



DEVON MOTH GROUP

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NEWSLETTER 2014 ISSUE 3 (July)

The good moth recording conditions mentioned in the last (May) newsletter have continued through June and into July, leading to some good recent records. There has been clear evidence of immigration during June with a large influx of *Macroglossum stellatarum* Humming-bird Hawk-moth, as well as *Cyclophora pupillaria* Blair's Mocha in Brixham and Teignmouth, *Mythimna vitellina* Delicate in the South Hams, *Agrius convolvuli* Convolvulus Hawk-moth at Bolberry, *Heliothis peltigera* Bordered Straw in Teignmouth, and *Rhodometra sacraria* Vestal near Newton Abbot. Intriguingly there have been four reports of *Idaea trigeminata* Treble Brown Spot during June, three of which were caught by Roy McCormick in the Teignmouth area and one in my own garden in Abbotskerswell. Although a widespread moth further east, Treble Brown Spot has always been very scarce in Devon and Cornwall, but a spate of sightings over the past decade around Exmouth suggested that the species might have become established there. Whether last month's sightings represent further colonisation/spread of the moth or were due to immigration is not clear.

It's been a good period for resident species too. Phil Barden had a micro new to Devon (see next page) and Mike Braid was astonished to find a *Moma alpium* Scarce Merveille du Jour in his garden trap, some seven miles or so north-east of the known populations around Great Torrington. Mike then caught a second specimen in a local wood. This is a new 10km square for this nationally scarce species.

Following on nicely from articles in our last newsletter, Barry Henwood caught a *Pasiphila chloerata* Sloe Pug in his Abbotskerswell garden, near Newton Abbot, a couple of miles from the recently confirmed population at Orley Common, Ipplepen, and we've received an unusual number of reports of Small Eggar nests. Seems this latter species is having a good year.

Happy mothing!
Richard Fox



Blair's Mocha (left) caught in Teignmouth 11.6.2014 (Roy McCormick) and
Treble Brown Spot (right) from Abbotskerswell 24.6.2014 (Richard Fox)

Members of Council: Richard Fox (Chairman) Nicola Bacciu (Membership & Distribution) Bob Heckford (Ordinary Member)
Roy McCormick (Secretary/Treasurer) Rob Wolton (Conservation) Barry Henwood (County Moth Recorder)

www.devonmoths.org.uk

Cosmopterix orichalcea new to Devon

On 22.6.2014, Phil Barden caught this beautiful and distinctive micro-moth in a 15W actinic trap at Thorn Point on the Devon bank of the Tamar near Bere Ferrers. *Cosmopterix orichalcea* is associated with damp habitats where its larvae mine the leave of grasses. It has a scattered distribution across southern Britain (see distribution map at http://www.mothscount.org/uploads/0896_Cosmopterix_orichalcea.png) and has previously been recorded in Cornwall (VC1 and VC2) and Dorset.

Richard Fox



John Randall 1947 – 2014 Obituary

For all those who knew John, it was with great sadness that the news of his sudden death at home in St. Budeaux, Plymouth on April 23rd 2014 was received.

John was born in Plymouth and lived there all his life. Growing up, his father kept pigeons and canaries and this may have been inspired John's interest in birds generally – but he always preferred to see birds in the wild. One of two children (Brian was his older brother), John attended Tamar Secondary School. After leaving he took up work straight away with South West Electricity Board (SWEB) - a position he stayed in until retirement - working with their computers. John retired early at 50 years old but did some consultancy work for SWEB for the following few years. He was full of praise for his employer, reporting that he had been treated well by the company and retired on a generous pension.

A bachelor all his life, John continued to live with his father in Albert Road Devonport after his mother died aged only 45. Later they both moved to St Budeaux. John's interest in birds continued with membership of the RSPB and then the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), for whom he carried out Wetland Bird Surveys for more than 30 years, specifically at Lopwell Dam and the Tavy Estuary. Following retirement, John also became a surveyor for the BTO's Breeding Bird Survey.

John's wildlife interests and conservation commitment extended beyond birds too. He was an active member of Devon Moth Group and regularly attended events. He also trapped moths in his garden and endeavoured to identify the micro moths he caught as well as the larger moths. However, it was as key volunteer for the Devon Branch of Butterfly Conservation that many of us knew John. After initial reluctance to join the Branch committee, he soon became its most-active member, organising field meetings and co-ordinating the Regional Action Plan, butterfly monitoring transects and the Wider Countryside Butterfly Scheme. He was a prolific recorder too, carrying out numerous site visits every year to monitor the Devon strongholds of some of Britain's most endangered butterflies, such as the High Brown Fritillary and Pearl-bordered Fritillary. In recognition of his enormous contribution, John was awarded one of Butterfly Conservation's national Volunteer of the Year awards in 2008.

John was also very involved with voluntary work for Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) over many years, helping to maintain a presence of DWT's work in Plymouth. With others he kept a practical conservation work group going which is now thriving. His patience and willingness to help were evident in his work and he readily added his support to any wildlife initiatives that were begun. He did a lot of volunteer work at Warleigh Point and sometimes helped at Andrew's Wood and Lady's Wood. He regularly set up his moth trap at Sourton Quarry whilst the bat

surveys were being carried out. He was also an active member of Devon Mammal Group, Devon Bat Group, led walks for the National Trust and was involved with the Peregrine Watch at Plymbridge Woods.

Another project dear to his heart was his work as Chairman of Friends of Ham Woods, a site owned by Plymouth City Council. He spoke very passionately and persuasively at a site meeting earlier this year attended by Natural England who decided to grant the site Local Nature Reserve status, protecting it from any future development.

