



DEVON MOTH GROUP

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NEWSLETTER 2012 ISSUE 2 (April)

I trust that you have all received your Annual Report by now and that it was of interest. Now the field season is upon us, although the recent weather hasn't been very conducive to moth recording. This issue brings news of notable sightings already this year, as well as some micro-moth highlights from 2011, and more besides. At the end you'll find details of forthcoming field meetings – hope to see you at some of these. I would also just like to thank all those who responded to the appeal in the last newsletter re the Dewhurst collection. In the end, Charles Dewhurst has decided to return the collection to the custodianship of his own family.

Happy mothing!
Richard Fox

Early spring records of over-wintering adult immigrant moths.

A warm spell of weather at the end of February and beginning of March following a mild winter has resulted in some very interesting records. Let's hope the trend continues throughout the rest of 2012.

I set up my garden trap on 24th February and when I examined the catch the following morning I was amazed to see *Conistra erythrocephala* Red-headed Chestnut. This is a rare immigrant and only the third Devon record. Previous records were at Ivybridge (5.11.1856) and Shaugh Prior (12.2.2004). The vast majority of records of this species are autumnal. Although it is impossible to know the origin of my individual, I suspect that it arrived from Europe as part of the prolonged immigration which was noted in October and November 2011. Winter was very mild, facilitating its survival until the spring. The species mates in the spring, but I think that they could only have survived here in low density, maybe too low for breeding.



Red-headed Chestnut
(Barry Henwood)

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

This record was followed on 28th February 2012 by *Xylena exsoleta* Sword-grass at Membury by Oliver Woodland. The moth is shown right. There are very few records of this species in Devon and this is the first since 1994.

Although it is a resident in northern Britain, it is recorded in the south as an immigrant. Again, I suspect it arrived last autumn and overwintered.



Sword-grass (Roy McCormick)

Macroglossum stellatarum Humming-bird Hawk-moth is a much commoner immigrant which does successfully breed (e.g. a larval record from the Axmouth-Lyme Regis Undercliff on 30th July 2011). It seems highly likely that some moths have survived as adults over the last winter. This is evidenced by some early records this year, although it is not possible to say with absolute certainty that they were not primary immigrants. One was recorded at Liverton on 26th February, another was seen at Exwick on 29th February and there were two in a garden at Bovey Tracey on 2nd March. A month later one was seen at Abbotskerswell in the week starting 2nd April.

Barry Henwood

Highlights of Devon Microlepidoptera 2011

Although Devon experienced snow in January 2011, spring was unusually warm both in Devon and the rest of the United Kingdom and, with the spring of 2007, was the joint warmest since 1910. The summer, however, was rather wet with below average temperatures but the autumn, particularly October and November, was exceptionally mild resulting in some of the more uncommon migrants being recorded into late November.

Four new county records, *Dahlica lichenella*, *Phyllonorycter platanoidella*, *Cosmopterix lienigiella* and *Catoptria verellus*, were received, all from Vice-county (VC) 3 (South Devon), and 13 new VC records, all from VC4 (North Devon) except one. These are listed at the end of this report. This continues the recent trend of more new VC records from VC4 than from VC3. This is no doubt partly because of more recorders in the former than historically and the latter having been better recorded. Against that, there are still more species known from VC3 than VC4.

Apart from new Devon or VC records, other highlights included the discovery of *Selania leplastriana* in the Dartmouth Castle area as nationally this is a very local and rare species that is known only from Dorset and Kent in the British Isles outside Devon. Its sole larval foodplant is Wild Cabbage *Brassica oleracea*, which has a wider distribution than the moth, which seems to occur only in base rich localities.

It was equally good to find a new site for *Ectoedemia heckfordi* even though it is literally only across the road from the type locality at Hembury Woods. The new site is privately owned and Stella Beavan and I are very grateful for being given permission to look for it there. This still remains one of the rarest moths in the British Isles, being known from only five 1 kilometre squares in South Devon and nowhere else in the world. The Devon Moth Group held a successful field meeting at Hembury Woods specifically to search for mines of this species, because between 2008 and 2010 only one mine had been found there and this had a dead larva; and so there had been concern about the population. Mines were photographed but none was collected.

Larvae of *Metalampra italica* were discovered under the dead bark of four species in my garden and a larval description made. The first British specimen turned up at light in the same garden in 2003 and until then was unknown outside Italy. In 1987 moths were reared from larvae found in Italy the previous year in wood of *Ostrya carpinifolia* and in rotten wood of *Quercus pubescens* and *Quercus robur*, but no larval description was made. Moths were also reared in 2005 from a log of *Quercus* sp. collected in Hertfordshire but again no larval description was made. As far as I am aware these are the only other European rearing records.

