



# DEVON MOTH GROUP

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Although it has definitely not been a golden summer for moths, there is plenty to report and there's still an outside chance of immigrant arrivals this autumn. Indeed there have been a number of very exciting immigrant moths caught over the past month or so. Best of the bunch were *Ethmia quadrillella*, *Diploseustis perieresalis* and *Eublemma purpurina* Beautiful Marbled, but there were also several *Agrius convolvuli* Convolvulus Hawk-moth as well as more common species such as *Autographa gamma* Silver Y and *Nomophila noctuella*.

*Ethmia quadrillella* is a smart-looking micro-moth in the family Elachistidae (formerly family Ethmiidae), and one was recorded by Peter Vernon at Colyford on 17.8.2012 - a new county record for Devon. This moth is a scarce UK resident, found mainly in wetland habitats in eastern England. However, it is also known as an occasional migrant or wanderer, so the Devon individual is suspected to have travelled from eastern England or Continental Europe.

The single *Diploseustis perieresalis* was found close to a garden moth trap by Andrew Cunningham in Tiverton (2.9.2012). It is thought to be only the 17th ever record for Britain, the second ever for Devon and is a new species for North Devon (VC4). This pyralid moth is found widely across eastern Asia, Australia and New Zealand, where the larvae are thought to feed on rushes. The first British sighting was in 2001 and the only previous Devon record was from Exeter, when Graham and Jean Jarvis found one in garden trap in 2007.

Mike Braid caught the stunning Beautiful Marbled shown below near Chittlehampton in VC4 on 23.8.2012. This rare immigrant was first recorded in Britain in 2001 and the only previous Devon record was in 2006.

Happy mothing!  
Richard Fox



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

**[www.devonmoths.org.uk](http://www.devonmoths.org.uk)**

## Field Meeting Reports

### Dartmeet, 14.7.2012

The rain stopped! The meeting was a success! Jointly organised by Devon Moth Group, Dartmoor Preservation Association and the Devon Wildlife Trust, over 30 people assembled in the car park close to the confluence of the West Dart and East Dart. The original plan was to trap down river on the DWT reserve, but the intervening ground was partly flooded so we searched for drier ground close to hand. Spotting a group of aspen, a rare tree in the National Park and one famed for its specialist moth fauna, Barry Henwood set his three traps close to these, Richard Fox put a couple out on the other side of the road and I put mine beside the river by the car park. I'd forgotten about the risk of midges and was slapping furiously before some kind person gave me a home-made concoction that worked very well, although what others thought of the highly perfumed scent I know not. Caddis flies and mayflies arrived early in good numbers, but the moths held off until it was really dark.



Small Elephant Hawk-moth  
(Patrick Clement)

With clear skies the temperature fell and numbers of both individuals and species were low, but enough arrived to keep us happily occupied and to enthrall newcomers. A Small Elephant Hawk-moth *Deilephila porcellus* was our most spectacular capture, although those of us who remained to the end (about 1.30am) were rewarded with a Beautiful Carpet *Mesoleuca albicillata*, which lived up to its name. No aspen specialities were caught, although a Swallow Prominent *Pheosia tremula* larva was found feeding on the leaves. Being Dartmoor, it is worth mentioning two bracken feeding species which were recorded – Brown Silver-line *Petrophora chlorosata* and the micro-moth *Monochroa cytisella*.

In all, some 60 species were recorded, adding valuable data for distribution maps, but the main success was the chance to introduce so many people, young and old, to the wonderful world of moths.  
Rob Wolton

### Hittisleigh Woods, 24.8.2012

This is a fine ancient woodland site in the heart of Devon, with good access, and one which the Moth Group has visited before, although some years ago. This time we were a fairly small band, the dubious weather no doubt putting many off. Our host, John Milverton, led the way down to the trapping site where Barry Henwood and I each set out three traps and John a seventh.

Matt Prince found the first moths while it was still just light enough to see – two rather attractive micros, *Caloptilia elongella* whose larvae feeds on alder leaves, and *Argyresthia goedartella* which feeds on both alder and birch catkins. At this stage the weather looked very promising, cloudy but warm, with a half moon occasionally showing itself. We started up the generators, and began our rounds. Moths started to arrive – and the first rain drops! Off went the MV bulbs, with just an actinic left running, and we retired to a tepee. Yes, a tepee! Surely a first for a moth group event! Complete with beds on which to sit, John has put up this tepee for more adventurous guests to the weddings which are held up near his farmhouse.

