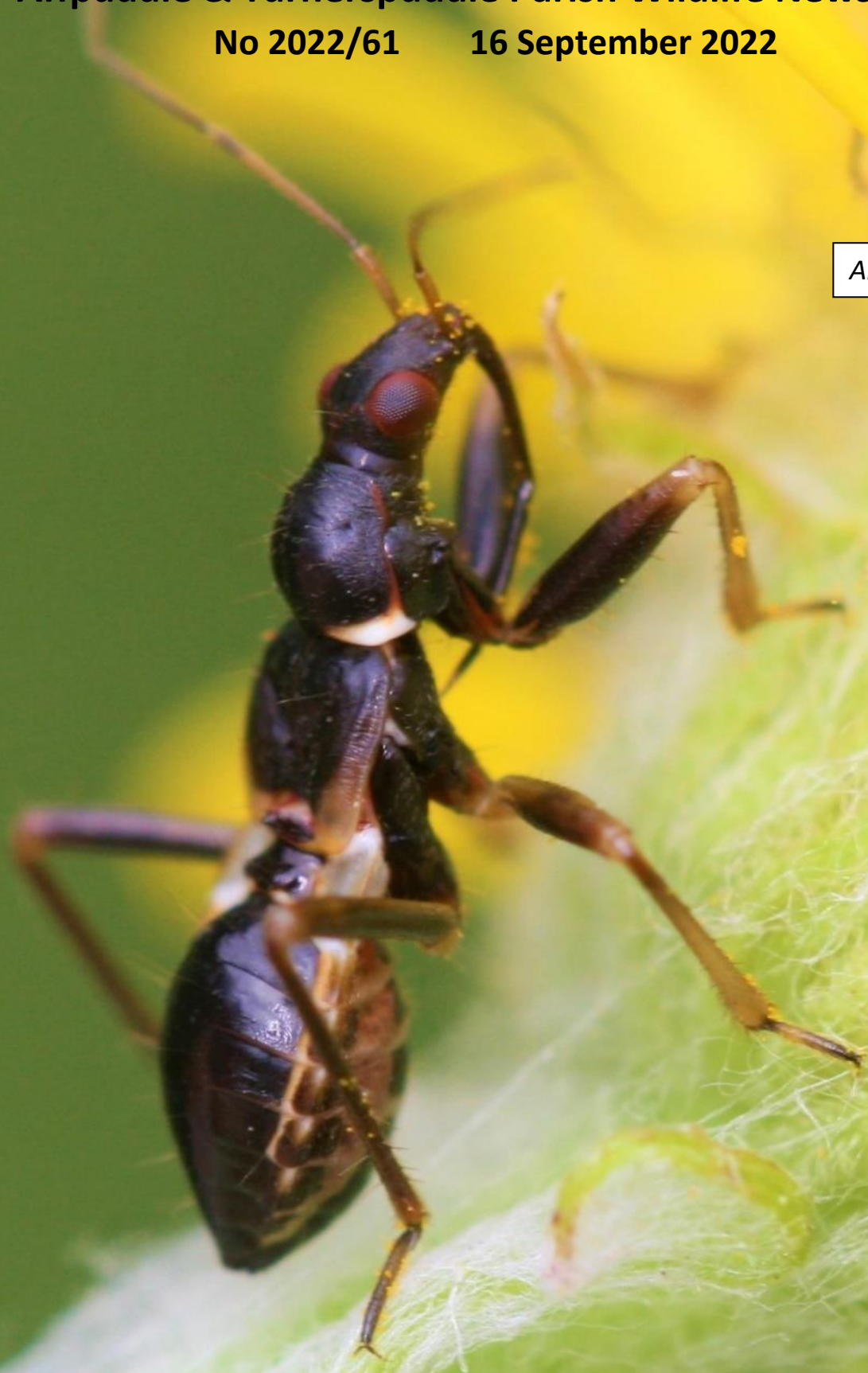


**Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter**  
**No 2022/61      16 September 2022**

*Am I an ant?*



## Am I an ant?

*Ian Cross:* Ants don't always receive good publicity. They have a reputation for biting, stinging, squirting formic acid, or even all three – a reputation that is often well-deserved. If you are an ant, predators generally treat you with a bit of respect and probably give you a wide berth.