Between early June and late July there was a notable influx of the migrant Plume moth *Oxyptilus laetus* with 11 being recorded. Prior to 2011 there were only about 20 records for the whole of the British Isles. Three of these were from Devon, one in 1928, another in 2003 and the third in 2009.

Finally, a short stay on Lundy in September resulted in 21 new species records for the island, one of which,

Eulamprotes immaculatella, was also new to VC 4. For a fairly small island with not a great variety of habitat, the Macrolepidoptera list that has resulted from a number of recorders, mainly running light traps, is quite extensive. Most of the new Microlepidoptera records resulted from daytime field work.

Bob Heckford

PSYCHIDAE

179 *Dahlia lichenella* (Linn.): The Ride, Saltram, Plymouth SX506546 (VC3) 14.ii.2010 cases on trunks of *Quercus ilex*, moths reared 5–14.iii.2010 (confirmed by DNA analysis) (RJH). **NEW TO DEVON**

BUCCULATRICIDAE

273 *Bucculatrix thoracella* (Thunb.): Knightshayes Plantation SS9615 (VC4) 4.x.2011 one larva and several moulting cocoons on *Tilia* sp. (RJH). **NEW TO VC 4**

275 *B. bechsteinella* (Bech. & Scharf.): Locks Park Farm, Hatherleigh SS518022 5.vi.2011 one at light (RW). **NEW TO VC 4**

GRACILLARIIDAE

321a *Phyllonorycter platani* (Staud.): Bideford SS455270 (VC4) 17.ix.2011 one mine on *Platanus x hispanica* (SDB & RJH). **NEW TO VC 4**

326 *P. blancardella* (Fabr.): Rosemoor (RHS Garden) SS4917 (VC4) 28.vii.2011 a few mines on *Malus domestica* (SDB & RJH). **NEW TO VC 4**

363 *P. platanoidella* (Joannis): Trago Mills, Liverton near Newton Abbot SX822746 (VC3) 4.ix.2010 mine on *Acer platanoides*, moth reared 13.ix.2010 (RJH). **NEW TO DEVON**

COLEOPHORIDAE

490 *Coleophora lutipennella* (Zell.): Locks Park Farm, Hatherleigh SS518022 25.vii.2011, genitalic determination (RW). **NEW TO VC 4**

509 *C. violacea* (Ström): Long Ash SX4969 (VC3) 12.x.2010 case on *Corylus avellana*, moth reared Mr T. Sleep (per RJH). **NEW TO VC 3**

552 *C. lassella* Staud.: Braunton Burrows SS4534 (VC4) 21.vi.2010 one, genitalic determination (SDB & RJH). **NEW TO VC 4**

587 *C. caespitiella* Zell.: Locks Park Farm, Hatherleigh SS518022 22.vi.2011 one, genitalic determination (RW). **NEW TO VC 4**

ELACHISTIDAE

631 *Cosmiotes freyerella* (Hüb.): Locks Park Farm, Hatherleigh SS518022 17.iv & 22.vi.2011, genitalic determinations (RW). **NEW TO VC 4**

GELECHIIDAE

731a *Eulamprotes immaculatella* (Dougl.): nr South Light, Lundy SS144437 21.ix.2011 one late afternoon, genitalic determination (RJH). **NEW TO VC 4**

COSMOPTERIGIDAE

897 *Cosmopterix lienigiella* L. & Z.: Exminster Marshes SX960870 (VC3) 1.vi.2011 one at light Mr B. Bewsher (per RJH). **NEW TO DEVON**

PYRALIDAE

1317 *Catoptria verellus* (Zinck.): Colyford SY237928 (VC3) 24.vii.2010 one at light Mr P. Vernon per B. Bewsher (identification confirmed by RJH from a photograph). **NEW TO DEVON**

1438 *Trachycera suavella* (Zinck.): Barnstaple SS596366 (VC4) 25.vii.2011 one at light Mr N. W. Cottle (per RFMcC). **NEW TO VC 4**

1445 *Pempelia formosa* (Haw.): Zeal Monachorum SS719039 2.vii.2011 one at light (SDB); Butcombe House, Morchard Bishop SS787069 (VC4) 9.vii.2011 one at light Mr B. Bewsher (per RJH). **NEW TO VC 4**

PTEROPHORIDAE

1502 *Platyptilia isodactylus* (Zell.): Locks Park Farm, Hatherleigh SS518022 1.vi, 28.vi, 28.vii & 20.viii.2011 (RW). **NEW TO VC 4**

Notes:

SDB Miss S.D. Beavan, RJH R.J. Heckford, RFMcC R.F. McCormick, RW Dr R. Wolton

Numbering, nomenclature and classification order follows Bradley (2000). Unless stated otherwise, records are of adults and those at light were at mercury vapour light.

