

A macro guide to

Flanders Moss

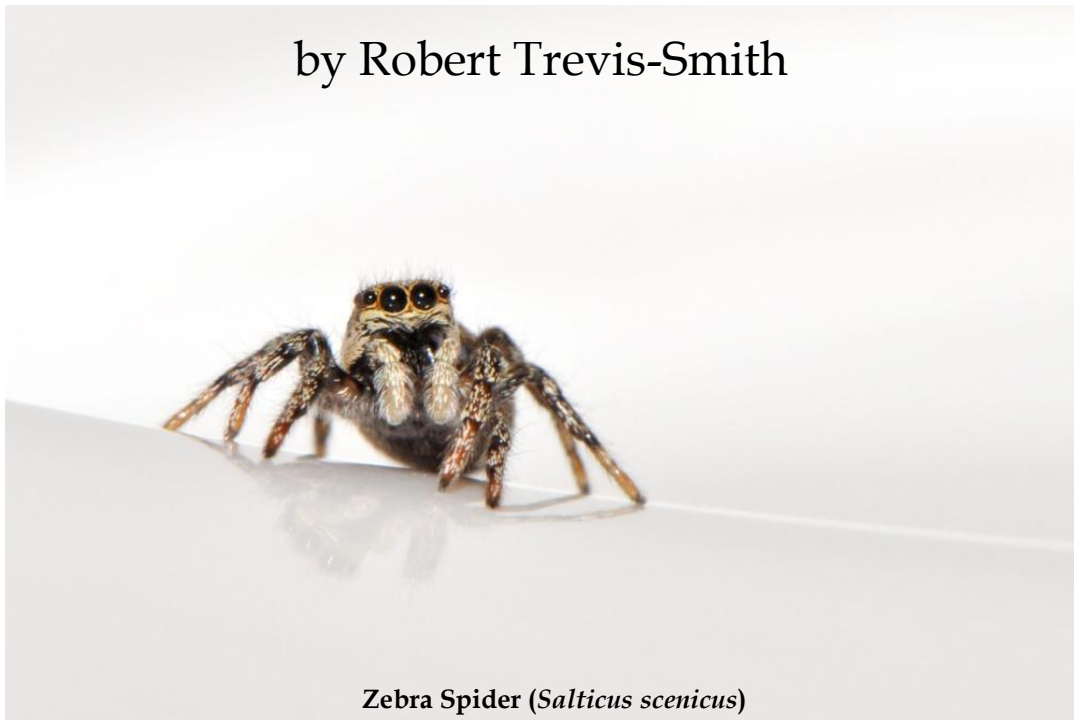
by

Robert Trevis-Smith



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Zebra Spider (Salticus scenicus)

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Contents

About Me/ About the Guide5

Introduction 6

The Wildlife7

Conclusion21

Further Resources22

References22

More Photos23



Round-Leaved Sundew
(*Drosera rotundifolia*)

The Wildlife

Butterflies 7

Moths and Caterpillars 9

Damselflies 10

Dragonflies 11

Bugs 12

Beetles 13

Spiders 14

Wasps and Flies 15

Reptiles 16

Common Lizard 17

Adder..... 18

Amphibians..... 19

Other Wildlife 20



About Me

I'm Rob from Stirling and live just ten minutes drive from Flanders Moss NNR. I recently completed my Bsc (Honours) in Natural Sciences with the Open University specialising in environmental science, and I love everything and anything about nature. My real passion is wildlife and I love to photograph and share my experiences, which I hope educates and inspires others to go out and enjoy nature for themselves. I specialise in macro photography – close-up shots of the small things – and use a Nikon D90 camera with AF-S MICRO NIKKOR 105mm 1:2.8G ED lens.

About the Guide

I'm not a professional photographer or wildlife expert. This guide is therefore not intended to give you a lesson on how to use your camera, or to give an accurate account of the wildlife at the reserve. It simply introduces some of the common and rare species that you are likely to see when you visit. I have included, to the best of my ability, the common and scientific names of the species involved, and this is to help you if you decide to research them further.



Cover photograph – Adder (*Vipera berus*) at Flanders Moss NNR

Introduction

The Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) describes Flanders Moss as being 'a vast expanse of all things damp and wonderful. From a distance you can make out the perfectly formed domes of peat as they rise gently from their surroundings. Closer up, squelchy mats of sphagnum moss carpet the reserve with their swirling colours, whilst adders and lizards bask in the sun. Listen out for the distinctive calls of snipe and stonechat or feel the slight shudder of the peat as it quakes beneath your feet' (www.nnr-scotland.org.uk/flanders-moss).

