

Shetland's Hoverflies

A PHOTOGRAPHIC IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

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Hoverflies are the most attractive group of flies! There are over 280 species of hoverfly in the UK but currently only around 40 recorded on the Shetland Islands and illustrated here. Although flight times vary, the majority of Shetland hoverflies can be seen between May and late September, out in the countryside or in more urban parks and gardens. Hoverflies are important pollinators and a crucial part of a healthy natural environment. The best places to look for them is on garden flowers or flower-filled ditches and verges in summer. They are sunworshippers too, so when not busy feeding on flower nectar or enjoying 'hovering' in mid-air, they can often be seen perfectly still, basking on sunlit leaves.

Most Shetland hoverflies can be identified with close inspection in the field and from photographs. Try to take as many close-up photographs as possible, including a side, top and front profile to aid key identification features. With a little effort and patience, most of these hoverflies can easily be recognised by their clear, often colourful, distinctive markings by even the most amateur of naturalists. A number of hoverflies have very different looking males and females so a good starting point is telling them apart. This is easily done as male hoverflies have eyes that join in the middle, females are clearly separated.

Several of our hoverflies are black and yellow, resembling wasps, others are brown and furry like bumblebees or the honey bee. Indeed their shape and behaviour can also imitate wasps or bees. This mimicry is likely a clever guise evolved to ward off potential predators. Some are more convincing mimics than others! You will soon start to recognise the difference between hoverflies and other insects and then this guide should help you take that next step to identify your find. All hoverflies are harmless with no bite or sting – so get out there & discover hoverflies, a great outdoor insect discovery activity for all the family!

MARMALADE HOVERFLY

Episurphus balteatus (6-10.25mm)



Probably our most familiar hoverfly. Both sexes similar. Very common, small migrant which can turn up in big numbers on southerly winds in Summer. Small, slender-bodied with variable black & orange bands or 'moustaches' across abdomen. Larvae feed on aphids, adults feed on variety of flowers. Excellent hoverers.

MIGRANT HOVERFLY

Eupeodes corallae (5-8.25mm)



Attractive small hoverfly & a common migrant to the Isles in Summer, sometimes in big numbers. Both sexes similar however male 'comma' abdominal markings can often fuse together in the middle & appear more orange than pale yellow. Look out for the scarce Common Spotted Hoverfly: *Eupeodes luniger* also recorded on Shetland. The distinctive yellow abdominal markings NOT reaching the sides on the abdomen is a key ID feature of *E.luniger*.

TIGER HOVERFLY

Helophilus pendulus (8.5-11.25mm)



Also known as 'Dangling Marsh Lover' due to favouring damp, wetter habitats or "The Footballer" due to the distinctive vertical thorax stripes. A relatively common, widespread resident & possible migrant to the Isles. Very distinctive. Look out for the very rare Large Tiger Hoverfly: *Helophilus trivittatus* which is larger with striking lemon yellow abdominal markings.

COMMON SNOUT

Rhingia campestris (6 – 9.5mm)

TAPERED DRONEFLY

Eristalis pertinax (8.25 – 12.75mm)

PLAIN-FACED DRONEFLY

Eristalis arbustorum (7 – 10mm)







Reddish-orange hoverfly (very dark without close inspection & good light), grey thorax, bulbous, broad abdomen & unmistakable facial feature of a long, pointed 'snout'. Prefers wooded, sheltered habitats & wetlands. Larvae feed on dung, unusual for hoverflies. Common in suitable habitat. Found from Summer to late Autumn.

A stocky Honey Bee mimic. Distinguished from other *Eristalis* species by pronounced tapering of abdomen in males & pale yellow front & middle legs (tarsi) in both sexes. Face has central black stripe. Abundant in gardens, parks, woodlands, edge habitats. Long flight season. Resident, common. Possibly also a migrant. Often hovers motionless in mid-air. Obviously territorial. Feed on wide range of flowers.