Indoor Meeting Report: Micro-moth workshop, Church House, Abbotskerswell 10.3.12

This was something of a new departure for Devon Moth Group and those of us involved in setting it up (Bob Heckford, Barry Henwood, Stella Beavan and myself) were unsure whether anyone would turn up at all.

In the event, there was a great turnout, giving over 20 people in all, with some travelling up from the far reaches of Cornwall, just for the opportunity to 'talk micros' for an evening.

The evening was led by Bob and Barry and included a presentation and discussion about micro-moth species, families, photography and identification, displays of specimens, ID books, and microscopes with slides of moth genitalia. All were lapped up by the audience, which varied from beginners to experienced recorders, and there was much discussion.

Perhaps the highlight of the evening was a quiz devised by Bob, which revealed a hitherto unseen competitive edge among the participants. Twelve specimens of "comparatively common species" had been selected by Bob and were presented unnamed in a case (shown in the foreground of the image, right). After much huffing, puffing and thumbing through ID guides, the answers were read out – only one participant got full marks; 10-year-old Tim Stripp!



It was a fun and informative evening, organised as part of the OPAL project funded by the Big Lottery Fund.
Richard Fox



Macro-moth dissection workshop

As a result of suggestions and discussion at the micro-moth workshop held in March, we are planning to hold a training event sometime in the autumn to teach people the basics of moth identification by genitalia examination. This will be run by Barry Henwood, Bob Heckford and Stella Beavan and will focus on those macro-moth species that require genitalia examination for identification (e.g. Common Rustic/Lesser Common Rustic, Marbled Minor agg. etc). If you are new to such techniques but keen to learn, please let Barry know (barry.henwood@btinternet.com or 01626 364080) so that we can plan the workshop. Numbers will be very limited.

Indoor Meeting Report: Spring Meeting, Ley Arms, Kenn 22.3.2012

The secret lives of Devon's bats, a talk by Dr Fiona Mathews, Senior Lecturer in Mammalian Biology at the University of Exeter.

Joking that she felt as if she was entering into the enemy's camp, Dr Mathews gave us a fascinating and fearless account of the habits of these most adept predators of moths. Fortunately, it transpires, they favour Large Yellow Underwings above all else, making Fiona and her subject instantly popular with the audience!

With infectious enthusiasm, Fiona recounted to us stories about the bats she and others have worked on in Devon. At Beer Quarries, horseshoe bats have been caught and fitted with tiny radio transmitters, revealing that some travel huge distances every night. New nursery roosts have been found along with key areas for foraging. Fiona was particularly pleased to report that East Devon AONB is taking positive action to improve areas that are

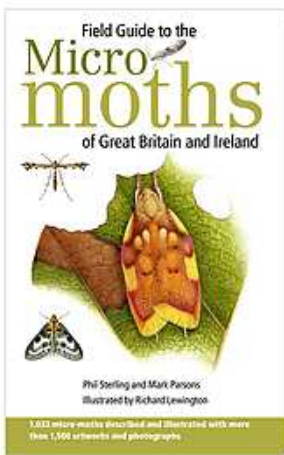
apparently inhospitable for these rare bats. This includes encouraging the right sort of cattle grazing – low stock densities out for as long as possible, to get ideal dung for the beetles that are among their favoured prey.

Very excitingly, using a well-placed harp trap, Fiona has discovered a small colony of the very rare grey long-eared bats, near Musbury in east Devon. Like the much commoner brown long-eared bat this is a whispering species, its soft echo-location calls being designed for gleaning insects from foliage. Moths make up 65% of the prey of brown long eareds, and 70-80% of these are noctuids. There may be difference in prey preferences between the two species with the brown including the Square-spot Rustic among its favourite menu items and the grey Dark Arches. Both bats like swift moths as well as our 'friend' the Large Yellow Underwing.

The barbastelle is another rare bat found in East Devon. Looking like gremlins, these woodland bats are also moth specialists. They are very quiet too, allowing them to hear moths before the moths hear them and take evasive action. Guess what their favoured food appears to be – yes, the Large Yellow Underwing! Some discussion about this followed, about whether this is a real preference, or is it just that yellow wings are very conspicuous under feeding perches?

Fiona finished her talk by telling us about two research projects she is involved with. The first is investigating the impacts of wind turbines on bats, and for this she uses ex-police sniffer dogs to find casualties under the blades. They are much better at this than humans, not least because they have a 24 hour work ethic! Emerging results suggest that single turbines may have just as much impact as multiple turbines. The second project is exploring the impact of light pollution on a range of animals, but especially bats and their prey. It seems that some of our rarer bats, including horseshoes and woodland species like the barbastelle, are particularly sensitive to light, emerging later in the evening in illuminated sites. Different types of lighting have different peaks in the UV spectrum, offering a possible easy win to improve the situation.

