



DEVON MOTH GROUP

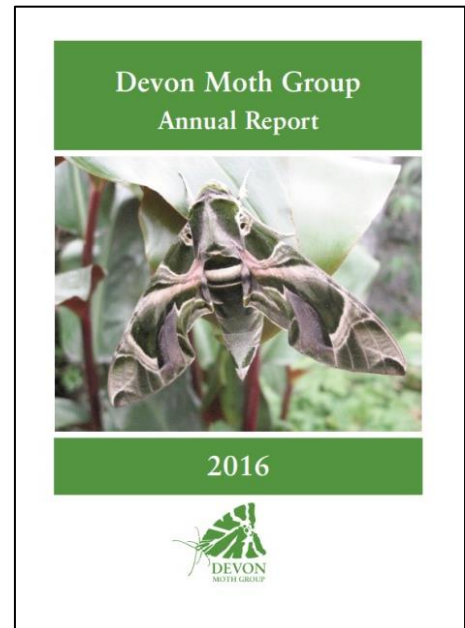
Please reply to: The Secretary/Treasurer
Roy McCormick
36 Paradise Road
TEIGNMOUTH
Devon TQ14 8NR
Telephone: 01626 779543
181525131225.devmg@talktalk.net

NEWSLETTER 2017 ISSUE 2 (April)

The 2016 Annual Report is out, so if you have paid your Devon Moth Group subs for the current year then you should have received your copy. An amazing 54,000 moth records for 2016 have gone into the report, contributed by 152 different people, and, on behalf of the Group and the report's authors, I'd like to thank all of them. The greatest thanks, though, must be reserved for Barry Henwood, the County Moth Recorder, who, ably assisted by Bob Heckford, Phil Barden, Darryl Rush and Phil Dean, has collated and verified this impressive set of records and incorporated it into the Devon Moth Group database. The report details records of six species new to Devon in 2016 (five micro-moths and one macro), as well as 11 new Vice-county records (nine micros and two macros) and numerous other interesting sightings.

The new season is well underway now, despite some cold nights of late, so fingers crossed for some excellent moth trapping nights and fruitful daytime searches for larvae and day-fliers over the months to come.

Richard Fox



Annual General Meeting on Thursday 26th January 2017

The AGM was held once again at the Kenn Centre, Kennford and attended by 24 members. Apologies were received from Dave Allen, Paul and Toni Lister, Malcolm Scoble, George Williams, Rob Wolton and Oliver Woodland. The minutes of the previous AGM were approved unanimously, as were the annual accounts that were presented by Roy McCormick. The annual election of Council members (with the exception of Chairman) followed. There being no other candidates for Council posts, the current incumbents (Nicola Bacciu, Phil Dean, Barry Henwood, Roy McCormick and Rob Wolton) were nominated en bloc and elected unanimously.

Chairman's AGM Report

It's always difficult to assess the fortunes of Devon's moths in any given year, but my own anecdotal observations certainly suggested that 2016 wasn't one to remember. In my garden, both the annual species list and total abundance of many moths were down on 2015 and well down on 2014. Numbers of common species such as Buff Arches, Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing and Setaceous Hebrew Character, and plenty of others, were well below average. It wasn't all doom and gloom though, with excellent numbers of Red-green Carpet and Square-spot Rustic in the garden and, of course, the amazing influx of *Plutella xylostella*.

Despite the generally low numbers of moths, 2016 produced some exciting sightings including immigrants such as Dusky Hook-tip by Roy McCormick, *Catoptria verellus* by Barry Henwood, and several Jersey Mocha (recorded on separate occasions by Phil Barden, Dave Grundy and Mark Marshall). As usual there were a number of new county records, such as *Stathmopoda pedella* (caught by Ken Bibbings), *Opogona omoscopia* (by Roy McCormick and Paul Bowyer) and adventive species *Maruca vitrata*, *Prays citri* (both by Bob Heckford) and *P. oleae* (by Stella Beavan).

