfly.
Photo © Murdo Macdonald

Distribution:
We have only a few records, all in the east. It is almost sure to be seriously under-recorded.



The distribution of records of Solomon's Seal Sawfly in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
Adults appear in June, and the depredations of the larvae become increasingly evident during July. The host is commonly grown in gardens and parks.

Similar species:
Do not record adults unless confirmed by a specialist, as confusion with other species is possible. If you see black sawflies on the host plant, check again after a few weeks for signs of larvae.

Notes:
The only host recorded in Highland is Solomon's Seal *Polygonatum*. Elsewhere it is known to feed on Lily of the Valley *Convallaria majalis*.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

Bird Cherry Fungal Gall

Taphrina padi

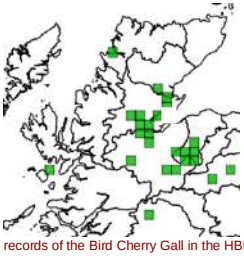
Identification:

This gall develops in the fruits of Bird Cherry *Prunus padus*. The normal black berry is distorted into a whitish,elongated, banana-shaped gall.

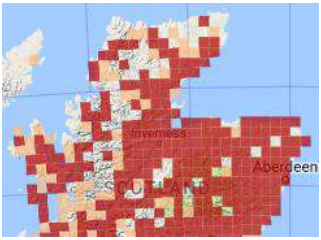
Taphrina padi galls.
Photo © Stewart Taylor.

Distribution:

It might be expected anywhere in Highland where Bird Cherry grows. It is probably more common than the map suggests, as the Bird Cherry host is widespread (map below right is from the BSBI website).



Distribution of records of the Bird Cherry Gall in the HBRG database.



Distribution of records of Bird Cherry from the BSBI.

When to look for it:

The galls are easily seen in June and July. It is a good idea to locate the Bird Cherry when it is in flower during May, as once the characteristic white 'candles' drop their petals, the tree is easily missed.

Similar species:

A related gall, the Pocket Plum *Taphrina pruni* occurs on Sloe *Prunus spinosa*.

Notes:

Taphrina is a genus of Ascomycete fungi, several species of which are host-specific gall-causers on a variety of plants. Two very common species in Highland are *T. alni* on the cones of Alder, and *T. tosquinetii* on its young fleshy leaves.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

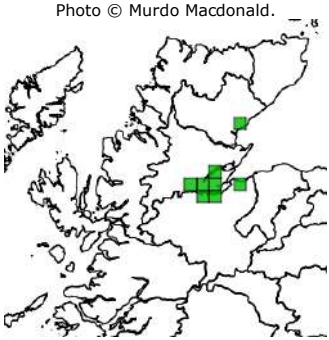
Honeysuckle Rash
Lasiobotrys lonicerae

Highland Biological Recording Group

Identification:
Many things cause marks on Honeysuckle leaves – fungi, leaf-mining flies, feeding damage – but the Honeysuckle Rash in its prime is unmistakeable. It is usually on the upper surface of the leaf: circular, slightly raised, shiny black spots, 1-2mm diameter and with a lumpy surface which is obvious under a lens.

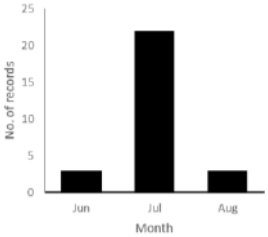
Honeysuckle Rash.
Photo © Murdo Macdonald.

Distribution:
Current known distribution is mainly in mid-Ross and the Black Isle, but the large gap between there and Golspie suggests it is overlooked. Records from anywhere will be valuable, but especially those from outside the core area. We appear to hold most of the UK population in Highland.



The distribution of records of the Honeysuckle Rash in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
The fungus is best recognised during July. Before the fruiting structures develop, and after the spores are shed, the marks are unremarkable. It is often abundant on one plant, and absent on others close by.



Similar species:
If you see the shiny black fruiting bodies, the identification is certain.

Notes:
This is one of the species in Kew's Lost and Found Fungi project, where you can see the species account.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

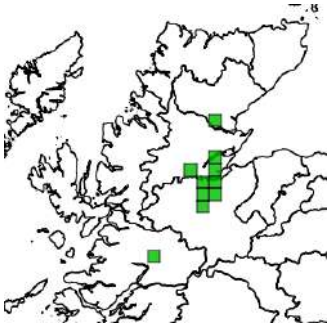
Shieldbug Fly
Phasia hemiptera

Highland Biological Recording Group

Identification:
Unlike most Tachinid flies, *Phasia* is not particularly bristly, and can be passed over as a hoverfly. The male (pictured) is very easy to identify - squat, robust, large-eyed, and notably with broad, curved, dark-patterned wings. Females are rather less distinctive, though they have a conspicuous thorn-like ovipositor. Record only males unless confirmed by a specialist.

