



DEVON MOTH GROUP

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NEWSLETTER 2012 ISSUE 1 (FEBRUARY)

Welcome to this first newsletter of 2012. Last year turned out to be pretty amazing for moths, with four macro species new for Devon and one of the most extensive immigrations ever recorded in Britain. I was happy with a few *Rhodometra sacraria* Vestals in my trap, but couldn't help the odd twinge of jealousy when people started to catch *Trigonophora flammea*, Flame Brocades, *Acherontia atropos*, Death's-head Hawk-moths and the rare tropical moth *Spoladea recurvalis*. Still, if you didn't catch the rarity you've long dreamt of, there is always this year...



Spoladea recurvalis at Hennock
13.10.2011 (Brian Bewsher)



Flame Brocade at Colyford 31.10.2011
(Peter Vernon)

It is subscriptions time again. The membership form can be found at the end of this newsletter. Please fill it in and send it off straight away. If you don't it will mean lots of work for Roy, chasing all those who haven't paid, and may also mean that you don't get the 2011 Annual Report, when it is published in the spring. Of course, if you pay by Standing Order at the beginning of each year then you need to nothing – what a great way to pay your subs!
Richard Fox

Annual General Meeting on Thursday 26th January 2012

The AGM was held at the Ley Arms, Kenn and attended by around 45 members, one of our biggest meeting attendances ever. Apologies were received from Sue Mackechnie-Jarvis, David and Judith Simpson and Peter Vernon. The minutes of the previous AGM were approved unanimously and signed by the Chairman. The reports of the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary followed (see below). Copies of the accounts were distributed to all present. These showed a healthy balance and there were no questions or issues raised. The accounts were approved and signed by the Chairman. The election was then held for all Council members apart from the Chairman. Nicola Bacciu, Barry Henwood, Roy McCormick and Rob Wolton all put themselves forward for re-election to Council, in

**Members of Council: Richard Fox, Chairman; Roy McCormick, FRES, Secretary/Treasurer;
Rob Wolton, Conservation; Nicola Bacciu, Membership & Distribution; Barry Henwood, Ordinary Member.**

the positions of Membership Secretary, Ordinary Member, Secretary/Treasurer and Conservation Officer respectively. There being no other candidates, they were considered en bloc and were re-elected unanimously.

Chairman's AGM Report

2011 proved to be an extraordinary year for weather and for moths. After the coldest December ever recorded (2010), we had a mild spring and very hot April (the hottest on record). As a consequence there were lots of early emergences and some very large numbers of spring species. This was followed by another disappointing summer – the 5th in a row – which proved to be the coldest for 18 years. Unsurprisingly, the cool and often wet weather had a negative impact on moth numbers. However, we then enjoyed a warm autumn, with massive influxes of immigrant moths on southerly airflows. It was the second warmest November ever, leading to emergence of spring species such as *Orthosia cerasi* Common Quaker and *O. gothica* Hebrew Character. Overall it was second hottest UK year since records began in 1910, but also second hottest year in the central England time series which began in 1659!

Four new macro-moths were recorded for the county! One overlooked resident *Zygaena lonicerae* Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet and three presumed immigrants: *Cyclophora ruficiliaria* Jersey Mocha, *Itame brunneata* Rannoch Looper and *Xanthia ocellaris* Pale-lemon Sallow.

The undoubted highlight of 2011 was mass immigration – not only in the autumn, but right through the year e.g. *Cynaeda dentalis* larvae found in April, Rannoch Looper in early June, *Oxyptilus laetus* and *Eublemma parva* Small Marbled in late June/July, then from September onwards all sorts of amazing species including *Chiasmia clathrata* Latticed Heath, *Catocala fraxini* Clifden Nonpareil, Death's-head Hawk-moth, *Spoladea recurvalis*, *Palpita vitrealis* and Flame Brocade.