Fairly common & widespread Honey Bee mimic found in variety of habitats from late Spring to late Summer. Abdominal markings can be variable. Slightly smaller than Eristalis pertinax, close inspection needed to see the distinctive, pale dusted face & dark front legs (tarsi). Similar to very scarce *E.nemorum & E.abusivus* not illustrated which need very careful examination. Visit wide range of flowers including thistles & umbellifers.

COMMON DRONEFLY

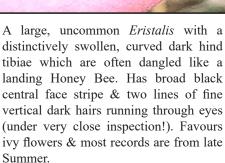
Eristalis tenax (9.75 – 13mm)

FURRY DRONEFLY

Eristalis intricarius (8.25 – 12mm)









Distinctive bumblebee mimic, males & females differ. Males dark with orange-brown tip to abdomen, Females are black & orange with whitish abdominal tip. Both have orange scutellums (oval area between thorax & abdomen. Hind tibia half yellow, half black, this chequered leg pattern is conspicuous in the field. Prefer wetland habitats but found readily in gardens across Shetland from late Spring. Long flight season, observed well into the Autumn.



WHITE-CLUBBED HOVERFLY

Large distinctive, also called Pied Hoverfly with white narrow "comma" or "club" markings on large, oval, matte black abdomen. Similar to *Scaeva selenitica* but markings are white & fall short of meeting the outer abdomen edges. Both *Scaeva* species on Shetland show a swollen area (frons) between the eyes. Frequent summer migrant throughout the isles, sometimes in good numbers.

YELLOW-CLUBBED HOVERFLY

Scaeva selenitica (10.5 – 12mm)

YELLOW-BARRED PEAT HOVERFLY

Sericomyia silentis (9.5 – 14mm)

WHITE-BARRED PEAT HOVERFLY

Sericomyia lappona (10 – 13.5mm)







Large, distinctive hoverfly, similar to *Scaeva pyrastri* but the comma-shaped markings on the abdomen are pale yellow not white. Appears to be a very scarce migrant on Shetland with few annual records. Preference for conifers or moorland with pines as its larvae feed on pine aphids but also found in coastal gardens on a variety of flowers.

Also known as Bog Hoverfly. An unmistakable large, bright species with striking narrow orange broken bars on matte black, rounded abdomen. Legs orangey-red. Very conspicuous when at rest. Uncommon species found in rural & more suburban gardens around Shetland. Breed in peaty pools & ditches.

Surely the cream of Shetland hoverflies, this stunning, large species is associated with peaty moorland & pools where is breeds but can be found in gardens & croft-land with suitable flowers. Comparable with *S. silentis* but slightly smaller, with white abdominal broken bars on matte black abdomen contrasting with reddish-orange legs & red wing bases. Scarce resident.

SPOTTED MELISCAEVA

Meliscaeva auricollis (6 – 9.5mm)

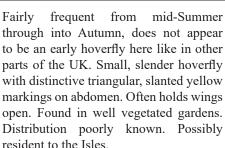
COMMON SPOTTED FIELD SYRPH

Eupeodes luniger (6.5 – 10mm)

LONG HOVERFLY

Sphaerophoria scripta (5 -7mm)







Look out for this scarce *Eupeodes* among the very common Eupeodes corallae (Migrant Hoverfly) also recorded on Shetland. The distinctive yellow abdominal markings do NOT reach the edged of the abdomen unlike in E.corallae. Both sexes similar however abdominal markings can vary is colour & shape as can the overall size of the species. This is the most common Eupeodes on mainland UK but not found to be so on Shetland, though they must be considerably under-recorded. There are potentially several other rare Eupeodes species which could be found on Shetland too, *E.nielseni* for example.



Small, very slender, narrow hoverflies with yellow & black banded abdomens & yellow faces. There are a number of unconfirmed records of a'Sphaerophoria' species on Shetland but only S.scripta (commonest species of this group in the UK) has been confirmed. Males have conspicuous, large genital capsules protruding under the end of the abdomen & can only be identified from several UK 'Sphaerophoria' species by microscopic gentialia examination. Females cannot be identified reliably at all. A scarce annual migrant to the Isles.