The reserve is one of the largest lowland raised peat bogs in Britain and one of the most intact in Europe. It has some incredible and rare wildlife on offer and has been declared a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Management of the reserve not only includes the restoration of the water table and bog habitat, but also additional measures to improve the visitor experience. Of these, the car park, viewing tower and boardwalk allows everyone to safely access the reserve while protecting the fragile ecosystem.

Everyone has a camera these days, whether it's on their mobile phone or some higher specification SLR, and this means that we can all take photographs of the things we see at the reserve. There is simply too much wildlife on offer to include it all here so I have just selected a few groups, with a few examples of the things I have seen during my visits. All of the photographs in this guide were taken by me during the last several years through all the seasons except winter, and without stepping off the path. I hope you can use it to your benefit.



Manchester Treble-Bar (*Carsia sororiata*)

Butterflies

Butterflies, with their vibrant colours and beautiful details are incredibly photogenic. This puts them close to the top of anyone's list of things to see. If you can find a rare species, that's even better.

Flanders Moss is a home to such a rarity, the large heath butterfly. They can be seen on sunny days from June to August. There is a good population at the reserve due to the abundance of its larval food plants, cotton-grass and white beak-sedge.

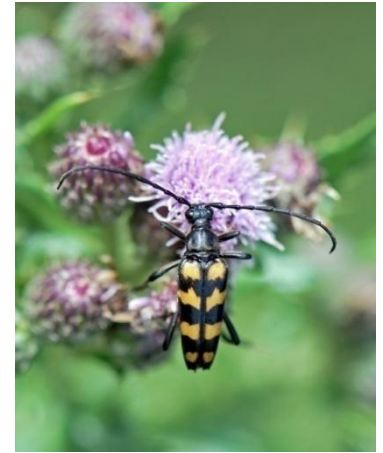


Cotton-Grass Sunset



Large Heath Butterfly (*Coenonympha tullia*)

A great place to look for more common butterfly species is along the dirt road leading to the car park. You will notice the wild flowers and grasses lining the side of the road at the edge of both farmland and woodland, and this attracts insects of all kinds. Pay attention to the pink and purple thistle flowers and you won't be disappointed.



The 7-spot ladybird (*Coccinella 7-punctata*) and longhorn beetle (*Strangalia quadrifasciata*) are prime examples of other species that can be found feeding on and amongst the thistles.



Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*)



Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*)

Moths and Caterpillars

Moths and caterpillars are plentiful and you are likely to see different species throughout the year. The large emerald (below) with its stunning green colour and the emperor moth (right) with its unmistakable design are two examples of what you could find. Although the emperor caterpillar is well camouflaged it can easily be seen. Take a closer look at the heather where they feed or watch them crossing the path and boardwalk.

The Emperor Moth and
Caterpillar (*Saturnia
pavonia*)



Large Emerald (*Geometra papilionaria*)



Damselflies

The most commonly seen damselflies include the large red (right) and emerald (below). They can be found among the vegetation by the gravel path where they cling to blades of grass (if you take a left before the viewing tower). Damselflies spend most of their lives as aquatic larvae and transform into aerial predators to breed.



Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrosoma nymphula*)



Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*)



Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*)

Dragonflies

Dragonflies have similar habits and lifestyles to damselflies, although they are generally much larger. There are several species to be found at the reserve and they can often be seen patrolling the waterways. They are fascinating creatures and can be photographed from almost any angle. This makes them great fun to work with if you can get close enough.

If you are lucky you could find a dragonfly as it completes metamorphosis. →



Four-Spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*)



Common Hawker (*Aeshna juncea*)



Black Darter (*Sympetrum danae*)