So it was a pretty exciting year for moths and another good year of progress for DMG, thanks to all those on Council and other members who have helped out during 2011. A highlight was being successful in nationwide competition for funding from the OPAL project administered by the Natural History Museum and funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Most of this money is being used to create a new, expanded website for the Group, but the grant will also pay for the printing of our annual report this year, and helped towards travel expenses for the leaders of our summer field meetings. In addition, as part of the grant, Bob Heckford is leading two micro-moth workshops for DMG members. The first was a very successful survey for *Ectoedemia heckfordi* (reported in our Oct 2011 newsletter) at Hembury Woods in August. The second will be a micro-moth indoor workshop this spring – see p.8.

Moth recording has continued to improve under the leadership of Roy McCormick. Thanks to Roy's work encouraging recording, leading field meetings and processing records over many years, we have a formidable database and good coverage across the county. More and more members are computerising their own records, which has huge time-saving benefits for the County Recorder and means that more records are being submitted.

However, all good things must come to an end. Roy took over as County Moth Recorder in 1994. He'd started trapping regularly at Dawlish Warren in the previous year and when he presented his records to Dave Bolton at Exeter Museum, Dave responded that he had never received moth records by the kilogram before and the County Moth Recorder job was handed to Roy more or less on the spot. Since then, for 17 years he has undertaken the highly onerous tasks of County Recorder, but 2011 will be his last year of data collecting, checking and crunching.

Stepping into his shoes is Barry Henwood. I am very grateful to Barry for agreeing to do this and we are all very fortunate to have such a highly skilled and experienced mother to take over from Roy. And so, to express our huge thanks on behalf of the whole of DMG, we presented Roy with a signed and framed print of Tiger moths by the artist Richard Lewington.

Richard Fox



Richard Fox presents Roy McCormick (left) with a moth print (Barry Henwood)

Secretary's AGM Report

The Group is still gaining new Members with a membership of 162 at the beginning of 2012; we have 27 members who do not live in the county, with a high proportion of these living in Cornwall and two living in London, with one having a second residence in Devon. We have three Honorary Members and two who get free Membership, with one of these our Accountant.

We held three Indoor Meetings at the Ley Arms, the AGM, Spring and Autumn Meetings. Our Christmas event at the Highwayman's Haunt, Chudleigh, was well attended with 23 people coming. We have booked for Saturday 15th December for this year. Most of our Meetings attract around 25+ Members. We had seven field Meetings booked and these were led by (various combinations of) Stella Beavan, John Breeds, Paul Butter, Richard Fox, Barry Henwood, Bob Heckford and Rob Wolton. As far as I know we had reasonable numbers at these meetings, with two of them being open to the public which attracted a very good attendance. Because I am now a full time carer for my wife Mavis, I could not lead any these and I heartily thank these Members who stepped in for me.

The number of sites visited as listed on my database during the day and at night was 400 + (this includes the garden trap lists), and the number of records is up on last year at 37,000 + (Devon records up to 21.1.2012); the continuing increase in records is because more people are sending the records in either excel files, with most of these being re-worked so that they fit the criteria, or by the import facility on MapMate. A list of the people who did the work will be found in the Annual Report. We have five Field Meetings arranged for 2012, with the possibility of more; these, once confirmed, will listed in the Annual Report along with the dates of the indoor meetings for 2012. We will continue to hold our meetings on Thursday evening with a starting time of 19.30 for 20.00, this to accommodate our North County Members who find it difficult to get there on time with the distance they have to travel. Our Christmas event, as mentioned, will be back on a Saturday and will continue to be held at The Highwayman's Haunt. Our Annual Report will continue to be issued at the Spring Meeting, as many records do not come in until the beginning of the year; this creates a big rush to get it out on time and with the changes in this document, it has become impossible to issue this sooner. I still have records to enter and I still await records from a couple of the Members. I will be handing over County Moth Recorder duties to Barry Henwood this year so records for 2012 should be addressed to him in future. I have had a good run at this having started in 1994, 17 years ago, and the database has over 560,000 records which include my sorties out of County, but most of these are Devon related and include microlepidoptera and butterflies.

Your Council held four meetings during 2011 with the main topics of discussion: trying to find speakers for our indoor meetings, arranging Field Meetings, discussions about the Annual Report and getting funding for our new web site; we managed to obtain an Opal grant for this and other purposes. Unfortunately, due to my caring duties, I have had to withdraw from most of my activities, but DMG still remains a prominent partner in BAPs activities along with B.C. and the National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS). Further to this, Richard will have already mentioned this in his address.