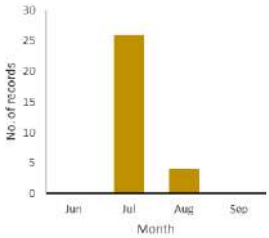
Shieldbug Fly *Phasia hemiptera*.
Photo © Richard Bartz

Distribution:
The first Highland records were in 2005, so we still know little about its status. It may have followed a potential host, the Hawthorn Shieldbug *Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale*, which seems to have spread north since the late 1990s. It might be expected anywhere in Highland where hosts occur.



The distribution of records of *the Shieldbug Fly* in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
Records are all between 3 July and 7 August, a very short season. It is usually seen nectaring on Hogweed and other umbellifers.



Similar species:
The male cannot be confused with any other Highland species.

Notes:
The larva is parasitic on various shieldbugs. Any records of these are welcome, and can be identified with this resource.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

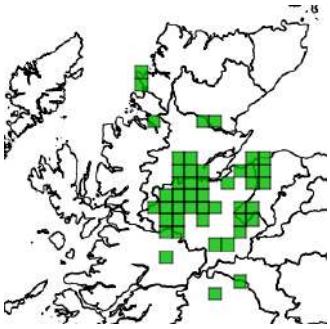
Bee-beetle
Trichius fasciatus

Highland Biological Recording Group

Identification:
At 10mm or more long and strikingly marked, the Bee Beetle is easily spotted, although often the head is buried in the flowers and all that is visible are the unmistakable pale brown and black wing cases.

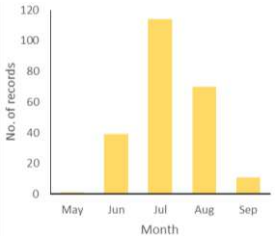
Bee-beetle *Trichius fasciatus*.
Photo © Murdo Macdonald.

Distribution:
It is not uncommon in the eastern part of our area, but even there we have significant gaps in the map.



The distribution of records of the Bee-beetle in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
Most records are in July and August, but extend from May to September. Good places to search on are Hogweed and various thistles, though it will feed at a wide range of flowers.



Similar species:
The imported *T. rosaceus* has been recorded intermittently in England. That has a pinkish tail, and a wide gap in the front black band (two large dots rather than a black band).

Notes:
The larvae develop in dead birch stumps. The beetle has a very disjunct distribution on Britain, in the Scottish Highlands, and in Wales.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

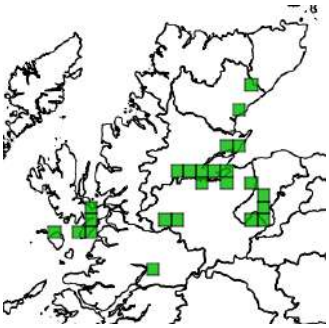
Spiked Shieldbug
Picromerus bidens

Highland Biological Recording Group

Identification:
Shieldbugs have a distinctive shape (and an even more distinctive smell if handled - they are not called 'stinkbugs' for nothing!). This large species (11-14 mm) is mainly brownish with a paler yellow or orange spot in the middle of the back. The important feature for certain identification is the very sharply pointed spine on each shoulder.

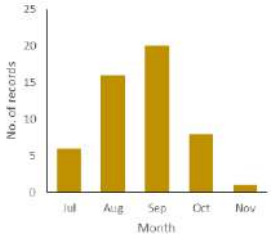
Spiked Shieldbug.
Photo © Tomasz Górny.

Distribution:
It has been found across our area apart from the north-west, but is never common.



Distribution of records of the Spiked Shieldbug in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
The Spiked Shieldbug begins to show itself in July, and can be found until early November.



Similar species:
The much commoner Forest Bug *Pentatoma rufipes* has a similar pattern, but its shoulders are blunt and squared-off.

Notes:
The Spiked Shieldbug is one of our few carnivorous species, and is often seen dining on other insects.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

Knopper Gall

Andricus quercuscalicis

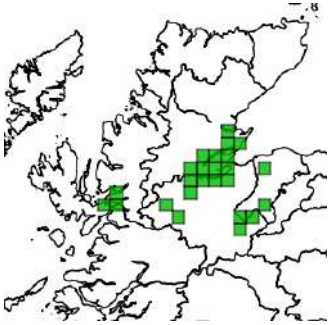
Identification:

The galls are caused by a tiny wasp, and appear as irregular swellings on the surface of the acorns of Pedunculate Oak *Quercus rober*. They are obvious while still on the tree, or once fallen.