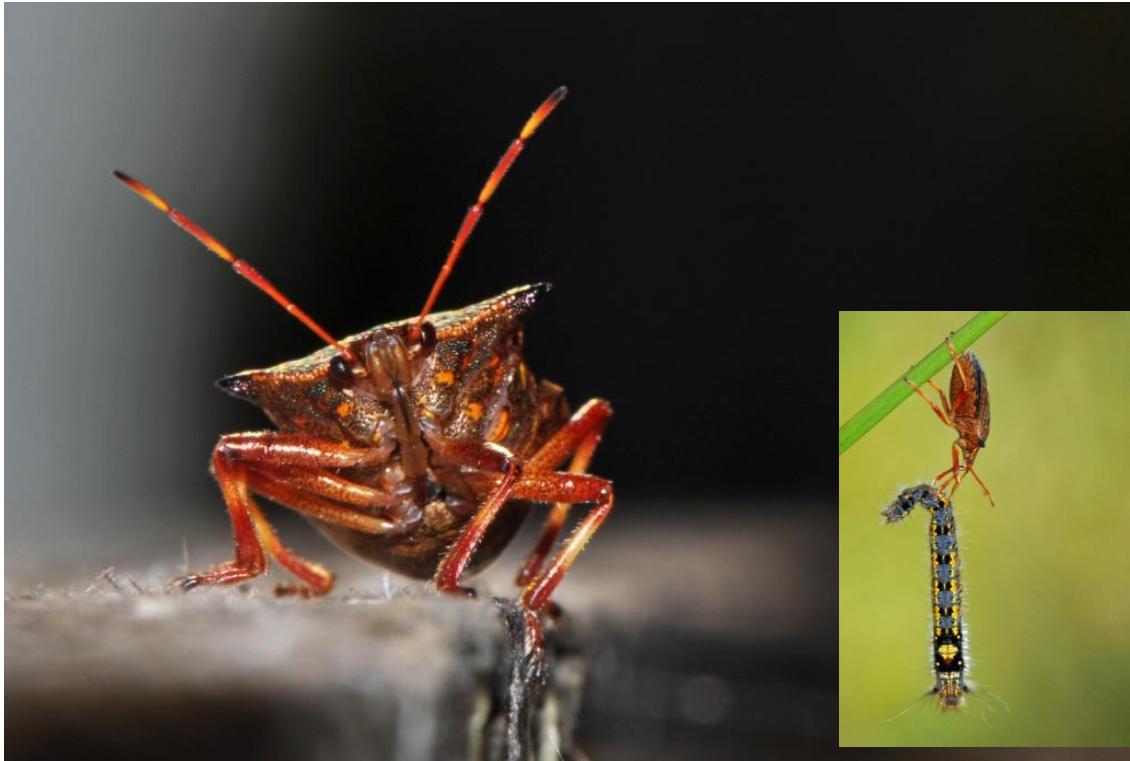
Four-Spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*)

Bugs

Many people refer to all insects as bugs but this is not strictly true. A true bug is a special insect with a piercing and sucking straw-like beak. Spiked shieldbugs (below) take great photographs with their colourful and spiky armoured plating. They can be seen on the boardwalk as they soak up the sun. There are many different bugs to be found at Flanders Moss and they come in all shapes and sizes.



Leaf Hopper (*Cicadella viridis*)



Spiked Shieldbug (*Picromerus bidens*)



Marsh Damsel Bug (*Dolichonabis limbatus*)



Heath Assassin Bug (*Coranus subapterus*)

Beetles

Unlike the bugs, beetles have powerful jaws. They also come in all shapes and sizes and can be found in and out of the water. If you look into the deep pool from the bridge you might get a glimpse of the monstrous great diving beetle (below). Green tiger beetles (right) can be seen darting about the gravel path making them tricky to photograph.



Great Diving Beetle (*Dytiscus marginalis*)



Green Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela campestris*)



Longhorn Beetle (*Rhagium bifasciatum*)

Spiders

Spiders may not be the most popular subjects but they must not be ignored. The orb weaver (below) spins a classic web and is quite large in size making it hard to miss. The tiny zebra spider (right) is harder to spot. You can find them on the viewing tower, bridge and boardwalk on sunny days.



Zebra Spider (*Salticus scenicus*)



Four-Spot Orb Weaver (*Araneus quadratus*)

Ticks are arachnids and closely related to spiders. They feed on blood and have the potential to spread disease. It is always advised that you check yourself thoroughly if you wander off the path.



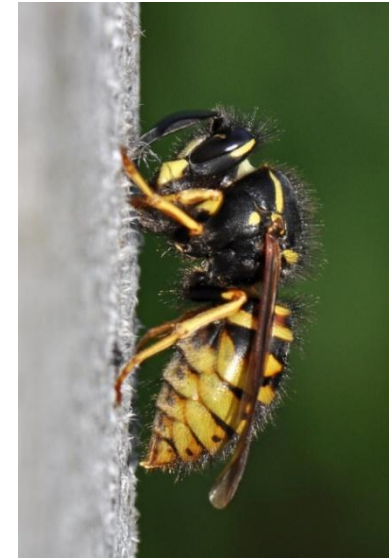
Blacklegged or Deer Tick (*Ixodes scapularis*)

Wasps and Flies

You can see common wasps (far right) chewing and collecting wood fibres from the viewing tower which they use to build their nests. Ruby-tailed wasps (right) are so small they often go unnoticed. They are also known as cuckoo wasps because they lay their eggs in the nests of other insects.

