



DEVON MOTH GROUP

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What a difference a month makes! In the last newsletter, in June, I was rueing the long cold spring and the dearth of moths being reported not only in Devon but across the UK during the first half of 2013. Since then, we've had three weeks of heatwave; a proper summer, the like of which we haven't seen since 2006. And moth trapping has been transformed. July nights with temperatures barely dipping below 20°C have brought bumper catches of moths and some very memorable mothing experiences for recorders. Long may it continue!

Happy mothing!
Richard Fox

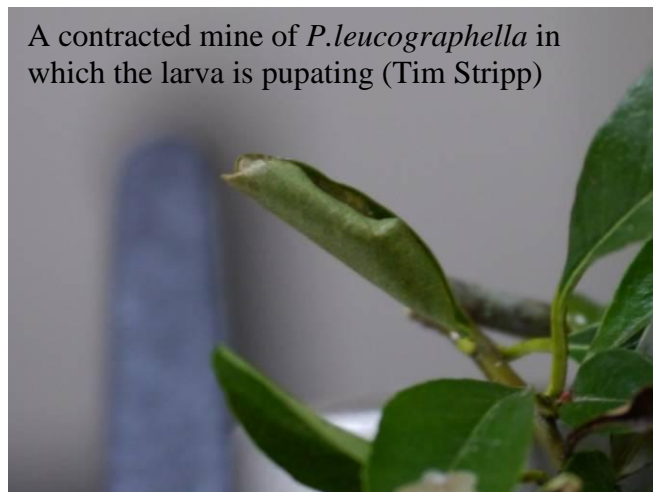
Rearing *Phyllonorycter leucographella* (Firethorn Leaf Miner)

In early June 2012 my Mum and I caught a very small but beautiful micro moth in our moth trap. After trawling through our books we eventually decided it was a specimen of *Phyllonorycter leucographella* (the Firethorn Leaf Miner), but knew that we would need to find its larval mines to make a formal identification. It wasn't until early 2013 that we realized, firstly, how abundant this species was on our *Pyracantha* and secondly, how easy it is to rear.

The mine of the moth is made by the larva eating away the second layer of a *Pyracantha* leaf. This means the first layer of the leaf makes a translucent sheet which protects the moth larva from a whole host of predators. *Pyracantha* is a shrub well-known because of its sharp, rufous thorns, the English name is Firethorn, hence the moth's common name. The sheet over the mine contracts over time, making the leaf look like a pod in which the larva pupates.



Mines of *P.leucographella* (Tim Stripp)



A contracted mine of *P.leucographella* in which the larva is pupating (Tim Stripp)

Rearing *Phyllonorycter leucographella* is very easy as we found when we had a go. I went up the garden at the start of April to see if there were any mines on the *Pyracantha* and, to my surprise, found that almost every leaf had a

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Rob Wolton, Conservation; Nicola Bacciu, Membership & Distribution; Barry Henwood, County Moth Recorder.**

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mine on it. Gleeful at my discovery, I cut some *Pyracantha* twigs and put the them in a plastic pot. About 7 weeks later, on the 24th of May, this beautiful specimen (image right) hatched showing the moth in all its splendid glory.

Tim Stripp



A night's moth recording at RMB Chivenor

The Royal Marines Base at Chivenor, just outside Braunton in north Devon, has, like many other military bases and training grounds, a conservation group. This largely consists of volunteers from the local community, including our own John Breeds. As a spur to renewed action, Devon Moth Group was approached by the Chivenor conservation group to carry out some moth recording, and so John, his wife Mary and I met their Environment Protection Officer Sian Flaherty and her boss Dave Mills on site early in May to assess the base's potential. Although it largely consists of an airfield with extensive areas of mown grass around the runways, at one end we were shown a few acres of disturbed ground with much bare soil, rough grassland, some small reed-fringed ponds and scattered scrub (image below). This looked promising for a night's trapping, although we decided that because of security arrangements it wouldn't though be suitable for a formal Devon Moth Group field event.