Members of Council: Richard Fox (Chairman) Nicola Bacciu (Membership & Distribution) Roy McCormick (Secretary/Treasurer)
Barry Henwood (Recorder), Rob Wolton (Conservation), Phil Dean (Ordinary member)

www.devonmoths.org.uk

Another highlight of 2016 was the effort put in by several members in targeting severely under-recorded parts of Devon to ensure better coverage of macro-moth species for the forthcoming national atlas. Thanks to Rob Wolton, Phil Barden, Tony Holwill, Kim Leaver and Andrew Cunningham for their efforts.

On the conservation front, Rob Wolton, Barry Henwood and Bob Heckford, led Devon Moth Group's input into a review of scarce and threatened species for the State of Devon report and contributed to the development of criteria to select County Wildlife Sites for invertebrates.

And finally, Council was delighted when member Rob Price responded to our appeal for help publicising Devon Moth Group. Rob has brought lots of good ideas and plenty of enthusiasm to take them forward, which will be a great benefit to the Group.

Richard Fox

Secretary's AGM Report

The Group is still gaining new Members and when this report was produced on 24.1.2017, we had 129 members; we have 17 members who do not live in the county, with a high proportion of these living in Cornwall. We have two Honorary Members, and we still have two who get free Membership, with one of these our Accountant. We now only have 17 Members who get their Newsletters by post with the remaining 112 receiving it by e-mail, which makes a considerable saving on our expenses. Fortunately we now get our hard copy Newsletters printed for free and we have Devon Biodiversity Records Centre to thank for this valuable service. However, with the cost of second class stamps @ 55p each, rising every year, it is still costing us around £10 for each "snail mail" distribution of our Newsletter and we publish around six of these a year.

Despite a few reminders, including the form at the end of our latest Newsletter recently, may I remind you all again that our subscriptions are now £8 for single Members and £12 for a family; this was passed at our indoor meeting on 25.10.2013. Could you please check your Standing Orders as I am still getting people paying £9, with a couple at £6.

We held four Indoor Meetings at the Kenn Centre in Kennford at £25 a meeting (lucky this charge has not risen over the years) with most of these attracting around 35 + Members. Our Christmas event at 'The Welcome Stranger, Liverton', was attended by a similar number as last year with 17 people coming. We had eight Field Meetings booked and these were led by Paul Butter, Barry Henwood, Kim Leaver and Dave Gibbon; as far as I know there was one cancellation, which was Barry's event at Andrews Wood.

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 will be on a Saturday and will continue to be held at 'The Welcome Stranger, Liverton'. Our Annual Report will continue to be issued at the Spring Meeting.

Your Council held four meetings during 2016 with the main topics of discussion: trying to find speakers for our Indoor Meetings, arranging Field Meetings and discussions about other matters relevant to the smooth running of the Group, and checking on the validity of records in the database, with particular emphasis on the micro records. DMG still remains a prominent partner in Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) activities along with Butterfly Conservation (BC) and the National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS).

I reiterate my thanks to the people doing the work I used to be involved in, with Secretarial tasks being taken care of by others; I am pleased to be relieved of some of this work, and hope this state of affairs will continue. Most of these tasks are being done by Richard Fox and Rob Wolton. Thank you Richard and Rob.

Roy McCormick

Treasurer's AGM Report

This year's income is just over £300 more than in 2015 – due mainly to Mrs Slatter's donation of her late husband, Fred's equipment to us, which we sold for £225. Expenditure decreased from £1891 in 2015 to £1481 in 2016, a reduction of £410. This is mainly due to two factors; the reduction in the newsletter costs (mentioned in the Secretary's report), and secondly the fact that last year we incurred costs of £238 for moth trap repairs, which did not happen in 2016. I did cancel the BENHS Corporate Membership subscription of £19, but it is still showing, however I will be chasing this up to get the money returned.

