

BEETLES of GUERNSEY

by Mark P. Lawlor



Volume 2 : Silphidae
Carrion beetles

Necrodes littoralis
(15 to 25 mm)



Nicrophorus humator
(18 to 26 mm)



Silpha tristis
(13 to 17 mm)



Thanatophilus sinuatus
(9 to 12 mm)



Silphidae

The Silphidae are mostly associated with decaying animal carcasses and are often called the 'large' carrion beetles to distinguish them from smaller beetle families that also use decaying animal matter. There are two subfamilies; Necrophorinae and Silphinae.

The Necrophorinae are often known as Sexton beetles and are amongst the largest species of beetle found in Guernsey. These species hunt for small rodent or bird carcasses and then will bury them underground for their larvae to feed on. They have quite short, square wing cases which usually means that the end of the abdomen is showing. The wing cases often have reddish blotches but can be plain black. The antennae always show a distinct club and the front legs are very spiny.

The Silphinae are also mostly associated with carrion, often on larger carcasses, but some species also feed on insects, snails and plant matter. These beetles are generally more oval in shape and are mostly smaller than the sexton beetles. They do not have very obvious clubs on their antennae and they usually have raised ridges running down their wing cases.

Checklist :

a) species recorded since 1990:

Necrodes littoralis

Thanatophilus sinuatus

Silpha tristis

Nicrophorus humator

Nicrophorus vespillo

b) species listed during 20th Century prior to 1990 but not since:

Silpha atrata

c) species recorded by Luff in 1893-1907:

Nicrophorus vestigator

d) additional species only listed in 1862 and not since:

Notes on the checklist:

Section a) shows the species that have recorded on the island's insect database since 1990. This publication is concentrating on these species. These records are presumed to be reliable although the identification of many species is very difficult so some errors are inevitably going to be present.

Section b) shows species that have been listed during the 20th century as occurring on Guernsey but not since 1990. It is very difficult to ascertain the reliability of some of these records without further investigation, but equally there are no particular reasons to doubt most of these records.

Section c) shows the species reliably recorded by Luff from the late 19th/early 20th century. Luff was a respected Victorian entomologist and all his identifications are presumed correct using the knowledge available at that time.

Section d) shows species that were listed in Ansted & Latham's 1862 list of fauna of Guernsey but not since. This publication has been shown to contain errors in some areas. Most of the species listed were not authenticated and many lists were passed on second hand. Local naturalists always presume this list to be somewhat unreliable.

Necrodes littoralis

length 15 to 25 mm

antennae without a
clear and obvious club,
last 3 segments are red

large species for a
Silphinae, similar in
size to sexton beetles



elytra square-ended, with
three raised lines each side,
and an obvious raised
bump near rear about
2/3 along elytra

Thanatophilus sinuatus

length 9 to 12 mm

amount of pubescence on pronotum and head varies

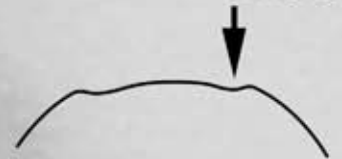
small tooth at shoulder of elytra (not visible here)

elytra with 3 raised ridges and a single bump after half way, spaces between are flat and have no pubescence

only the female has the 'sinuate' ends on the elytra (as here), the male's being simply rounded

antennae without a true club, but last few segments are very expanded so quite club-like

front edge of pronotum (thorax) is emarginated inwards.



golden hairs on sides of scutellum and extreme base of elytra

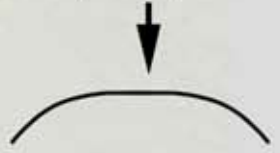
underside with pale yellowish pubescence

