



# DEVON MOTH GROUP

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## NEWSLETTER 2013 ISSUE 5 (September)

Conditions have remained pretty good since our last newsletter in July and I'm sure many people have had enjoyable moth recording nights and days. There have been reasonable numbers of many resident species and a scattering of immigrants, such as Vestal *Rhodometra sacraria* and *Palpita vitrealis*, although the latter part of this month is often the most exciting time of year for such visitors.

Regarding recording, your Council has decided not to seek to renew the blanket permission to access Forestry Commission and National Trust sites in the county that we previously held. It is much better for all concerned if members who want to run moth traps on such land make contact directly with the site managers or wardens, so that they are kept fully in the loop.

It won't be long now before the main part of the moth season draws to an end and members will start to gather their records together into computer spreadsheets or the MapMate recording software for passing to Barry Henwood, the County Recorder. We have several people in Devon Moth Group who have used MapMate quite extensively and who would be willing to organise some training for new users or those who might be considering its use. Please let me ([rfox@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:rfox@butterfly-conservation.org)) or Barry ([barry.henwood@btinternet.com](mailto:barry.henwood@btinternet.com)) know if you would be interested in such training.

Finally, many of you will have already heard the very sad news that Devon Moth Group stalwart and former Chairman, Brian Bewsher, passed away on 10<sup>th</sup> September. Brian was a very active moth recorder and staunch supporter of the Group and will be greatly missed. An obituary will appear in the next newsletter.

Richard Fox

## Field Meeting Reports

### **Marsland field meeting, 13 July 2013**

How very good to have arranged a field meeting for a warm and dry night – what an extraordinary July this has turned out to be. The magnificent Marsland Devon Wildlife Trust reserve spans the Devon-Cornwall border where the two counties meet on the northern coast. It occupies a branching valley running down to the sea, with broadleaved woodland on the slopes and open grasslands, some marshy, at the bottom.

The county divide was the subject of much friendly debate – where to set our traps? Paul Butter placed his firmly on the Devon side of the border stream, but I opted for a likely looking spot on the Cornwall side, arguing that it was all a Devon Wildlife Trust reserve and in any case both sides appear to be in VC2 (Eastern Cornwall). No doubt this is going to create a predicament for the Devon recorder – sorry Barry! Adrian Spalding added a Skinner trap to my string.

We were a select band, nine in all, the hardy few ready to venture so far from the main centres of distribution of both Devon and Cornish moth'ers. Darkness fell, and we began our rounds. The first trap we examined was full – not of moths but of thousands of tiny flower beetles. Fortunately these stopped flying shortly after dusk, otherwise checking the traps would have been challenging! Moths started to drizzle then shower in, never really developing

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

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into a down-pour, but always enough to keep us busy and engaged. Among the early finds was a Waved Carpet *Hydrelia sylvata*, a nationally-scarce moth and the first of ten or so individuals of this species.

Next we admired an impressively large and colourful spider found on the vanes of an actinic trap Paul had brought. Matt Prince identified this as a male *Araneus angulatus*, a nationally scarce species. Another uncommon moth, the attractive pyralid *Anania (Phlyctaenia) stachydalis* soon followed. Six Dot Moth *Melanchra persicariae* were good to see, as was (for those of who stayed until the morning) a solitary Garden Tiger *Arctia caja*.



(Gary Pilkington)

At one o'clock we did our last trap round of the night and Paul lifted his traps. Adrian and I topped up the generator and left our traps running, catching some sleep in accommodation kindly provided by Gary Pilkington, reserve manager. The morning revealed a further 20 or so species, bringing the night's total to a very creditable 98. The most numerous moth was, unexpectedly, Peppered Moth *Biston betularia* (40 of them), followed by Variegated Golden Tortrix *Archips xylosteana* (30), with Plain Golden Y *Autographa jota* and Uncertain *Hoplodrina alsines* close behind (25 each). Next came Coronet *Craniophora ligustri* (20) – with the almost certain forthcoming loss of most of our ash trees (the larval food plant), will people in the future look back on such numbers with envy?