John loved taking wildlife holidays abroad perhaps 2 or 3 times a year. He went to The Gambia a number of times and from about 1985 he helped finance the building and running of a much-needed school in the country.

John was incredibly reliable and dedicated in his work. A story that came from the Friends of Ham Woods relates to his frequent litter picks at the site when he would transport the sacks of rubbish to his local tip. This backfired somewhat when the Council sent him a letter saying that his car had been clocked by their cameras doing more than the permitted number of visits per month and questioning if he was operating commercially!

Many of those who knew him have paid heartfelt tributes to John, and the following quotes are just a small selection: “John I had huge admiration for you, you were modest, sincere and passionate about nature”. “John was a very patient man, willing to impart the same wildlife information repeatedly without ever a hint of frustration in his voice”. “John was the most inspiring volunteer that I have had the pleasure to work with”.

Thank you to John’s family, his friends and people from the societies and organisations mentioned above who enabled this picture of John’s life to be told.

Peter Hurst

Field Meeting Reports

Bovey Heath, 30.5.2014

Following a cloudy afternoon I thought conditions for trapping that evening looked good. At teatime I received two phone calls from people living in Bovey Tracey telling me that it was raining hard. The forecast was not for persistent heavy rain, so I decided to proceed with the event.

Thirty-three people attended including some families, probably as a result of the event being advertised in the Devon Wildlife Trust programme. We assembled at the entrance to compartment one, but decided to move to compartment two for the trapping as there was tree cover there and a greater variety of vegetation. While waiting for darkness I was able to show the crowd larvae of the Brimstone butterfly on Alder Buckthorn and a larva of the Grayling butterfly which I had found the previous evening of bristle bent grass whilst doing a recce. Jackie Gage, the DWT Reserves Officer took us on a guided walk of compartment two in the hope of seeing Nightjars – unfortunately there was not a display to entertain us.

The moth trapping itself was disappointing in that only 19 species were recorded, despite running three traps. Nevertheless, there were some spectacular moths to show such as *Phalera bucephala* Buff-tip and *Macrothylacia rubi* Fox Moth. It was also good to see *Cyclophora punctaria* Maiden’s Blush, *Parectropis similaria* Square Spot, and *Lacanobia contigua* Beautiful Brocade. Tim Stripp also showed some moths he had netted earlier including a very fresh *Chlorissa viridata* Small Grass Emerald and *Perconia strigillaria* Grass Wave, both of which are uncommon and typical heathland species.



Grass Wave (Patrick Clement)

I think the heavy rain during the early evening had had a cooling effect which resulted in poor numbers of moths arriving at the traps. In any case, it was an enjoyable evening and a pleasure to do some recording at a site where I have spent a great many hours on practical conservation tasks in the last two and a half years. I am very grateful to Jackie Gage for permission to run the event, for her help with setting up traps and for leading a guided walk.
Barry Henwood

Langaford Farm, North Bovey, 21.6.2014

This field meeting provided two excellent opportunities for Devon Moth Group. First to develop a relationship with the Langaford Farm Charitable Trust, which now runs the traditional Dartmoor farm for environmental education and quiet recreation by schools, community groups and the public. Ces Hout, who manages the site for the Trust, was out very generous and welcoming host, laying on tea, coffee and biscuits throughout the night. Second, the tetrad (2km x 2km map square) in which the Farm lies is seriously under recorded, having only a handful of records of day-flying species in the Devon Moth Group database.

So it was on a pleasant midsummer evening, that 13 of us assembled at the farm and set out five traps (three of my own and one each from Ivan Lakin and Kevin Rylands) in an unimproved wet meadow with associated thick hedgerows and woodland. Tim Stripp did some useful dusking with his net to get the species list underway while the rest of us chatted about the site, the work of the Trust, the moth season and the inevitable Heath and Safety briefing.



Lomaspilis marginata Clouded Border (above) and
Anaplectoides prasina Green Arches (Richard Fox)

The moths soon started to arrive at the traps and we were kept busy! Early arrivals included *Hepialus fusconebulosa* Map-winged Swift and *Lampropteryx otregiata* Devon Carpet, both of which were new to many of the people present. For those, like Ces, who had never been out moth trapping before it was a revelation, but there was plenty of interest for the more seasoned recorders too. Highlights included *Orthonama vittata* Oblique Carpet, *Eupithecia valerianata* Valerian Pug, *Hydrelia sylvata* Waved Carpet, *Cybosia mesomella* Four-dotted Footman, *Mythimna turca* Double Line and *Schranksia costaestrigalis* Pinion-streaked Snout. There were lots of beautiful common 'crowd pleasing' species too, including lots of *Hepialus humuli* Ghost Moth, *Deilephila porcellus* Small Elephant Hawk-moth, *Stauropus fagi* Lobster Moth, *Pseudoips prasinana* Green Silver-lines and *Plusia festucae* Gold Spot.

Although a 'hard core' stayed on long into the night, we couldn't quite get to 100 species, finishing up with 98 once a few micros had been confirmed. Still, it was a very enjoyable evening and a big step forward in our knowledge of both the farm and the tetrad. Great thanks are due to Ces and the Langaford Trust for their hospitality.
Richard Fox

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

Friday 25 July 2014, Parke, Bovey Tracey. Meet at 21.00 in the main National Trust car park, SX805486. Please phone Fred Hutt (07919 395150) in advance, if the weather conditions appear unfavourable.

Saturday 16 August 2014, The Old Kennels, Dunkeswell. Meet at 21.00 at the Old Kennels, ST135098. Please phone Kim Leaver (07889 978223) if you plan to attend so that sufficient car parking space can be arranged.