Location of moth traps (Rob Wolton)

John, Barry Henwood and I pencilled in 18 June for a night's trapping. By great good fortune, the night turned out to be a perfect one – warm, cloudy and still – rare indeed in recent summers. Sadly, though, Barry had to pull out because of a nasty recurring back problem. Sian met us in the evening and escorted us through the security fencing to the trapping site where, with her help, John and I set out 3 MV lights and 2 actinics. Filling the generator's tank up to the brim just as it got dark we left the site, hoping for the best.

Returning next morning, this time escorted by Dave, we returned to the traps. To my relief, the generator had clearly kept going throughout most if not all the night, and we could see the traps had moths in them. It was a perfect morning and as we worked away we were entertained by a Cetti's warbler singing close by!

It soon became apparent that we had a good haul, indeed a remarkable one for a year noted so far for its low catches and late start. A Cream-spot Tiger *Arctia villica* headed our list, shortly followed by Bordered Sallow *Pyrrhia umbra* – this was a moth I had not seen before although John was familiar with it - and one which is distinctly uncommon in Devon and rare in North Devon (VC4). In all, we had eight of them. Small China-mark *Cataclysta lemnata* was another new species for me and again one which for which there have been few previous records in North Devon: we had four.

Next and to our delight John identified a Reddish Light Arches *Apamea sublustris* – he had seen the species before in France. This is a very rare moth in Devon with just a handful of previous records, most a hundred years old. A wainscot had us puzzled, and later in the week I showed an individual to Barry and he identified it as Obscure Wainscot *Mythimna obsoleta*, another uncommon species in Devon and one which had not previously been recorded in VC4. We caught four of these. The final good moth was a gelechiid micro, *Metzneria metzneriella*, another new VC record. In all, we caught 63 species (with a strange pug yet to be identified). Among these were four species of hawk-moth – Poplar, Eyed, Elephant and Small Elephant.

It's clear that RMB Chivenor is important for moth conservation in the Devon context. Who knows what other specialities may be found with further trapping? Importantly, the rare and uncommon moths we found are all either associated with grassland or standing water, not with scrub. Bordered Sallow larvae feed on Rest-harrow, Reddish Light Arches probably on various grasses, *M. metzneriella* on Knapweed, Obscure Wainscot on Common Reed, and Small China-mark has aquatic larvae which feed on duckweeds. Consequently John and I were able to recommend to the conservation group that management should aim to retain areas of open, herb-rich grassland, as well as ponds and ditches with open standing water and fringing reeds. Rank grassland and invading scrub should

be kept in check. It is probable that maintenance of open, sparsely-vegetated, ground through regular disturbance will be important too, if not for moths then for other invertebrates since this is a scarce habitat used by large number of insects and so forth.

Rob Wolton

Field Meeting Reports

Ledge Wood, National Trust Parke, Bovey Tracey, 21.6.2013

The evening started a bit windy with rain promised around 22.00 so we had cloud cover and warm conditions for the duration of the night. We were ferried to the spot with our equipment by site manager, Fred Hutt, in his four-wheel drive vehicle; a hairy ride to say the least, but we finished up on a high spot on a woodland ride with Fred and Richard Fox going back to the car park to pick up the main party.

We finished up with 13 people, including myself, and we had 5 traps set out along this ride and these were started up soon after we were all assembled. The rain kept off and several rounds of the traps were done. The list built steadily with around 50 species by 22.30 with the best of these *Catarhoe rubidata* Ruddy Carpet, *Ancylis mitterbacheriana*, *Jodis lactearia* Little Emerald in brilliant condition, *Cyclophora punctaria* Maidens Blush, *Mesoleuca albicillata* Beautiful Carpet, *Plagodis dolabraria* Scorched Wing, *Cleorodes lichenaria* Brussels Lace, *Mimas tiliae* Lime Hawk-moth, *Stauropus fagi* Lobster Moth, *Craniophora ligustri* Coronet and *Autographa pulchrina* Beautiful Golden Y, another moth that got everybody's attention.