Perhaps equally interesting was the low number of some others that we might have expected to be present in quantity – no Small Phoenix *Ecliptopera silaceata* at all, a sole Green Carpet *Colostygia pectinataria*, only two Flame Shoulder *Ochropleura plecta* and just three Large Yellow Underwing *Noctua pronuba*. Maybe we were between generations or before the main flight period for these species, or are numbers genuinely low?

My thanks to Gary for hosting the event, even laying temporary bridges over the small streams, and to Paul and Adrian for bringing traps and assisting with the identification – this was really a team event in this respect! Gary reports that we caught 4 new species for the reserve - *Tinea semifulvella*, Dark Fruit Tree Tortrix *Pandemis heparana*, *Phlyctaenia stachydalis* and a probable Lesser Common Rustic *Mesapamea didyma* – the last being smallish, black and with a white kidney mark so probably this species but not confirmed by dissection. All in all, a most successful field meeting.

Rob Wolton

### Moth Night 2013 event at National Trust Parke

This event, organised by the warden Fred Hutt, was not a Devon Moth Group event, but as any efforts to record and promote moths are welcome in the county, especially on Moth Night, I went along to assist. The event was held in the walled garden which is just downhill from the main car park.

Fred and his trusty four wheel drive picked me up with my equipment around 19.30 and we went and surveyed the site which is a large walled area with vegetables, herbs and garden flowers, with a good area left wild. I set up my two traps with Fred putting out wine-soaked cloths in the surrounding trees outside the garden area going on from here to collect the hoards of visitors we expected to this event, which had been fairly well publicised; in the event he brought back just one woman and her two near-teenage children, hoards indeed!

With our meagre public assembly, we looked at and discussed the few moths Fred had gathered during the day, which included several *Autographa gamma* Silver Y, which were flying among the herbage, along with a couple of specimens of *Nomophila noctuella* Rush Veneer and a couple of *Agriphila selasella* a widespread grass moth at this time of the year, with one or two other common species.

Rain was promised by around 22.00, but the generator was started up and we waited until it got a bit darker to give some moths a chance to fly before we went to look at them. There were lots of *Cerapteryx graminis* Antler Moth and the expected hoards of Silver Y, along with a few *Habrosyne pyritoides* Buff Arches which went down well. One specimen of *Rheumaptera undulata* Scallop Shell was very nice to see and the state of a very worn *Euphyia*



Antler Moth (Roy McCormick)

*biangulata* Cloaked Carpet was a surprise. I explained the name of *Notodonta dromedarius* Iron Prominent to the assembled ‘crowds’, who were then wowed by several *Lymantria monacha* Black Arches and one *Euplagia quadripunctaria* Jersey Tiger (a Moth Night 2013 target species). We had both of the copper underwings, *Amphipyra pyramidea* and *berbera* with myself explaining the differences, a couple of *Abrostola tripartita* Spectacle with its markings that look as if it is wearing glasses, one *Laspeyria flexula* Beautiful Hook-tip another species which was looked at with wonder, but the best moth of the night was a spectacular variety of *Cerapteryx graminis* Antler Moth (left). Our visitors enjoyed immensely a trip around the wine clothes that produced several Copper Underwings; they left us at around 22.00 in order to get back home to Plymouth, but had had a fabulous time doing something they had never done before. Fred and I soldiered on until 23.00 watching the fine rain in the light of the near trap whilst we sheltered in a greenhouse before we packed up, leaving the site c. 23.30.  
Roy McCormick

### Living with Scarlet Tigers

I first noted Scarlet Tigers *Callimorpha dominula* here in the garden in 2005 with none recorded for the previous decade. Our Chudleigh garden is about 100 feet long by 20 feet wide. A “cottage” type garden, we have perennial flowers and shrubs and usually grow a few vegetables and some fruit each year. Some of the garden is disturbed every year but usually a larger part doesn’t get weeded very often and we have grassy areas and various wild flowers and shrubs to encourage butterflies and wildlife generally.