I reiterate my thanks to the people who are helping to keep the group running taking on most of the work I used to be involved in before my wife had a stroke, with most of the work being taken over by Richard Fox; I certainly could not have been able to carry on without this valuable help. Thank you Richard

The Group is well known throughout the county with more of the existing organisations, such as Natural England, Woodland Trust and National Trust along with owners of private land, all asking for our help with field work. Because of pressures of recording work, we have not undertaken any recording work for South West Lakes Trust, but a small amount of recording has been undertaken for Dartmoor National Park and Forest Enterprise, but all of these sites will be looked at in the future. I am still getting requests for identifications from Devon Biodiversity Records Centre and we have been invited to help with recording on sites managed by, or for, Teignbridge District Council and the Dartmoor Zoological Garden. Our Members in North Devon continue to work Braunton Burrows and other sites in their area. We will continue to apply for Grants toward the monitoring of localities.

Roy McCormick

AGM illustrated talk: *Wildlife Highlights of 2010/11* by John Walters

Once again we were treated to a highly informative and visually stunning talk by John Walters. It's impossible, in this brief report, to do justice to the quality and quantity of wildlife highlights covered during the evening, but the packed audience was itself a testament to John's reputation as one of Devon's most knowledgeable naturalists and an extremely talented wildlife artist, photographer and film-maker.

The talk took us from the sublime (Potter Wasps building their larval clay pots on Bovey Heathfield) to the ridiculous (a road-casualty otter strapped to the back of John's bike), via myopic Roe Deer, Hedgehog Harvetmen, Adders up the trousers and the incredible sight of about 100 male Emperor Moths that John lured to three 'calling' females on Dartmoor. I was amazed by John's insights into the weird and wonderful world of Oil Beetles. Each female Oil Beetle can lay up to 40,000 eggs! The larvae climb up onto flowers and then hitchhike on the backs of pollinating insects that visit the flowers. It is a hit and miss affair because only the right sorts of solitary mining bee will do for the Oil Beetle larvae. Once in the bee's nest hole, the beetle larvae climbs off, destroys the bee's egg and develops by feeding on the pollen store that the bee provided for its own young. However, surely the highlight was incredible video footage of Long-tailed Tits as they jostled for warm positions in a winter roost in a Rhododendron bush (see below). Who needs Springwatch/Autumnwatch? Many, many thanks to John for a fantastic presentation – a truly memorable evening meeting.

Richard Fox



Long-tailed Tits roosting (John Walters)

WANTED: Home for Charles Dewhurst Collection

As you'll recall from the August 2011 newsletter, Charles Dewhurst kindly offered his collection of Devon and Dorset Lepidoptera to Devon Moth Group. The collection is in two attractive, purpose-built, mahogany cabinets. Brian Bewsher has initially housed the collection but unfortunately can no longer keep it. Therefore, we are urgently appealing to any Devon Moth Group member who might be willing to take possession of the Dewhurst collection on behalf of the Group. Images of the two cabinets are shown below. If anyone is willing to be the custodian of the collection, please contact Richard Fox (rikfox@btinternet.com) or 01626 356463 in the first instance. Your Council very much hopes that someone will find a home for the collection in the near future. Please help if you can.



Devon Moth Recording and a new Devon County Recorder (Vice-counties 3 & 4)

After 17 remarkable years Roy has passed the task of county recorder to me. During that time he has built up a database of 560,000 records of which about 40,000 are from 2011 - an astonishing achievement. During those 17 years much has changed with moth recording in the county. Devon Moth Group has gone from strength to strength and now has around 170 members. There are now far more records being submitted than previously. In the early years Roy used to type every record into his computer however it was submitted. This is no longer possible in view of the large quantity of records and neither should it be necessary with widespread ownership of computers. We all need to work together to continue the massive recording exercise. Ideally I should like records to be submitted electronically either via an export from a recording programme such as MapMate or in a spreadsheet.