ORANGE-BELTED HOVERFLY

Xylota segnis (7 – 9.5mm)

GREEN MARSH HOVERFLY

Lejogaster metallina (4.75 – 6.5mm)

COMMON MARSH HOVERFLY

Melanogaster hirtella (5 – 6mm)







Strikingly different, more like an ichneumon wasp in structure & behaviour. When not sunbathing, characteristically runs about on low, sunlit foliage, sucking up pollen or honeydew droplets (honeydew secreted by aphids) from leaves, rarely feeds on flowers. Mediumsized, long-bodied hoverfly with wings often closed. Abdomen, (when viewed!) mainly orange-red with black tip. Long legs black, white & pale yellow. Larvae feed on dead wood. Found in rural croft & more urban gardens & woodland habitats. Fairly frequent resident.

Small, metallic green, rather bulbous little hoverfly, with large rounded antennae. Favours wetlands, marshes & flushes with rushes & its favoured buttercups. Often overlooked in areas of *Melanogaster hirtella* due to similar size & shape. Resident, locally common in suitable habitats.

Small, rather indistinct, dark hoverfly with dull brownish tones. Abdomen shape flat, oval. Easily overlooked but locally common in wetlands, flushes & marshy areas with plenty of rushes & buttercups. See similar *Lejogaster metallina*. Larvae live on emergent vegetation on edges of water courses. Resident, locally common.

PINE DASYSYRPHUS

Dasysyrphus pinastri (6.25 – 10mm)

STRIPE-BACKED DASYSYRPHUS

Dasysyrphus albostriatus (6.25 – 9mm)

SIX-SPOTTED PARASYRPHUS

Parasyrphus punctulatus

(5.5-7.75mm)







Small, black hoverfly with narrow, slightly hooked yellow bars on abdomen. The yellow markings do not quite reach the edge of the abdomen (under close inspection). Also distinguished by dark stigma, hairy eyes & dark stripe through face when viewed head-on. Superficially similar to *Eupeodes*, particulary *Eupeodes luniger*. Associated with pine/conifer plantations but also found in gardens. Very scarce species on Shetland currently only recorded from Lerwick, recent records since 2014.

Strikingly different, wasp like hoverfly with bright yellow, split, slanted bars on jet black abdomen. Conspicuous two grey stripes on black thorax, obvious black wing stigma & dark stripe down face. Can occur in variety of habitats & flowers. Prefers woodland edges & gardens. Rarely recorded on Shetland, most recent records from Lerwick since 2014.

Only *Parasyrphus* recorded on Shetland, a small, rather inconspicuous species but close inspection reveals rather slender dark abdomen with yellow golf-shaped spots rising to a point at abdomen edges. Legs are blackish. Very scarce species, most records from Lerwick.

SHORT MELANOSTOMA

Melanostoma mellinum (4.75 – 7mm)

SLENDER MELANOSTOMA

Melanostoma scalare (5.5 – 8mm)

SHORT-FOOTED HOVERFLY

Platycheirus albimanus (5 – 8mm)







The females show similar yellow droplet markings to *M. scalare* but the overall body length is notably shorter (they aren't easy to separate in the field though!). Males are easier to identify as although similar, the yellow markings on the abdomen are distinctly wider than they are long, more square like in appearance. Frequent but not common in similar, wide variety of habitats as M.scalare. Has been noted to migrate here, possibly also resident.

Very small, long-bodied hoverflies seen from April to October. Noted across the Shetland Islands in a variety of habitats. Sexes differ. Females (bottom photo) have slender bodies with yellow spots, each tapered out towards the edge of the abdomen like an angled droplet. Males are even more slender with 6 well defined yellow spots, each longer than they are wide. Common resident.

