

17th August 2021

Rare moss beetle found in Hampshire water for first time



By [Andrew Napier](#) [@andrew_napier](#)

A RARE moss beetle has been spotted in Hampshire for the first time.

The creature was found in an ecological survey of the water that flows out of three farms belonging to The Watercress Company – one of which is in Alresford.

Nationally scarce, the moss beetle, *Ochthebius exsculptus*, is sometimes known as the sculptured moss beetle.

Often described as a water beetle it is in fact amphibious, frequently choosing to live in moss on stones either in the middle of the flow, or on its margins.

Normally found in the North of England, this is the first recorded sighting in southern England for some decades and the first ever for Hampshire.

Robert Aquilina, the independent consultant ecologist employed by The Watercress Company to run the annual survey, said: “This is a surprising find. These beetles are rare nationally and have never been seen in Hampshire before.



“What is better still is that the beetle was found at two of the four sites surveyed suggesting it is not just a one-off freak occurrence but that they are happy with the general environment. These beetles are usually found in upland streams in the north of England and Scotland, so these chalk streams with a constant temperature of 10°C as the water leaves the watercress beds, may represent a refuge for them in the south.”

The Watercress Company is the UK’s biggest grower of watercress with 50 acres of watercress beds split between Dorset and Hampshire, from which they supply most of the country’s major retailers, including Waitrose and Tesco.

Robert Aquilina concluded: “Clearly water quality is good enough to maintain high biodiversity, other factors being equal. Of course, overlaid on this is the year on year natural variation that weather and management bring.

“Repeated sampling is beginning to show the longer term trend of results cycling around a mean with no significant variation to suggest negative impacts from water quality. However, there is the added excitement this year of the noteworthy discovery of the rare Sculptured Moss Beetle.

“It is typical of pristine streams where it is found.”



Source: <https://www.hampshirechronicle.co.uk/news/19516410.rare-moss-beetle-found-hampshire-water-first-time/>