As county recorder, it is not my intention to spend a large amount of time typing in records. The ideal solution is for members to purchase MapMate. This is a bespoke recording programme which provides quick and easy entry of records. They can then be retrieved electronically and e-mailed to me. I can then go through a verification process and import the records into the county database. Apart from making your life and my life easier in terms of submission of records, you would find MapMate excellent for easy searching of your past records for your own use. If you do not have a database such as MapMate, typing your records straight onto a spreadsheet is fine (provided it is done in a particular way). I can still use that spreadsheet for importing into the county database. There may be members who are not familiar with using spreadsheets – please let me know if this is the case. I can provide simple instructions. If you do not have a computer, then I do not want to discourage you from submitting records. I should like to have them, but if I receive large numbers of records not on a spreadsheet then they are unlikely to all find their way onto the county database. The more significant records of course would be entered.

If anyone would like to become an Assistant County Moth Recorder – that is help me deal with such records not submitted on a spreadsheet that would be wonderful. Anyone who has MapMate can have a second copy running on their computer so such records could be entered on that without them going onto their own personal database. Alternatively anyone with a computer without MapMate can help by simply entering them onto a spreadsheet. Please contact me if you are willing to help.

However you are going to submit records, please contact me first to ensure the process is as easy as possible for both you and me. In particular those of you who are entering data straight onto a spreadsheet (not via MapMate) need to ensure you are doing it in a compatible way before you progress too far. I shall be providing detailed instructions on spreadsheets in a subsequent newsletter.

MapMate

As mentioned above, MapMate is an ideal recording tool for moth recorders (you can also record any living thing in Britain on it too). It is inexpensive and a discount is available to those who wish to become part of the Devon Moth Group MapMate User Group. This scheme means you can purchase it for £25 instead of the usual £32. If you would like to purchase MapMate as part of that user group then you will need to contact me as the lead contact. I shall then order it for you. The user group licence runs until 30th May each year. Therefore, if you bought it now as part of the user group, you would be due to buy the update on 31st May. (You could of course buy MapMate after that date). If you bought it not as part of the user group then your licence would run for a full year from the date of purchase. The annual updates are also discounted to user group members £6.30 instead of £13.60. If you do not pay for the updates you can continue to use MapMate, but with time the species list and names will become out of date and you will not get continued e-mail support. My recommendation is to buy MapMate as part of the Devon Moth Group MapMate User Group and buy the annual updates. There are currently 15 members of the user group and I know of two other MapMate users in DMG. There is therefore plenty of scope for sharing experiences and helping each other with MapMate. If we get up to 25 people in the user group the discounts will be even greater. Any current users of MapMate not in the user group can join by contacting me and benefit from the discounts, but your year end will then be 30th May.

Websites

There are a few websites I should like to mention which may help you with your recording:

- to grab a grid reference: <http://www.bnhs.co.uk/focuson/grabagridref/html/index.htm>
- to work out the vice county from a grid reference: <http://herbariaunited.org/gridrefVC/>
- MapMate tutorials: <http://Mapmate.bsbi.org.uk>

Accuracy

It is crucial for any recording scheme that the records are accurate. Many moths are difficult to identify and some

are impossible without dissection of the genitalia. It can be frustrating when you have a moth, you know which group it belongs to but cannot be certain exactly which species. Unless you are absolutely certain, please do not submit the record. Always remember **IF IN DOUBT LEAVE IT OUT**.

Duplicate records

We do not tend to go out moth trapping alone. Please make sure at any recording event that one person is designated to submit their records, so that the Devon database does not become distorted by duplicate records.

Please keep the records flowing. Please check with me at an early stage in the production of your records that they will be in a suitable format for importing into the Devon database. Let's see if we can beat 40,000 in 2012!