Now just imagine, if you were a helpless and harmless insect or spider, wouldn't it be a good idea if you could somehow convince the local bullies that you were an ant. You could put the word out that you didn't want to be pushed around anymore and that you too, wanted to be shown a little respect. It's a hard trick to pull off but it's amazing how many creepy-crawlies are good ant mimics. They don't do it deliberately of course – it's natural selection that has fine-tuned the similarity – but the results are often impressive.

One such creature is frequent in the parish. This is the Ant Damsel Bug (*Himacerus mirmicoides*). It's not the adult bug that achieves the mimicry but the early stage or 'nymph' (see picture below and front cover).



Nymph of Ant Damsel Bug, not an ant but a superb ant mimic Photo by Ian Cross

Of course, turning a chubby baby bug shape into that of an elegant and leggy ant takes a bit of refinement. Ants have a long, slender waist, that goes in, bulges out in a little bump, then becomes thin again. In bugs the various body parts are all the same width with no narrowing between.

The baby Ant Damsel Bug imitates a narrow waist by having two white patches on either side just behind the hind legs. A pair of crisp white crescents just behind the front legs creates another 'narrowing', that ants have but no bug possesses. Then, to cap it all off, the nymph has a 'kink' in its antennae – just like the sharp bend that is such a feature of ant feelers.

When all this is combined with a glossy, black body the result is a pretty passable copy of a tough ant with attitude.

This oh-so-ingenuous bug can be seen widely in our area. I have seen a number in recent days on the Erica Trust Heath but they can even be found in gardens. A good place to look is on yellow flowers of the dandelion family – Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) is always a favourite.

#### **ID Question and Photo submitted by Roger Hewitt**

*Roger Hewitt:* This form of bracket fungi is on my neighbours apple tree. I wondered what the exact name is and whether it is poisonous?



*Ian Cross:* This is the Shaggy Bracket (*Inonotus hispidus*). It's relatively frequent on the trunks of broadleaves, often Ash and Apple trees. Like many brackets it's neither edible nor poisonous - it's too tough and leathery - so no need for concern (except it means the tree is on the way out). Your neighbour's specimen is weeping little clear droplets. This is quite common with the young fruit bodies of several brackets.

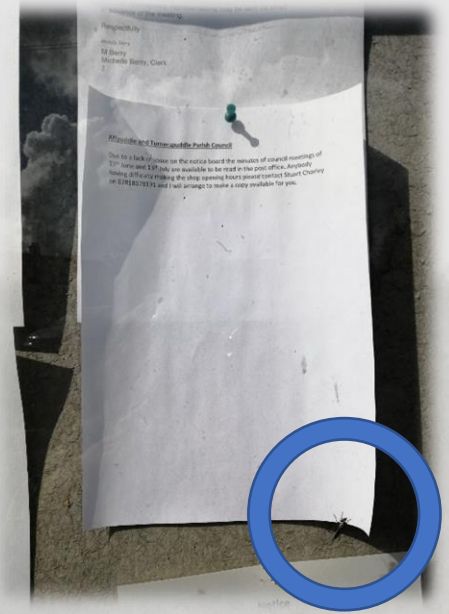
### **Pale Tussock Rescue**

*Adrian Middleton:* Taking a break this week I was checking the pond only to find this caterpillar struggling for survival well beneath the surface of the water. It appeared to have fallen off the nearby overhanging walnut tree. I managed to rescue it and photographed it. A caterpillar yes, but it wasn't a woolly bear (that of the garden tiger moth) but the pristine, if somewhat wet, pink-coloured variety of the Pale Tussock moth, on my woolly pullover.



Rescued and wet Pale Tussock caterpillar on Adrian's Woolly Jumper  
Photo by Adrian Middleton

Something interesting on the parish notice board. But what is it? See below!  
Photo by Margaret Cheetham



Robberfly tucking into prey –  
a tiny fly  
Photo by Margaret Cheetham

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,  
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Margaret Cheetham, Editor  
Please send your contributions to [macheetham@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:macheetham@hotmail.co.uk).  
I will confirm receipt. If you don't hear from me it means I haven't received your email, so  
please make contact through  
Briantspuddle Community Website and we'll sort out a Plan B.