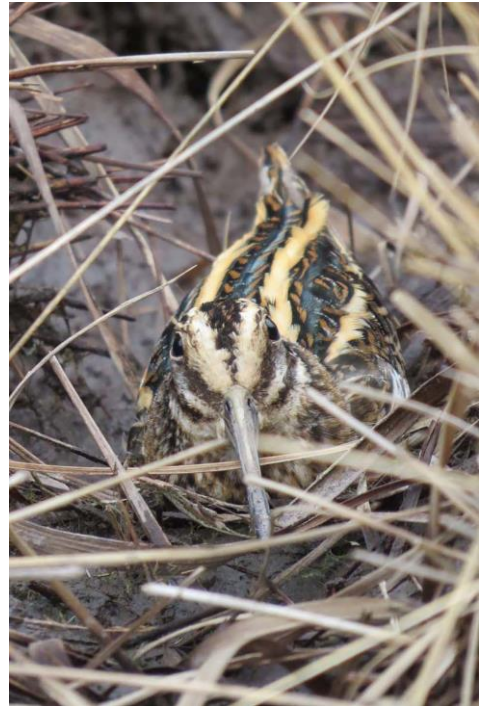
I am therefore pleased to report that we had a net surplus for 2016 of £396 against a deficit of £320 in 2015. This

results in our current assets increasing from £2881 to £3277, on the 'Balance sheet'. My expenses showing as 'Current Liabilities' of £29 on this sheet have now been taken.

My thanks go to our Auditor, Mr Tony Pickles, who does this for free, but he gets some return in an Honorarium most years and in the expenditure this is shown by £20 in 2015 and £15 in 2016.
Roy McCormick

AGM illustrated talk: *Wildlife highlights 2016* by John Walters

John's talents as wildlife observer extraordinaire, photographer, artist and film-maker delighted the audience after the mundanities of the AGM. He described close encounters with Golden Plover, Jack Snipe, Chimney Potter Wasps and Nightjar chicks that had us green with envy. John's skills as a naturalist were exemplified when he found a new site for one of the UK's rarest spiders, the Horrid Ground-weaver, under a bit of fly-tipped carpet on his first day of looking, and by knowing that the dry autumn followed by the heavy rain of Storm Angus would produce the perfect conditions for witnessing Salmon running up the River Teign.



Horrid Ground-weaver (left) and Jack Snipe (above)
(John Walters)

Persistence finally paid off for John in 2016 when, after many years of growing *Nicotiana* flowers in his Buckfastleigh garden, he succeeded in attracting *Convolvulus* Hawk-moth, and then topped it off by finding wild eggs of the same species on the coast at Thurlston and rearing through the fantastic larvae. In a rare failure, John amusingly recounted how he had spotted an excellent area of Rowan trees laden with berries on Dartmoor, an ideal lure for migrant thrushes in the autumn. However, when John returned in the hope of witnessing dramatic flocks of Fieldfare, Redwing and co., he found that the birds had, for once, beaten him to it and stripped the whole area bare and moved on!

Many thanks John for another excellent talk.
Richard Fox

Book a detector for the Devon Bat Survey

At our autumn indoor meeting, Ed Parr Ferris of Devon Wildlife Trust gave a presentation about the Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project. One element of the project is to improve knowledge of bat distributions across the county by enlisting volunteers to deploy bat detectors. This spring and summer, you can help with the Devon Bat Survey 2017! To take part you need to book and borrow a bat detector from one of 20 monitoring centres dotted around the county, and place it in a selected 1km grid square for three nights. All the bat echolocation calls recorded by the detector will be used to increase knowledge of how bats are using the Devon landscape, and what can be done to help them. Anyone can get involved in the survey – no experience is needed and full instructions are supplied. Once you have returned the detector, the results will be analysed and a report sent to you, so that you know what passed by your detector. Detectors can be booked now at www.devonbatproject.org/devon-bat-survey/.

More Prays

Avid readers of the Newsletter will recall that last year we found two adventive Microlepidoptera new to Devon: *Prays oleae* (Bernard, 1788) (Newsletter 2016, Issue 2: 2) and *Prays citri* (Millière, 1873) (Newsletter 2017, Issue 1: 2–3). These were found at different Garden Centres. The larva of the former feeds on various parts of olives depending on the generation; the larva of the latter feeds on flowers and small fruits, and sometimes spun leaves, of various *Citrus* species.