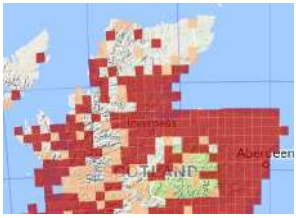
Knopper Galls.
Photo © Murdo Macdonald

Distribution:

This gall was discovered in the N of Scotland only in 2010, when it was found in Moray, and then in several places around the Moray Firth, Strathspey and Aberdeenshire. Its range has been significantly extended by our records in 2018-19. It should be looked for on Pedunculate Oak anywhere in Highland (the map opposite is from the BSBI website).



Distribution of records of the Knopper Gall in the HBRG database.



Distribution of records of the Pedunculate Oak from the BSBI.

When to look for it:

It is best seen when acorns are mature on the trees, in August to November. Fallen galled acorns can sometimes more easily be found under trees, and in litter at other times of year.

Similar species:

A similar gall, *A. grossulariae*, forms on the cup, not the acorn nut, has more finger-like projections, and if cut open has more than one chamber (the Knopper has only one chamber). There is only one unconfirmed record in Scotland, but it may work its way north to our area.

Notes:

The gall-wasp is a relatively recent arrival in Britain, and has spread rapidly northward since the 1970s. We are in a good position to monitor its spread north and west. Details of its biology are here.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

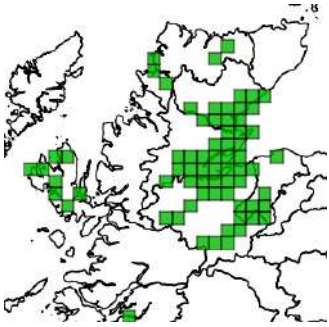
Ergot
Claviceps purpurea

Highland Biological Recording Group

Identification:
This parasitic fungus is easily recognised as hard, black, slightly curved growths on the florets of grasses. These sclerotia are always longer than the florets, so are obvious. On small grasses they are typically 5-10mm long, but on the robust coastal Lyme-grass *Leymus arenarius* sclerotia may be over 20mm long (as in the image).

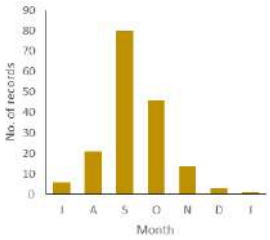
Ergot *Claviceps purpurea*.
Photo © Murdo Macdonald.

Distribution:
Ergot is widely distributed in Highland, but we have some extensive gaps in the map. Records from these white spaces would be especially welcome.



The distribution of records of Ergot on the NBN Atlas.

When to look for it:
Ergot first becomes visible in late July, and can be found through late summer, autumn and into winter. It is most usually found in September and October.



Similar species:
There should not be any scope for confusion if a growth of this shape is found on the flowering heads of grasses.

Notes:
Ergot has an interesting and rather dark history summarised in this Wikipedia article.

****** Ergot is highly poisonous! ******

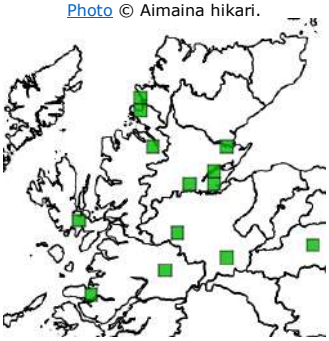
Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

Daddy Long-legs Spider
Pholcus phalangioides

Identification:
A narrow-bodied spider with extremely long, spindly legs. It is found almost exclusively indoors in loose webs in the corners of rooms between wall and ceiling. When disturbed it will vibrate rapidly in the web. The body is 7-10mm long, pale with a darker central marking, and almost translucent.

Pholcus phalangioides.
Photo © Aimaina hikari.

Distribution:
It is widely distributed in the north, but almost certain to be under-recorded and might be expected anywhere in Highland. It might be spread in part by human agency, in furniture being moved from farther south to a new home.



The distribution of Highland records of the Daddy Long-legs Spider in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
Highland records are between April and October, but it may be found throughout the year.

Similar species:
Psilochorus simoni is similar in build and behaviour, but is much smaller (<3mm) and is very different in shape and colour. It has been recorded from Skye.

Notes:
More information is on the Spider Recording Scheme site.

This page was compiled with advice from Hayley Wiswell.