Silpha tristis

length 13 to 17 mm

antennae lacks a club but the end segments are still clearly expanded

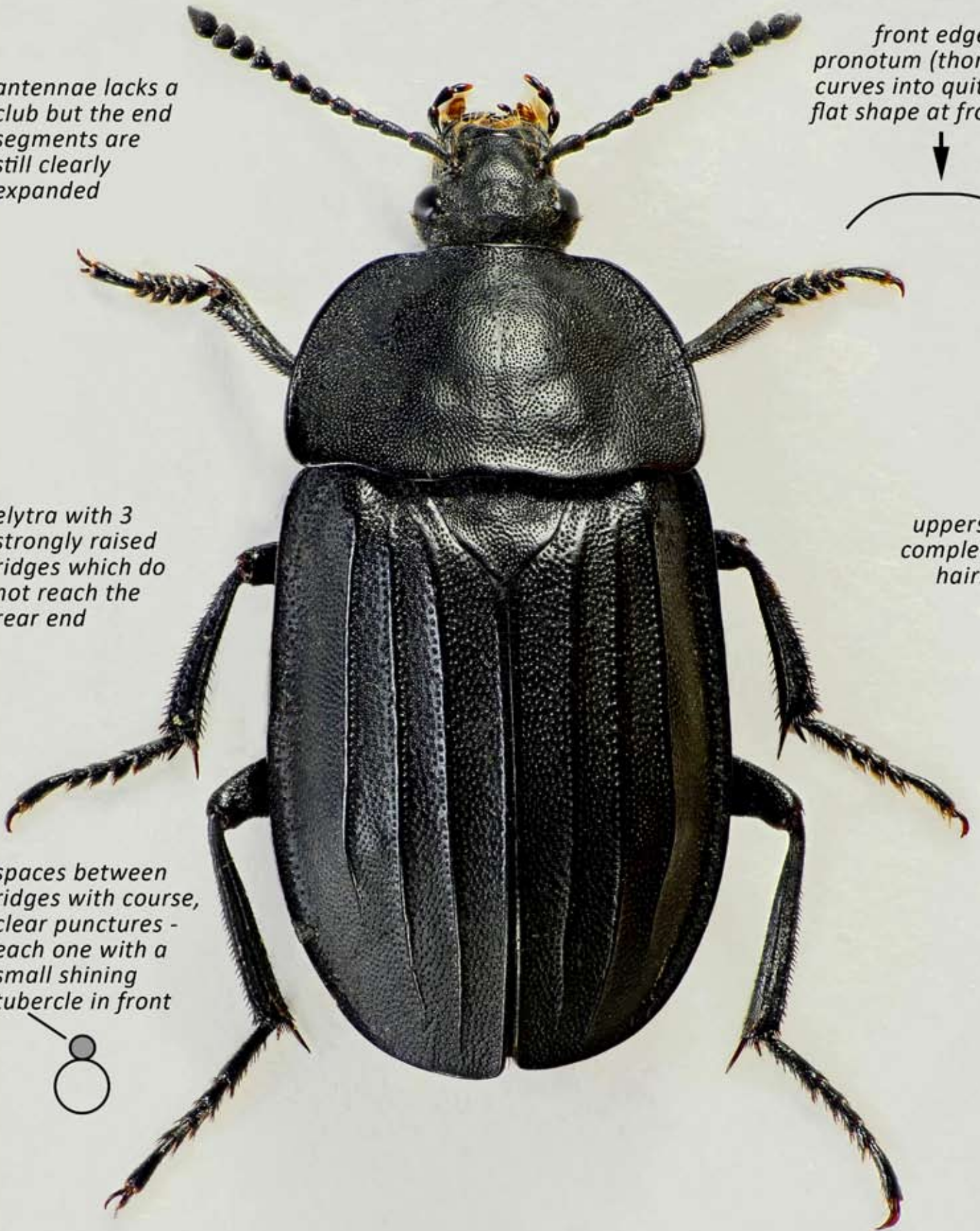
front edge of pronotum (thorax) curves into quite a flat shape at front.



elytra with 3 strongly raised ridges which do not reach the rear end

upperside completely hairless

spaces between ridges with coarse, clear punctures - each one with a small shining tubercle in front



Nicrophorus humator

length 18 to 26 mm

antennae with
an obvious club,
the last 3 segments
being red

elytra punctured
with 3 quite faint
ridges each side,
and a bump close
to rear end

totally black
everywhere
(apart from
antennae clubs)



elytra short and square-ended
with four segments of end of
abdomen showing clearly

Nicrophorus vespillo

Similar to *N. humator* but has 2 large red patches on each elytron. There are a number of similar red-blotched species in this genus which have not yet been recorded on Guernsey.