Often our earliest hoverfly with many records from early April onwards. Very small, long-bodied hoverfly, males & females differ. Tiny females (bottom photo) have distinct grey spots on dark abdomen, males rather dark yellow marks on abdomen & with modified front yellow tarsi with very close views. Common resident from April to September.

PLATYCHEIRUS MANICATUS

Platycheirus manicatus (6.75 – 9mm)

THICK-LEGGED HOVERFLY

Syritta pipiens (4.25 - 7mm)

LARGE NARCISSUS FLY

Merodon equestris (8.5 – 10.25mm)







Frequent throughout Shetland & relatively easy to identify in the field with close views. Medium-sized with dull, light bronze thorax & rather rounded yellow markings on dark abdomen. Distinct facial profile with obvious projecting lower mouth parts. Male front tarsi pale, almost spoon-shaped with close inspection.

Fairly common, very small, dark hoverfly, unmistakable at close quarters with long, narrow body & greatly enlarged hind legs (femora). Very agile, fast, males very territorial. Feeds on many different flowers in various habitats. Numerous in Lerwick Flower Park June-August where daisies & umbellifers appear to be favourite flowers. Possibly a resident with migrant influxes.

Very large bumblebee mimic hoverfly, also known as Greater Bulb Fly. First recorded in Shetland in Lerwick, June 2014. Seems fairly common in the town gardens & park at least. Likely to have been accidently introduced on imported plants. Very distinctive with several colour forms on Shetland from pale orange with black central band as above, to completely pale orange or even black & fiery orange rear end. Has a distinct triangular projection beneath an enlarged hind femur. A rather slow, noisy hoverfly in flight which can allow close approach at rest.

GARDEN EUMERUS

Eumerus funeralis (3.5 – 6.25mm)

SMUDGE-VEINED NEOASCIA

Neoascia podagrica (3.5 – 5mm)

XANTHANDRUS COMTUS

Xanthandrus comtus (8.75 – 11.5mm)







Also known as Lesser Bulb Fly. Small, rather dark, compact hoverfly with whitish markings under close examination. Records from Lerwick Flower Park only in June & July annually since 2016. Visit wide range of low growing flowers. Larvae feed on daffodil bulbs & other bulbs where rot is present. Probably accidently introduced on imported bulbs. Large rounded antennae conspicuous as is swollen hind femora. Confusion with Syritta pipiens possible but close examination reveals distinctly different shaped features.

Very small, dark hoverfly with strongly clouded/dark wings, long body with bulbous abdomen becoming thin, wasplike & tapered towards the thorax. Diffused, dark yellow spots on abdomen & at base of otherwise dark, swollen hind tibia. Very localised colony known from Sumburgh Quarry but also known from other Shetland mainland sites. Not confined to wetlands like other Neoscia species. Favours a variety of habitats & flowers. Larvae apparently found in cow dung, wet manure etc.

Medium-sized late summer hoverfly. Males very colourful with attractive bright orange spots & joined orange squares on abdomen, noticeable in flight, but less so at rest when wings are often closed over abdomen. Females similar but markings are darker, often grey-toned on the abdomen. Very scarce migrant species to the Isles. Prefers scrubby habitat, well vegetated gardens, often seen feeding & resting on Fuschia.

BIG-HANDED HOVERFLIES

Platycheirus podagratus (5 – 7.5mm)

BROAD-BANDED EPISTROPHE

Epistrophe grossulare (9 – 12.25mm)

HAIRY MELANGYNA

Melangyna lasiophthalma (7 - 9.25mm)





Members of the "Clypeatus" group of Platycheirus hoverflies are difficult to identify. Specimens are needed to confirm identification. In 2017 P. podagratus was confirmed from Geosetter (past records only from Fair Isle) & P. ramsarensis from Spiggie (past records only from Foula & Unst?), both first mainland confirmed Shetland records. Favour upland, boggy habitat, alongside boggy streams & base-poor flushes with plentiful rushes. Very small, slender hoverflies with pale, modified front legs (tarsi) in males. A local species in the UK with a northern & western bias. (Platycheirus clypeatus, not illustrated, has also been recorded).