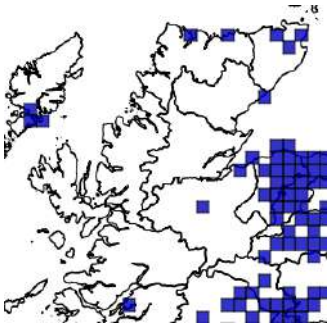
Painted Woodlouse
Porcellio spinicornis

Highland Biological Recording Group

Identification:
The Painted Woodlouse is distinctive in having a contrasting dark head, and a dark central stripe on the body flanked by bright yellow marks. Advice on identification can be had on the BMIG website.

Painted Woodlouse
Porcellio spinicornis.
Photo © Stephen Moran.

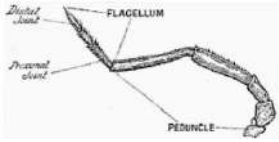
Distribution:
The current known distribution is very odd – almost absent from Highland, but in the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland, and widespread to the east and south of us. It is reputed to favour basic habitats, which might explain some of the distribution, but it is sure to be overlooked in Highland.

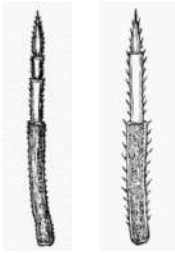


The distribution of records of the Painted Woodlouse on the NBN Atlas.

When to look for it:
It may be found all year, and a recommended technique is to examine lime-mortared walls at night.

Similar species:
Confusion is most likely with the abundant Shiny Woodlouse *Oniscus asellus*. This has pale marks, sometimes yellowish, but lacks the dark head, and has 3 segments (L) in the flagellum – only 2 in the Painted Woodlouse (R).





Diagrams from Webb (1906)

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

Felted Beech Coccus (Beech Scale)

Cryptococcus fagisuga

Highland Biological Recording Group

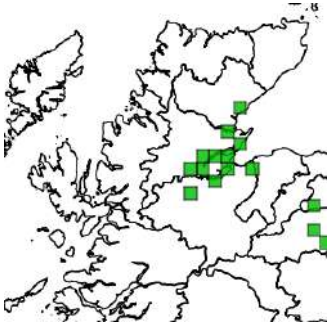
Identification:

In heavy infestations it shows as fluffy white patches up to 1cm across on the trunks of old Beech. The 'fluff' is a waxy substance produced to protect the eggs and nymphs. Young colonies appear as thin lines of white dots, in narrow vertical fissures on the trunk. These can stand out as odd on the normally smooth Beech bark. A lens will reveal the insects in various life-stages.

Beech Scale.
Photo © J. McKellar

Distribution:

Until early 2018, when Jimmy McKellar wrote about it in our *Highland Naturalist*, there were few detailed records in Scotland, but we now have several reports on our eastern side (and also in Edinburgh and on Deeside). It is likely to have been seriously overlooked.



Records of Beech Scale in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:

It may be found all year.

Similar species:

Check that the white patches are not lichens or discoloration of the bark. A woolly aphid *Phyllaphis fagi* occurs on young Beech leaves but the 'wool' is attached to individual aphids rather than forming a static woolly patch.

Notes:

More information is in this Forestry Commission paper. The species is all female and parthenogenetic. Heavy infestations can cause colonisation by the fungus Nectria coccinea, so look for its red fruiting bodies, and let us know if you find them.

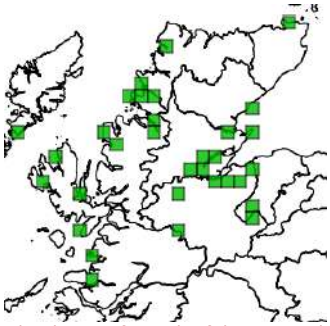
Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.

New Zealand Flatworm
Arthurdendyus triangulatus

Identification:
The purplish-brown back combined with an oatmeal fringe and underside make them unmistakable. They may extend to 12cm, but often rest in a flat spiral. The larvae may be found in glossy black cases, about 7x5mm, like small blackcurrants.

New Zealand Flatworm
Arthurdendyus triangulatus.
Photo © Murdo Macdonald.

Distribution:
This invasive alien is widespread in Highland. While it is recorded mostly from gardens, it is in the wider countryside in Sutherland and W Ross at least.



The distribution of records of the New Zealand Flatworm in the HBRG database.

When to look for it:
It may be found during most of the year, but is usually reported in spring and summer. A wooden board or weighted plastic sack placed on bare ground will attract the worms, which can be found underneath, removed, and killed in a jar containing a few cm of salt.

Notes:
New Zealand Flatworm is a predator of earthworms and a serious garden and agricultural pest. Read more about this and the related but less common Australian Flatworm *Australoplana alba* on our Focus on Highland Wildlife page.

Similar species:
It is unlikely to be confused with any other species.

Records may be submitted online at www.hbrg.org.uk.