In mid-April we found evidence of both species at one Garden Centre and of *Prays citri* only at another Garden Centre, both in South Devon. Where we found both species we only noted a few vacated mines and one pupa, but no larvae, of *P. oleae*. But there were several, if not many, larvae and pupae of *P. citri* and one adult was observed. The host plants were *Citrus mitis* (Panama Orange) and *Citrus sinensis* (Sweet Orange) and all these plants' stated origin was Asia. Moths of both species resulted in due course.

Unfortunately, although an account of the biology of *P. oleae*, with an illustration of the larva, has been published in the British literature, no such account has yet been published on the early stages of *P. citri* found in Britain. This might be because the only records of such, so far, may have been made by us. There are various publications, some with illustrations, about the biology in mainland Europe and Asia. Those that we have traced seem to suggest that the larva is either pale yellowish or pale greenish with a pale head and prothoracic plate. The larvae we have found are far more variable than that, both as individuals and within instars. We have certainly found larvae that are pale yellowish with a pale head and prothoracic plate, but we have also found larvae with dark, reddish brown bodies and with a light brown head and black prothoracic plate as well as larvae having the body colour of varying shades of grey (but not as many as 50). We illustrate two larvae below, one having a pale yellowish body and the other having one that is dark, reddish brown. Unfortunately, once their feeding place within the *Citrus* flowers is exposed, the larvae are very active and so difficult to photograph satisfactorily.

Because we have recently found the larvae and pupae of *P. citri* to be relatively common at two Garden Centres it is difficult to believe that others have not been imported with *Citrus* plants at other such places.

Stella Beavan and Bob Heckford



Prays citri, yellowish larva (left) and reddish brown larva (right)
(Bob Heckford)

Indoor Meeting Report: Spring Meeting, the Kenn Centre, Kennford, 30.3.2017

The Natural History of Moths by Barry Henwood, County Moth Recorder for Devon.

Barry gave a fascinating tour of the wonderful world of moths, drawing interesting and, in the case of the Psychid *Acanthopsyche atra*, frankly bizarre examples of their lives and ecology. Much of the focus was on larvae, stressing the incredible variety of development, pattern, colour and behaviour. The unusual non-feeding larval instars of burnet moths and True Lover's Knot were highlighted, as was the extraordinary 12 instar development of Dingy Footman. The amazing larval behaviour of the White Admiral was described with some excellent photos illustrating the construction of the pier from the end of the leaf mid-rib and the use of the portable latrine! Avoiding being eaten was a key theme, with many examples illustrating the subtleties of camouflage (e.g. Scarce Silver-lines in which the colours different larval instars vary to match the changing seasons and Large Emerald in which algae grow on the overwintering larvae improving camouflage) and mimicry (e.g. Alder Moth larvae which initially

mimic bird droppings but later adopt dramatic warning colouration, and a selection of tropical and British larvae that may be snake mimics). It was an entertaining and very informative talk, much appreciated by the audience.
Richard Fox

Two tricky species pairs

***Dysstroma truncata*, Common Marbled Carpet and *D. citrata*, Dark Marbled Carpet**

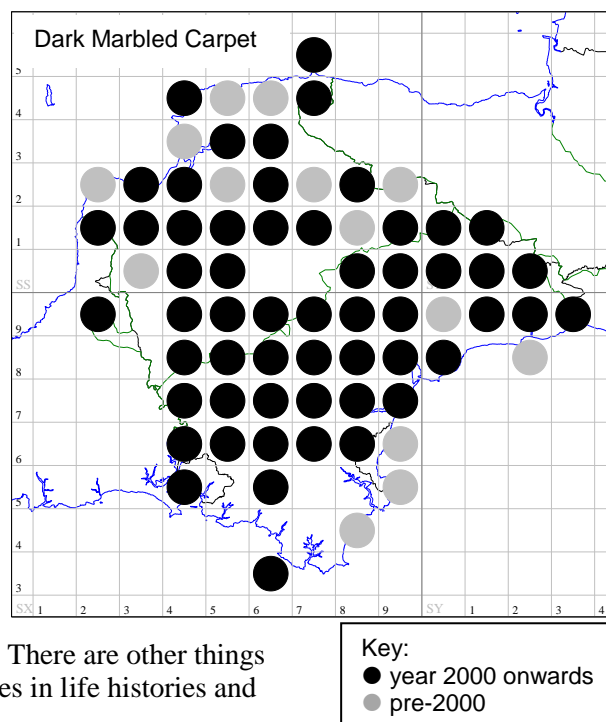
In this note I am going to refer to them simply as *truncata* and *citrata*. As you can see from the Devon distribution map of *citrata* (right), both species appear to be widely distributed in Devon. It is possible that this is correct. However, I have personally only ever seen *citrata* on and around Dartmoor and Exmoor. That does not necessarily mean that records from further afield are wrong, but it does make me wonder. So, the questions are:

- Does *citrata* breed away from the moors?
- Does *citrata* sometimes wander away from the moors?

I have had the moorland moths *Papestra biren*, Glaucous Shears, *Epirrhoe tristata*, Small Argent & Sable and *Antitype chi*, Grey Chi on rare occasions in my trap in Abbotskerswell near Newton Abbot but never *citrata*.

Differences between the two species are described in Bernard Skinner's *Colour Identification Guide to Moths of the British Isles* and Paul Waring and Martin Townsend's *Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland*.

The latter is particularly good and describes more differences. There are other things to consider in addition to their appearance. There are differences in life histories and phenology, which are also described in the textbooks.



So, take care when recording *citrata* and please take photos of any you record – both upperside and underside please. It would be very interesting to be able to verify a record away from the moors.

***Furcula furcula*, Sallow Kitten and *F. bifida* Poplar Kitten**

In Devon *furcula* is common, whereas *bifida* is rare. They are very similar and so I take great care before accepting a record of *bifida*. Although records submitted as *bifida* are often supported by photos, they invariably only show the forewings. It has not always been possible for me to be certain from these. Both textbooks quoted above illustrate the forewings and describe the differences between them. Only Skinner shows the hindwings, but neither describes differences in the hindwings. Photos of set moths are shown below. The hindwing markings of *bifida* are confined to the wing margin and a discal spot, whereas *furcula* in addition has an obvious grey band across the wing.

Although rare in Devon, genuine records of *bifida* are widely scattered and seem to be increasing. So that we can get a true picture of its distribution, if you think you have one please make sure you take a photo of the hindwing in addition to the moth at rest.

Barry Henwood



Moth traps for loan

A reminder that Devon Moth Group owns several moth traps that are available for short or long-term loan to members keen to start trapping and recording. We have Skinner-type traps with MV or actinic light that run off the mains available for long-term loan and a lightweight Heath trap and battery that is ideal for one-off use in remote areas, where it is impractical to lug a generator. If you would like to borrow any of these traps, please contact Barry Henwood (01626 364080 or barry.henwood@btinternet.com).

Help with moth trapping at Goren Festival of Meadows

Kim Leaver is running moth traps as part of a festival at Goran wildflower farm near Honiton (<http://goren.co.uk/festival/>) on 30 July and will be showing moths caught to the public. If any other members would like to join him they would be very welcome. Please contact Kim on k.leaver57@gmail.com or 07889 978223.

Forthcoming events (see www.devonmoths.org.uk for more details)

Saturday 20 May 2017 Blackbury Camp, near Sidmouth. Meet at 21.00 at the English Heritage car park at SY188924. Please phone Kim Leaver (07889 978223) in advance, if the weather appears unfavourable.

Saturday 24 June 2017 Trinity Hill LNR, near Axminster. Meet at 21.30 at the car park at SY307959. Please phone Kim Leaver (07889 978223) in advance, if the weather appears unfavourable.

Saturday 8 & Sunday 9 July 2017 Dunsdon, nr Holsworthy. Meet at reserve entrance at SS302080 (EX22 7JW) at 21:00 Saturday for moth trapping and/or 09:30 Sunday to see moths caught during the night and a butterfly walk. Limited overnight camping available but **must be booked in advance** with Steve Threlkeld sthrelkeld@devonwildlifetrust.org or 01288 331324.

Muslin Moth (Iain Leach)