Last year I noted about 22 Scarlet Tiger moths in the flight season including three mated pairs. This year, even more moths were present and I was able to make the following observations:

1. A number of larvae were found in the spring but I don’t know what their preferred food is here. In other gardens and roadsides in Chudleigh they are fond of Green Alkanet though we don’t have this in our garden. One larva was found on Primrose but may just have been at rest.
2. Flight period for 2013 was 20th June until 15th July (26 days). The latter two weeks coincided with a sudden burst of lovely warm weather.
3. Total number of adult moths seen was circa 100, possibly more. Some years ago, Roger Thornett did a mark-release-recapture experiment on Jersey Tiger in his Exeter garden and found that he never re-caught a marked moth, so that each day’s sightings were of new individuals. This could therefore be likely for the moths that I was recording.
4. The moths were noticeably active during early evening, especially between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. I generally made observations early a.m. or from late afternoon onwards (or through the day at weekends) to fit in with work. One unusually warm evening, moths were flying up until 9 p.m. with one until 9.10 p.m. The presence of plenty of shrubs and small trees in the general vicinity seems to be useful to them for resting and mating.
5. Eight mated pairs were seen in the garden.
6. Some moths were freshly emerged early morning – probably males. Two fresh moths were found flying in our garden shed – I assume larvae had pupated in there. A few Scarlet Tigers were witnessed hatching in the afternoon and turned out to be female. Females hatching at ground level crawl to a higher position, expand their wings fully then begin emitting a pheromone attractant. Whilst sitting in the garden, I noticed on a few occasions sudden activity by several male moths attracted to a particular spot, and this would turn out to be where a female was sitting. One evening around 6.30 p.m, I noticed two moths hovering around our Flowering Currant bush just outside the conservatory. On closer inspection I saw a female moth sitting on a leaf of the bush. The two males drifted a metre or two away, but soon the closer one doubled back and landed close to the female moth. He then walked over to where she was, turned around and locked his abdomen to hers. She remained passive throughout. Assemblies of males that were



Scarlet Tiger (Chris Manley)

- unsuccessful in reaching a female first dispersed within a minute or two.
7. Scarlet Tigers are said to fly at night (mentioned in several moth books) but numerous individuals noted on our garden shrubs in the evening were still there early a.m. so obviously had not been flying in the night in spite of favourable weather. Moths that went into the night in copula were usually still present early a.m. but had separated by then.
  8. No nectaring was observed at any time, but strangely I did see a moth on Buddleia flowers elsewhere.
  9. The only possible egg-laying behaviour I saw was a moth crawling around our rockery plants. When I crouched down to see what it was doing, it dropped deep into long grass out of sight. Females are said to scatter eggs randomly.
  10. Several Scarlet Tigers that hatched in our garden were deformed with unexpanded wings or only partly expanded. I wondered if the very dry conditions had contributed to this. One of the deformed moths, a female, still attracted a mate on its second day of life. Rather than copulating end - to - end on the level, the male had to curl his abdomen upwards from the grass stalk they were on – both moths had their heads pointing skywards.

I look forward to seeing plenty of Scarlet Tigers in the garden again next year!  
Pete Hurst

### Devon Moth Group trap for loan

A few years ago, Devon Moth Group purchased a Skinner-type moth trap so that it could be loaned to people or groups in the county who were interested in carrying out moth recording but lacked the necessary equipment. If any members would like to borrow the trap for part or all of the 2014 recording season, please let me know.

Richard Fox [rfox@butterfly-conservation.org](mailto:rfox@butterfly-conservation.org) or 01626 356463

### *Coleophora linosyridella*: a pRDB1 species found in Devon, & on a new British foodplant

*Coleophora linosyridella* was first found in the British Isles in Kent in 1978. It has since been recorded from Essex but in both counties it is restricted to parts of salt-marshes above the average high-tide level in the estuary of the River Thames. There the larva feeds on Sea Aster *Aster tripolium*. Until this year it was known from nowhere else in the British Isles.