Rob Wolton



NEW Field Guide to the Micro-moths of Great Britain and Ireland

This exciting new publication, due at the end of May, is likely to revolutionise the recording of micro-moths. Written by a team of micro-moth experts led by Phil Sterling and Mark Parsons, with fantastic illustrations of moths in their natural resting positions by Richard Lewington, it covers over 1000 species.

British Wildlife, the publishers, are running special pre-publication offer (softback is £26 instead of £29.95) see www.britishwildlife.com or order on 01747835522.

Mothing in winter 3

Continuing the theme from the last newsletter, this and the next item show what can be found by looking for larvae during the winter. *Oecophora bractella* (Oecophoridae) is a stunning species that looks far too colourful to be British. It used to be considered rare but, this year, a review of the status of all British Microlepidoptera by Butterfly Conservation has downgraded it from pRDB3 (occurs in 11 – 15 10km squares) to Nationally Notable A (occurs in 16 – 30 10km squares). In Devon it is only known from the Dart Valley area, where it was first found in 1985, and Hembury Woods. It is an inhabitant of ancient and large woodlands.

Like several species of Oecophoridae, the larva feeds under the bark of dead wood, usually that of deciduous trees but it also occurs on conifers. The literature does not give beech but on 5th January this year we found several larvae under the bark of horizontally stacked beech logs at Hembury Woods. The larva of the much more common *Esperia sulphurella* (Oecophoridae) is very similar and feeds in the same way, but our tentative identification was confirmed when moths emerged.

The images accompanying this note can also be viewed on www.ukmoths.org.uk

Stella Beavan & Bob Heckford



Oecophora bractella larva (above) and adult moth (right) (Bob Heckford)

Nothing in winter 4

In mid-January I found a larva feeding within the decaying old stem of Oxeye Daisy at Gull Cove on the south Devon coast. In mid-March *Dichrorampha senectana* (Tortricidae) emerged.

Unlike *Oecophora bractella* (article above), its fortunes seemed to have declined: Butterfly Conservation has upgraded its status from Notable (not defined) to pRDB2 (occurs in 6 – 10 10km squares). In the British Isles it is only known from England, Wales and the Isle of Man, with a distinct western, usually coastal, distribution. There are no records from north Devon, but the species can be locally common on parts of the south Devon coast.

Dichrorampha species are often difficult to identify but *D. senectana* is the only British species that has two or three short black longitudinal dashes on the forewing below the grey streaks that reach the upper edge of the forewing.

The image accompanying this note can also be viewed on www.UKMoths.org.uk
Bob Heckford



Dichrorampha senectana (Bob Heckford)

Forthcoming events

Saturday 9th June 2012, Whiddon Deer Park (full details given in the Annual Report). Meet at 21.15 at SX723889 Please phone Paul Butter (07876524184), in advance, if the weather conditions appear unfavourable.

Saturday 23 June 2012 Hobby Drive, Clovelly (full details given in the Annual Report). **Moth Night 2012.** Meet at 21.00 by the black gates at SS316249. Please phone Rob Wolton (01837 810416), in advance, if the weather conditions appear unfavourable.

**** Moth Night 2012 ****

Just a reminder that this year Moth Night 2012 (the new name for National Moth Night) takes place over three days and nights from Thursday 21st June to Saturday 23rd June. The theme is the moths of brownfield sites but, as ever, you can make what you like of the event – why not run your moth trap somewhere new (brownfield site or otherwise) or invite some friends out for their first experience of moth trapping. More info at www.mothnight.info

Jubilate D.M.G.

For I will consider the Devon Moth Group.

For fourthly amongst its members are those who are knowledgeable thereof.

For it was talked about by three people.

For fifthly it can determine the proper species of those that are difficult to identify, by looking into the intimate details of the insect.

For it was inaugurated at a meeting in January 1997, and has since gone from strength to strength.

For it has been in existence for fifteen years.

For sixthly it has spread beyond this and now engages the wider public.

For it has now come in from the cold.

For seventhly its newsletters are a wonder to behold.

For it is no longer considered a pariah amongst other groups.

For eighthly its Annual Report is a veritable mine of information.

For it is open to all comers that they be interested.

For ninthly its events are pleasurable and informative to the people that attend them.

For the number of its members is approaching its second hundred.

For tenthly its winter meetings are good and its talks excellent, if occasionally over long.

For its Committee is the servant of its members and works tirelessly in that direction.

For it is not outclassed in this region by any other group interested in moths.

For it is now turned to practical matters.

For this it performs in ten degrees.

ANON.

For first it is committed to extend knowledge of moths in Devon.

With acknowledgements to
Christopher Smart,
1722-1771,
and Jeffry.

For secondly it has done excellent work in this way and rediscovered forgotten species.

For thirdly it is delving into the intricacies of the micro-lepidoptera.