The rain soon eased off, and the bulbs once more shone brightly. One of the early moths to arrive was a rather worn Svensson's Copper Underwing *Amphipyra berbera*, to be followed not long afterwards by a fresh Copper Underwing *A. pyramidea* so we were able to compare the subtle differences in hindwing colour. A late Swallow-tailed Moth *Ourapteryx sambucaria* was good to see, along with other attractive species such as Black Arches *Lymantria monacha* and the well-named Antler Moth *Cerapteryx graminis*.

About half past ten a gentle drizzle commenced – as it slowly strengthened we realised that the night's nothing would have to draw to a close. One last quick round and we headed back to the farmhouse, where John had set up a Robinson trap in the lee of a huge oak. This added the Chinese Character *Cilix glaucata*, a splendid bird dropping mimic, to the list. Overall, it was not a bad night at all – we recorded a total of 60 species, respectable for the time of the year. Perhaps the evening was most notable for its footmen, with four species of these lichen-eating moths recorded including the Scarce Footman *Eilema complana*, with its characteristically rolled wings. Our thanks to John for hosting this event on his superb farm.

Rob Wolton

### Ford Park Cemetery

On 7th September at Ford Park Cemetery I organised an event with the aim of introducing the public to the moths and bats that can be seen in the centre of a large city. Around 100 people came along, including many families with children, which was very encouraging. Three lights were run, and although with clear skies only 20 species were recorded, there was a great deal of interest from all who came, the children being particularly enthusiastic. The species that people seemed to enjoy the most were *Hepialus sylvina* Orange Swift, *Timandra comae* Blood-vein, *Colostyia pectinataria* Green Carpet and *Ennomos quercinaria* August Thorn. My thanks to all who helped on the night.

John Boon

### Change of Indoor meetings venue

Unfortunately, the Ley Arms in Kenn, our regular meeting place for indoor events, proved very unreliable last winter, with unexpected closures, changes of management etc. Therefore, we have made alternative arrangements for future events and these can be found in the Forthcoming events section at the end of this newsletter. We're sticking to the villages of Kenn/Kennford as these are convenient for many members and very close to the A38, but please note the new venues.

### Sightings from south-west Devon

DMG member Phil Barden has been out and about trapping moths in the far south-west of Devon and turning up quite a few nice moths with his Skinner 15W actinic trap. These have included local species such as *Archanara dissoluta* Brown-veined Wainscot, of which there have been only eight Devon records in the past five years, and *Alcis jubata* Dotted Carpet, both found in the Tamar Valley and *Mythimna putrescens* Devonshire Wainscot and *Agrotis trux* Crescent Dart at Noss Mayo. A trap near the cliff edge south of Noss Mayo produced 58 Crescent Dart on 21.7.2012 and also a *Agrius convolvuli* Convolvulus Hawk Moth on 18.8.2012. Thanks to Phil for letting us know about these sightings.

Richard Fox



Convolvulus Hawk-moth (left) and Brown-veined Wainscot (right) (Phil Barden)

## The Burnished Brasses – an update with regard to *stenochrysis*

Rumours abound, so it seems, and all sorts of words are being put into the mouths of others, including mine, so I think it is a good idea to clarify the situation with regard to *stenochrysis*. Here is my take on the situation.

First, there can be no doubt that *Diachrysia chrysitis* (the Burnished Brass) and *Diachrysia stenochrysis* are two valid, separate species. The issue is whether or not one or both occur in Britain. In very over-simplistic terms, *chrysitis* is a West Palaearctic moth that has expanded eastwards and *stenochrysis* is an East Palaearctic moth that has extended westwards. They have certainly now overlapped in Continental Europe; the issue is whether or not *stenochrysis* has yet reached Britain.

In appearance, *stenochrysis* has the two vertical brassy bands on the forewing joined (the “H-shape” species) as opposed to *chrysitis* which typically has the two bands separated. **HOWEVER**, form *tutti* of *chrysitis* also has the H-shape; theory is that the cross-bar of the H needs to be at least 3 millimetres wide for it to be *stenochrysis*.