The cleg (below) is a horse-fly and the female needs protein from blood to produce her eggs. She flies silently and can give you a nasty bite. With her incredible eyes she's definitely a species that shouldn't be overlooked. The male is harmless and feeds on nectar.

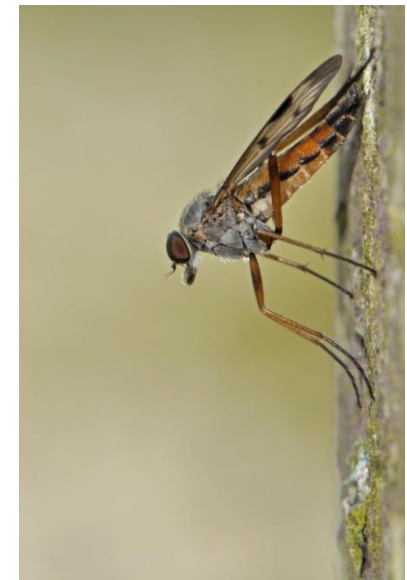
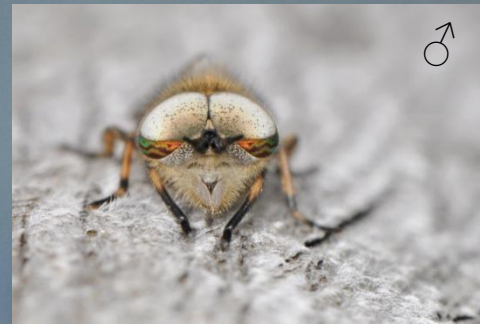
Ruby-Tailed Wasp
(*Chrysis ignita*)



Common Wasp
(*Vespula vulgaris*)



Cleg-Fly (*Haematopota pluvialis*)



Snipe-Fly (*Rhagio scolopaceus*)

Reptiles

Reptiles are my favourite group of animals so I have included three pages on them! The reserve is home to the common lizard (right) and adder (below) and there are great populations of both. They give birth to live young and are the most northerly distributed reptiles. You are almost guaranteed to see a lizard basking in the sun along the sides of the boardwalk, and you can get really close if you approach slowly. The adder is far more elusive. I have seen five or six in as many years.



Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*)



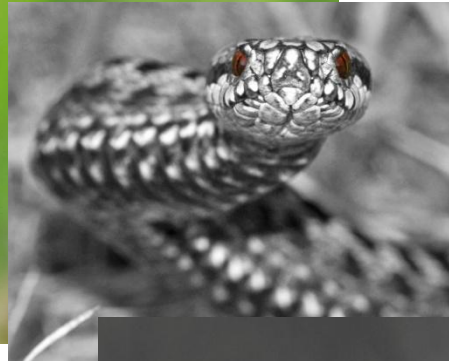
Adders have no ears but can detect vibrations. If you want to increase your chances of seeing one you should tread lightly. They are venomous snakes and must be treated with caution and respect.

Adder (*Vipera berus*)

Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*)



Adder (*Vipera berus*)



Amphibians

The first group of animals to wake from their winter hibernation are the amphibians. There are large populations of palmate newts (below) and common frogs (right) which can be seen breeding in the various pools.



Common Frog
(*Rana temporaria*)



Palmate Newt (*Lissotriton helveticus*)

Other Wildlife

If you do not own a camera with macro capabilities there're still other opportunities. The reserve is home to many different bird and mammal species.



Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)



Hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*)



Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*)

Conclusion

I hope you have found the guide interesting and useful. The species included are just a small fraction of what can be found at the reserve, and just a small selection of the things I've seen and photographed. What I really enjoy about Flanders Moss is that every time I visit I find something new. It's impossible to get bored and I can't wait to go back.



Grasshopper Species (?)

Further Resources

If you like my photographs and want to see more:

All my public wildlife photographs can be found on Flickr – www.flickr.com/photos/rjtrevis-smith

I also run a group called 'Flanders Moss NNR' with 59 members and over 400 images – www.flickr.com/groups/flandersmoss

You can also contact me directly by email at – roberttrevismith@yahoo.co.uk

Reference

Scotland's National Nature Reserves – www.nnr-scotland.org.uk/flanders-moss

More Photos