Ruddy Carpet (Chris Manley)

Trapping carried on with further species coming in. The rain was rattling on the trees above us but little wet was getting through and it was still warm, with the trees were keeping the worst of the wind from us. We carried on looking at the traps with more species making an appearance, and the assembled company had lots of pretty moths to look at keeping them interested until the early hours when we decided we had had enough with little else coming in. We finished up with 87 species with a couple of micro-moths left for me to take home and identify, with the best of the second half; *Schiffermuellerina grandis*, a really pretty micro whose larvae lives in dead wood, *Melanthia procellata* Pretty Chalk Carpet, *Lomographa bimaculata* White-pinion Spotted, *Anaplectoides prasina* Green Arches which wowed the crowd, *Acronicta alni* Alder Moth and *Hypena crassalis* Beautiful Snout, another stunning species. All in all a very good field meeting which everybody enjoyed. The final micro-moths were *Nematopogon metaxella* and *Pseudatemelia josephinae*, this one still to be confirmed making our total 89.

Roy McCormick

Saving *Infurcitinea albicomella*?

This micro-moth belongs to the family Tineidae, a family tarred through including clothes-moths amongst its members. Back in the early 20th Century *Infurcitinea albicomella* was known from four Vice-counties in the British Isles, but despite searches is now known from just one – VC3 (South Devon). Even here it was last recorded as long ago as 1924 - that is until Bob Heckford rediscovered it at Torquay on 21 July 1990. On the warm and humid evening of that day, Bob observed many adults flying in a tiny patch of sparsely-vegetated coastal slope at Daddyhole, a limestone headland on the northern side of Torquay.



Infurcitinea albicomella (Bob Heckford)

Returning to the site in April the following year, Bob set about trying to find out what the moth larvae were feeding on. He quickly discounted lichens, the suspected food plant, because there weren't any: instead by dint of careful searching he found larval tubes in the leaf litter under naturalised cotoneaster *Cotoneaster microphyllus* bushes

scattered across the site. These tubes were made from dead cotoneaster or holm oak *Quercus ilex* leaves spun together loosely with silk. Bob suspected that the larvae were feeding on general vegetable detritus on bare earth.

After failing to find the moth elsewhere in Torbay or at any of its former localities, Bob contacted the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, managers of Daddyhole, to let them know that it was the only remaining known site for the moth in the British Isles, stressing the critical importance of bare earth under cotoneaster bushes with a thin covering of leaf litter. He provided a map showing the precise location and received assurance that the habitat requirements of the moth would be taken into account in future management of the site.

You can imagine Bob's dismay when he returned to the site in July 2011 only to find that every single cotoneaster bush had been removed. The habitat for the moth had apparently been wiped out and he only found one adult flying. The only ray of hope was that he did succeed in finding a single individual at a site 1.5 km to the east, Thatcher Point. Here there is neither cotoneaster nor holm oak, suggesting that the moth is capable of surviving in the absence of these plants. In 2012, Bob was unable to find any adults at Daddyhole but he and Stella Beavan found two at Thatcher Point.

It was against this background, and in the hope that we might be able to keep this critically-endangered species on the British list, that I approached Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust earlier this year asking for a site meeting at Daddyhole. They agreed and Bob, Stella and I met Chris Lingard, the Trust's Countryside Manager, there on 17 June.



Chris explained to us that the cotoneaster and other non-native plant species had been removed from the site to assist with the conservation of the extraordinary limestone flora for which Torbay is nationally important, including rarities like the White Rock-rose *Helianthemum apenninum*. He expressed his regret that the requirements of the moths were overlooked, recognising that its conservation is more critical than that of any the plants involved.

What could be done, we questioned, to restore the habitat for the moth in the hope that it is hanging on either at Daddyhole or nearby?

Chris Lingard (left) and Bob Heckford (right)
at Daddyhole (Rob Wolton)

We were pleased to see that cotoneaster is regenerating here and there so that in a few years' time conditions may once again be right. Chris readily agreed that there would be no further eradication of non-native plants on the site without first consulting Devon Moth Group. He also offered to clear Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber* from the site. This plant, attractive though it may be, is another alien species and one which is rapidly encroaching onto the open bare earth left by the dead cotoneaster, threatening not just the regeneration of the cotoneaster but also the special limestone plants for which the work was done in the first place. Chris hopes to pull the valerian early this July, and has also offered to arrange a meeting between Bob and the Trust's consultant botanist, Andy Byfield.