Tony Davis' Butterfly Conservation Report published last year, 2012 and entitled *A Review of the Status of Microlepidoptera in Britain* accorded it provisional Red Data Book 1 (pRDB1) status, meaning that it occurs in 5 or fewer 10km squares.

In mainland Europe the larva also feeds on Goldilocks Aster *Aster linosyris* (image right). This is a rare plant in the British Isles that is confined to four sites in England and three in Wales, all being limestone cliffs. The only Devon locality is in the Brixham area where it mainly grows on inaccessible/dangerous parts of the coast.



Goldilocks Aster (Bob Heckford)

On 22 May this year we found some plants in a slightly less dangerous area and discovered *Coleophora* larvae mining the leaves. *Coleophora* larvae make cases; some are so characteristic that the species can be identified from these alone. Others, such as the ones we found, are very similar. Indeed these looked like those made by *Coleophora trochilella*, a local species in Devon, whose larvae feed on the leaves of various members of the Asteraceae of which Goldilocks Aster is one. Nevertheless it seemed significant that the cases only seemed to be on this plant and not on other species, such as Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* which grew nearby and is also a foodplant of *C. trochilella*.

Thus we thought it possible that we had found and so with conservation in mind we only kept four cases. Moths emerged the following month. The adults of *C. linosyridella* and *C. trochilella* are extremely similar macroscopically (see images on the next page) but are quite different in the genitalia. Dissection confirmed that we had indeed found *C. linosyridella*; this is not only new to Devon but the first time that it had been found feeding on Goldilocks Aster in the British Isles.

Stella Beavan & Bob Heckford

*Coleophora linosyridella*



(Images Bob Heckford)

*Coleophora trochilella*



### Help wanted with trapping

I have moved to near Blackawton, the highest point of the South Hams. My very amateur attempts to lure in the moths have produced encouraging results, both in numbers and species, but I have a neighbour who has an area of old woodland, newly planted woodland, grassland and a fantastic selection of bats. He is fighting a planning application for a wind turbine adjacent to his fields. He was wondering if any members Devon Moth Group might be interested in setting up some traps to see if he has any moths worthy of protection? I am fairly sure the area has had no meaningful census work done. Please get in touch if you are interested.

Mark Marshall [mcbirdman@gmx.com](mailto:mcbirdman@gmx.com)

### Welcome to New Members

**Phil Dean**, Ladieswood, Pennaton, South Brent, TQ10 9HN.

Telephone: 07879 994963. e-mail: [philsue.dean@gmail.com](mailto:philsue.dean@gmail.com)

**Brian Hutchins**, Little Meadow, Widcombe-in-the-Moor, Newton Abbot, TQ13 7TF.

Telephone: 01364 621236. e-mail: [bphutchins@btinternet.com](mailto:bphutchins@btinternet.com)

### Forthcoming events (see [www.devonmoths.org.uk](http://www.devonmoths.org.uk) for more details)

Friday 25 October 2013, Indoor meeting at the Kenn Centre, Kennford ([www.kenncentre.co.uk](http://www.kenncentre.co.uk)) 19.30 for 20.00 start. Illustrated talk by Prof Peter Vukusic, Exeter University, entitled *All things bright and beautiful: light and colour in lepidopteran wing scales*.

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2013, Devon Moth Group Christmas Dinner, Clay Cutters Arms, Chudleigh Knighton.

Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2014, National Moth Recorders' Meeting at Birmingham & Midland Institute, Birmingham.

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2014, AGM and indoor meeting at the Kenn Centre, Kennford ([www.kenncentre.co.uk](http://www.kenncentre.co.uk)).

Anomalous – one of  
28 caught on  
Dartmoor on 16 Aug  
2013 (Phil Barden)