Barry Henwood barry.henwood@btinternet.com 01626 364080

Field Meeting Reports

Stone Lane Gardens, Chagford, 27.8.2011

This event was held at the invitation of the Friends of Stone Lane Gardens, an arboretum between Chagford and Whiddon Down. The site holds a large collection of native and foreign birch trees as well as alders and others, and had some hedgebanks and wilder areas surrounding the landscaped gardens. Bob Heckford and Stella Beavan arrived early and did their usual excellent job of recording micro-moths and their associated mines, spinnings and larval feeding damage. Unfortunately their hopes of finding any notable species associated with the birch and alder trees did not come to fruition.

By 20.00 a large crowd had assembled and were enjoying cheese and wine in a barn. Most people were regular visitors to Stone Lane Gardens or interested locals, but seven members of Devon Moth Group were also in attendance. Overall there must have been at least 40 people present. We waited in the relative comfort of the barn for darkness to fall, telling the assembled audience about moths and Devon Moth Group and answering numerous questions from the interested crowd, before heading out to check the traps.

With such a large number of newcomers in attendance, we needed moths quickly and thankfully the first round of the traps generated plenty of sightings. There was little of note, but sufficient attractive species to wow the crowd, with *Ennomos alniaria*, Canary-shouldered Thorn; *Campogramma bilineata*, Yellow Shell; *Campaea margaritata*, Light Emerald; *Hydriomena furcata*, July Highflyer; and *Phlogophora meticulosa*, Angle Shades providing colour and beauty. The numerous *Noctua pronuba*, Large Yellow Underwing dive-bombed the watching hoards and bemused many newcomers with their variation in markings.



Inevitably, most of the participants did not stay late into the night but they departed having had an enjoyable time. In truth, it wasn't a great night or a great site for moths and we finished with a tally of just 65 species and nothing of any great note. However, we'd introduced many new people to the wonders of moths and were rewarded for our efforts with a midnight feast of cheese, bread and home-pressed apple juice, kindly left out for us in the barn.

Richard Fox

The Christmas dinner

Once more the Highwayman's Haunt at Chudleigh did us proud for our annual moth ball (as my wife insists on calling it). No, we did not dance nor practice flying, but we did flutter about amiably close to light, and supped (fermented) nectar.

The new pub management greeted us warmly, and showed us to an open quadrangle of tables with just the right of amount of seating for the twenty or so of us (this reflects, of course, not chance but good planning by Secretary Roy). Not only did we have more space than usual, but the food was also of a higher order - large amounts were

avidly consumed with the exchange of news and anecdotes. Crackers were pulled, bad jokes read out and groaned at, and paper hats donned. (A short survey revealed men more willing to wear these hats than women, and that blue hats were favoured over all other colours – please send possible explanations for this behaviour to the editor). It was very good to have Mavis with us alongside Roy who later demonstrated remarkable Strong-Man abilities, when lifting single-handed a cunning but very heavy device to aid wheel chair users.

All too soon it was time to leave, but not before Roy, ever supremely efficient told us of the date of the 2012 moth ball, already booked! Out into the cold, but what a change from last winter – no snow and treacherous ice this time. Time to look ahead to another year, dreams of great catches and hopes of building new friendships by the light of the silvery mercury vapour bulb!

Rob Wolton



Mothing in winter

With most members either putting their traps away for the winter or only running them occasionally, interesting records can still be made by searching larval foodplants. A good one to look at is Pellitory-of-the-wall *Parietaria judaica*. This is the sole foodplant of the very pretty micro-moth *Cosmopterix pulchrimella* (Cosmopterigidae) that was first recorded in the British Isles in Dorset in 2001 and has since been found in several southern counties, including both South and North Devon. The larva mines the leaves and usually pupates under a folded-down leaf edge. Larvae can be found in the winter as can the adults as we discovered at Berry Head, Brixham on 26 November 2011 as we were tapping the foodplant.



Cosmopterix pulchrimella larva (left) and adult (right) (Bob Heckford)

Another, rarer, species that might turn up is Bloxworth Snout *Hypena obsitalis* whose larva also feeds on Pellitory-of-the-wall. Indeed on the same day at Berry Head we also found two adults hibernating inside a small cave as well as a very small larva on the plants growing nearby. This was a surprise because according to Bernard Skinner's *Moths of the British Isles* the larva occurs in July and again in August and September. We kept the larva which grew quite quickly, pupated and the moth emerged on 28 December. The following day it was released in the cave where the other two moths had been seen on 26 November (and photographed there). We noticed that since our previous visit a Wren had built a nest just inside the cave and so whether the moth will survive the winter with the other troglodyte is questionable!