Let us hope that together Devon Moth Group and the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust will save this moth from extinction as a British species. Our thanks must go to Bob for his extraordinary field craft in re-discovering the moth and his efforts to ensure its continued survival as a native species.

Rob Wolton

Parapoynx diminutalis – an adventive China-mark moth new to Devon

A visit to a garden centre near Ivybridge on 9 July 2013 produced an adventive Pyralid moth not previously recorded in Devon: *Parapoynx diminutalis*. This is in the China-mark group, whose larvae are aquatic. The Garden Centre has six, not very large, tanks of aquatic plants, and the moth was resting on the side of one of these. Also floating on the surface of that tank were parts of another moth, possibly of the same species, as well as one live *Anthophila fabriciana*. This was rescued and seemed no worse for its unsuccessful attempt at swimming.

As can be seen from the photograph (below right), the moth is in less than pristine condition. This rather suggests that it might have emerged at least several days earlier, but if so it had not attempted to leave the confines of the tank. The species was first discovered in the British Isles in 1977 at an aquatic nursery at Enfield, Middlesex by David Agassiz (1978, Five introduced species, including one new to science, of China Mark Moths (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) new to Britain. *Entomologist's Gazette* **29**: 117–127). His publication has a photograph of a moth in better condition.

Since then the species has been found in a few counties in England, always in association with imported aquatic plants, but it only survives in heated greenhouses, and now in a garden centre.

The larva feeds, often totally submerged, on various species of aquatic plants. The species is widespread across the Far East.

I am very grateful to David Agassiz for confirming my tentative determination.

Bob Heckford



Small Eggar caterpillars

The Small Eggar *Eriogaster lanestris* appears to be quite a scarce species in Devon. However, with a flight period in late winter, the adults, at least, are likely to be very under-recorded. Although we only receive a few records of this species each year, such sightings tend to be of larvae in the summer, when their nest are quite obvious in hedges. Two recent sightings have been received, both for VC3; one from near Ide, on the outskirts of Exeter by David and Sue Mentz (below, left) and the other by DMG member, Julie Morris at Upper Mounson, near Cheriton Bishop on the A30 (below, right).

Richard Fox



Welcome to New Members

Stan Stanbury, Toadmarsh Cottage, North Park, Tedburn St. Mary, EX6 6DW.
Telephone: 01647 61456. e-mail: toadmarsh@googlemail.com

Martin Wolinski, Hillgate Cottage, Kentisbeare, EX15 2DS.
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Forthcoming events

Moth Night 2013 (Thursday 8 August – Saturday 10 August)

All Devon Moth Group members can get involved in this annual, national event highlighting moths and moth recording and gathering sightings from the days and nights concerned. You can take part in whatever way you choose – it's a great opportunity to do something different e.g. record moths in a new location or with new people. There are two Group events to attend too (listed below). Whatever you do for Moth Night 2013, please submit all your moth sightings online at www.mothnight.info

Friday 9 August 2013, Decoy Woods, Newton Abbot (full details given in the Annual Report or on website). Meet at 20.45 at Decoy Country Park car park SX867702. Please phone Barry Henwood (01626 364080) in advance, if the weather conditions appear unfavourable.

Saturday 10 August 2013, Meeth Quarry, nr Hatherleigh (full details given in the Annual Report or on website). Meet at 20.00 on track to Devon Wildlife Trust Meeth Quarry reserve SS546079. Please phone Paul Butter (07807 680455) in advance, if the weather conditions appear unfavourable.

Friday 30 August 2013, Ford Park Cemetery, Plymouth (full details given in the Annual Report or on website). Meet at 19.30 at the cemetery visitor centre SX477559. Please phone John Boon (01752 786963 or 07811 243543) in advance, if the weather conditions appear unfavourable.



Mother Shipton seen in Mincinglake Valley Park, Exeter (Sam Stripp)



Dog's Tooth recorded on the Devon side of the Tamar Valley (Phil Barden)