# THE BAT-FLY *NYCTERIBIA KOLENATII* ON A DAUBENTON'S BAT AT DONCASTER RAILWAY STATION

On the morning of 18th September, 1991, Doncaster Museum was contacted by two excited and anxious British Rail commuters and the station barrier clerk who reported a bat roosting in full public gaze in the brightly iluminated and very busy passenger subway beneath the platforms at Doncaster Railway Station.

Since the specimen was hanging conspicuously on the outside of one of the direction signboards and was clearly within reach of tallish or determined passers-by, it was felt that this rather vulnerable specimen (although snoozing away, without a care in the world) might come to some harm. It was therefore transferred to the secluded safety of a vacant 'shunters cabin', well away from the hurly-burly of commuter action, where it continued its blissful slumbers.

The specimen, which had evidently been roosting in the subway since the 16th, turned out to be an adult female Daubenton's bat *Myotis daubentoni*, a species already known to have close links with BR in the Doncaster region with specimens roosting (with natterer's, whiskered and long-eared bats) in the brick and stone tunnels which pass beneath the Doncaster/Sheffield line in the Don Gorge at Warmsworth.

Whilst examining the specimen, several yellowish-amber coloured invertebrates could be seen to be re-arranging themselves amongst the bat's thick fur; emerging briefly, almost like dolphins or synchronised swimmers surfacing to take a breath, only to swiftly slide below again.

Though fleetingly glimpsed, these movements clearly differed from the bumbling motions of the usual glossy and rotund parasitic mites, or the torpedo-like lunges of armour-plated bat fleas. They were, in fact, the leggy, spider-like scramblings of those most elusive of ectoparasites, bat flies (*Diptera, Nycteribidae*).

In adapting to a life in wall-to-wall deep-pile bat fur, these elegantly designed ultra-specialist dipterans have, unlike most other flies, dispensed with such incumberances as wings and large compound eyes. Instead, they have developed smooth, flattened leg segments and a tiny head which amazingly folds backwards against the flattened and shield-like thorax, enabling them to slide effortlessly through the fur of their hosts. In common with other



ectoparasites, they also possess an array of spines, combs and claws with which to cling on.

Hutson (1984) notes that in the Dipteran family Nycteribidae, 250 species are recognised worldwide, the majority in Oriental and Pacific areas. About 12 species occur in Europe of which only 3 are recorded from Britain.

Three specimens were colected, one escaped and the two remaining (now in the Doncaster Museum collection) were identified by P. Skidmore (Y.N.U. Diptera recorder) as a male and female *Nycteribia kolenatii*, Theodor & Moscona.

This species is regarded by Hutson (1984) as being monoxenous to Daubenton's bats, hosts on which it seems to be extremely common.

Although no doubt present throughout Yorkshire's Daubenton's bat populations, *Nycteribia kolenatii*, has in fact only once been taken in the county when Adam Gordon collected several specimens from a Daubenton's bat in Helmsley before 1928 (Howes, 1984). The Doncaster Railway Station site therefore represents only the second for Yorkshire and the first for South Yorkshire and Vice County 63.

We would like to thank Messers Keith Bishop, John Cooley and their colleagues at Doncaster Railway Station for their interest, enthusiasm and consideration for their batty visitor.

C. A. Howes

References

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Hutson, A.M. (1984) Keds, flat-flies and bat-flies: Diptera, Hippoboscidae and Nycteribiidae. Handbooks for the identification of British Insects. Royal Entomological Society of London.