Stella Beavan & Bob Heckford



Bloxworth Snout larva (left) and adult (right) (Bob Heckford)

Requests for moth buddies/mentors

As we have occasionally mentioned in the newsletter before, newcomers to moth recording and to the Group may benefit from being able to meet up from time to time with more experienced members. We cannot perform an official introduction service, but are happy to highlight requests from members. In this vein, Barry Bowden, a relative beginner based in Plymouth would be very happy to hear from any nearby members. Please contact him on bazcaz@bazcaz134.plus.com or 01752 786184.

Forthcoming events

Saturday 10th March 2012 *A Micro-moth Evening* led by Bob Heckford, Barry Henwood and others at Church House, Abbotskerswell, Newton Abbot. 19.00-22.30. From the Newton Abbot/Totnes road (A381) drive into Abbotskerswell, straight across the mini roundabout and Church House is the old stone building on the left about 50m from the roundabout at SX85696876. Please note there is no parking at Church House itself, so you should park at the recreation ground car park, c. 100m further on from Church House at SX85866864.

This workshop is part of the OPAL grant received by Devon Moth Group and will provide an evening dedicated to micro-moths for members irrespective of your current skills at micro-moth identification. There will be presentations, discussion, specimens, reference books and opportunity to bring along a few specimens or photos of moths that you have caught. So come along and learn more about the marvellous world of micros!



Thursday 22nd March 2012, indoor meeting at the Ley Arms, Kenn. 19.30 for 20.00 start. Illustrated talk by Dr Fiona Mathews, a Senior Lecturer at Exeter University, entitled *The Secret Lives of Devon's Bats*.

Nothing in winter 2

With pheromones in the freezer, it's time to get cold outside by looking for Clearwing larvae in the winter. Between April and late May last year I found larvae of Six-belted Clearwing *Bembecia ichneumoniformis* in the lower stems and rootstocks of Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* at a few coastal localities in south Devon, and reared moths.

One of these sites was Butcher's Cove that has an area of flat but jagged rocks with a considerable amount of Kidney Vetch. According to Jim Porter's *The colour identification guide to caterpillars of the British Isles* the larvae are difficult to locate and inhabited roots may be indicated by the presence of frass within or alongside. In fact affected plants, at least of Kidney Vetch – I have not found larvae in roots of the other foodplant Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* – can often be detected by the 'look' of the plant. Instead of having healthy green leaves, those with larvae have slightly wilted yellowish green leaves. If the stem is tugged gently it will usually break off where the larva has been feeding.



Bob Heckford

I visited Butcher's Cove on 16 January. No doubt because of the mild winter the Kidney Vetch plants were almost luxuriant. I found three slightly wilted plants with larvae that appeared to be about half-grown. I also found several plants with the upper parts broken off but apparently not lying close to where they had been growing. The broken plants all had evidence of tunnels in the stems made by larvae, but none had larvae. The site is quite exposed and I can only assume that these had been broken off by strong winds. Whether the larvae survive in those circumstances is another matter.

Bob Heckford



Partially uncovered larval tube, and larva, of Six-belted Clearwing in *A. vulneraria* (Bob Heckford)



Membership subscription for Devon Moth Group

Membership subscriptions, **£6.00 for single and £9.00 for a family annual membership**, are due by the end of February 2012.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

I am happy to receive Devon Moth Group newsletters by email.

Please return with a cheque payable to Devon Moth Group to: Roy McCormick, 36 Paradise Road, Teignmouth TQ14 8NR.

For payment by Standing Order, please obtain the necessary form from your Bank. The account details are: **Devon Moth Group, A/C No: 94850593, sort code: 60-21-47 at NatWest Bank, Den Road, Teignmouth, TQ14 8AR.** Make the reference your own name as that will then be shown on our statements. Payment date is 1st January 2012, or a date soon after that, and 1st January from then on.