The issue seems to focus on whether or not this is a reliable character. My review paper (Plant, C. W., 2010. *Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation* **122**: 128 – 136) did not, I repeat **NOT**, claim *stenochrysis* as a British species. I merely reviewed the published evidence in chronological order.

The world authority on plusiids is László Ronkay at the Hungarian Natural History Museum in Budapest – the driving force behind *Noctuidae Europaeae*. A couple of years ago, Balázs Benedek, a friend of mine who until recently worked with Dr Ronkay at the museum and who is also an acknowledged expert on Palaearctic Noctuidae, visited me in Bishops Stortford. Upon arrival, he immediately (literally!) proceeded to work through my collection, drawer by drawer, hoping to embarrass me with any errors he could spot (he did spot one – an odd non-British *Lacanobia* – but that is another story). I had already sorted my own Burnished Brass material, both British and European, into 4 groups: “*chrysitis*”, “*chrysitis* f. *tutti*”, “*stenochrysis*” and “no idea”. Balázs made two or three changes involving removing just a few from the “*stenochrysis*” group into the “*tutti*” group, but otherwise agreed with my VISUAL assessment. This left me convinced that (1) I vaguely knew what I was doing and (2) we had *stenochrysis* in Britain.

Meanwhile, I have been experimenting with synthetic pheromones (P1: (Z)-5-decenyl acetate and P2: (Z)-7-decenyl acetate) provided by Nils Ryrholm at the University of Gävle in Sweden. To cut short a very long story, the *stenochrysis* pheromone failed to attract ANY moths whilst the *chrysitis* pheromone attracted typical *chrysitis* f. *tutti* examples and a few that might fit the bill for *stenochrysis*. Shot down in flames! Perhaps the British *stenochrysis* are just very well-developed form *tutti*?

Enter Shaun Dowman. Shaun had access to funding at the time, always useful, and so we started to work together with a view to sorting out the issue and publishing our results. We were able to send some of the presumed *stenochrysis*, that both myself and Balázs agreed were *stenochrysis*, for DNA examination (determining the base-pair sequence on the CO1 fragment of the mitochondrial DNA; this level of sequencing provides valid separation of species; the results of the entire project are in the public domain on the BOLD project web site). We were surprised when the results very firmly placed our *stenochrysis* samples as *chrysitis*!!!

As a consequence of all the above, Shaun Dowman and myself were about to publish the suggestion that there are not yet any



Burnished Brass moths – but which species? (Dave Green)

*stenochrysis* in Britain. Enter Sean Clancy's new book *Moths of Great Britain and Ireland: A Field Guide to All the Macromoths*, which claims *stenochrysis* as British on the basis of three specimens (two from Kent and one from Inverness-shire) named by examination of genitalia by no less than László Ronkay.

Sean Clancy and I discussed this potential problem recently on the telephone and agreed that it would be a good idea if these three specimens could be also sent for DNA analysis as confirmation. So that is the current situation. These three specimens collected by Sean are the only alleged British examples of *stenochrysis* to date, but I for one am not at all happy at the moment that they are correct.

I hope this clarifies the situation. As far as recording is concerned I think it is still premature to report *stenochrysis*.  
Colin Plant, County Moth Recorder for Hertfordshire

### Welcome to New Members

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### Forthcoming events

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2012, indoor meeting in the Exminster Suite at the Exeter Court Hotel, Kennford, EX6 7UX (see [www.exetercourthotel.co.uk](http://www.exetercourthotel.co.uk) for directions) 19.30 for 20.00 start. Illustrated talk by Dr Malcolm Scoble of the Natural History Museum in London, entitled *Moth-like butterflies from the Neotropics*.

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2012, Devon Moth Group Christmas Dinner, Highwayman's Haunt, Chudleigh. Details and menu in next newsletter. Likely costs will be in region of £15 for two courses, £19 for three courses.

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2013, National Moth Recorders' Meeting at Birmingham & Midland Institute, Birmingham.

Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013, AGM and indoor meeting at the Kenn Centre, Kenn ([www.kenncentre.co.uk](http://www.kenncentre.co.uk)).



Lunar Hornet Moth at Trews Weir,  
Exeter in 2012 (Julie Morris)