Very scarce resident. A bright, golden banded, stocky hoverfly with distinctive straight yellow bands across abdomen. Frequently found on umbellifer flowers in wetlands & woodlands in Summer. The larvae often associate with sycamore trees. May hover whilst feeding, not behaviour often seen with similar looking Syrphus. Apparently very local, few records, currently all from Lerwick (1st in 2014) & Voe.



A scarce resident only discovered in small numbers in April 2018 in Michaelswood, Aith but recorded in Kergord & Lerwick area since & may well be overlooked elsewhere in suitable wooded habitat. A neatly marked, slim bodied hoverfly, often found resting with wings open on sunlit tree trunks. Matte black abdomen with narrow orange-yellow markings.

HUMMING SYRPHUS

Syrphus ribesii (7.25 – 11.5mm)

HAIRY-EYED SYRPHUS

Syrphus torvus (8.5 – 11.75mm)

GLASS-WINGED SYRPHUS

Syrphus vitripennis (7.25 – 10.25mm)







There are 3 species of Syrphus on Shetland which are hard to tell apart without detailed examination of fine features, many are therefore classed as Syrphus sp. and recorded as such. Mediumsized & quite broad-bodied with yellow moustache-shaped yellow markings on a black abdomen. Can often be seen sunbathing on leaves of gardens plants, feed on a variety of flowers. Syrphus ribesii appears to be the most common. Female ribesii are easily recognised by having an almost completely yellow find femur. Males need microscopic examination to see seperate from vitripennis. Annual migrants to the Isles.

Males are readily recognisable with close views, as the eyes are covered with fine pale hairs which can be seen in good light with careful examination in the field. Females can only be separated from S. vitripennis by microscopic examination on wing cell details. Probably both migrant & resident on the Isles. Certainly seems to be a late summer species & less common than ribesii An annual migrant to the Isles.

Recorded on Shetland but extremely difficult to identify & impossible in the field. Both sexes are identified through close examination of basal cells on the wings. A big migrant from the continent to the UK, prone to large seasonal fluctuations so likely a similar, smaller scale status on Shetland.

MEADOW FIELD SYRPH

Eupeodes latifasciatus (6.5 - 8.5mm)

LARGE TIGER HOVERFLY

Helophilus trivittatus (10.25 - 12.25mm)





Only 1 record for Shetland of a female at Law Lane, Lerwick in 2018. Very similar to Eupeodes corallae but very black & strong yellow markings on abdomen with females showing two bars angled rather than spots. Half black, half yellow 'frons' on face too distinctive when at rest. Males trickier as they can show spots like corallae or angled bars like females. Microscope ID with specimen needed for males. Likely a rare migrant to the Isles.



Instantly recognizable from similar Helophilus pendulus in both size & striking lemon-yellow abdonimal markings. Close inspection also shows a red rather than black line down the front of the face. A rare migrant to Shetland with only 4 current records, the last on Foula, June 2020. On mainland UK large influxes from the continent can arrive, increasing resident populations.

We are only just beginning to scratch the surface of species, populations and distribution of hoverflies on Shetland, with only a few naturalists delving into their identification and recording them. With understanding of Shetland hoverflies still in its infancy, there is still much to learn and add to the current database of knowledge. These are exciting times for the Shetland naturalist; with so much to still explore and understand, anyone can really make a difference to biological recording in the Islands.

We welcome your Shetland hoverfly records or photographs for identification. Please use the **Shetland Insect Group** Facebook page, or contact Paul Harvey at Shetland Amenity Trust (paul.harvey@shetlandamenity.org). Please don't forget to add a location (grid reference if possible) and a date to your discoveries.

The WildGuides publication: Britain's Hoverflies - An Introduction to the Hoverflies of Britain, by Stuart Ball & Roger Morris, is a fabulous book and is highly recommended.