



DEVON MOTH GROUP

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Since the last newsletter we've endured the coldest August since 1993 followed by the dried September on record. Despite the stark contrast, both months produced some exciting moth sightings.

Three larvae of *Acherontia atropos* Death's-head Hawk-moth were reported; the first in Budleigh Salterton on 15.8.2014 by Irene Jarvis, followed by another in Stoke Gabriel (4.9.2014) identified and photographed by Peter Cooke and, finally, a third on 16.9.2014 near Berry Head by Noel Hughes.

Perhaps even more excitingly, there have also been three Devon records of *Catocala fraxini* Clifden Nonpareil in recent weeks. The first was caught by visiting moth recorder Dave Grundy, who caught it while trapping at Prawle Point on 27.8.2014.

Mike Lockyear also had a Clifden Nonpareil beside his moth trap in Crediton on 17.9.2014 and then Mark Marshall caught one in his trap at Blackawton on 27.9.2014.



Death's-head Hawk-moth larva, Stoke Gabriel
(Peter Cooke)



Clifden Nonpareil
(left) from Prawle
Point (Dave Grundy)
and same species
(right) from Crediton
(Mike Lockyear)

These Clifden Nonpareils were not alone. Other immigrant moths also arrived during September including *Tebenna micalis*, *Rhodometra sacraria* Vestal, *Mythimna vitellina* Delicate, *Agrius convolvuli* Convolvulus Hawk-moth and *Peridroma saucia* Pearly Underwing. With such moths around it is well worth putting your trap out on any mild October nights!

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

Field Meeting Reports

The Old Kennels, Dunkeswell, 16.8.2014

The evening was overcast with a light westerly breeze and a single trap was set up next to the coppice woodland and adjoining a small pasture.

Four members turned up for the event and we were also joined by the site owner, Tracey and her son and also one of the neighbours and his children. To get to the trapping site meant walking through a small paddock occupied by Alpacas, a novel experience for most of us! Typically, a light drizzle started almost as soon as we got to the trap and became heavy enough that the light had to be turned off for about 15-20 minutes after half an hour. The drizzle then eased and proceedings continued without further interruption. Tracey kindly brought out hot chocolate and biscuits to keep us sustained.

In total, 94 individuals of 38 species were recorded during the evening. *Opisthograptis luteolata* Brimstone Moth was the most numerous species of the evening with 15 individuals, while *Hepialus sylvina* Orange Swift and *Epione repandaria* Bordered Beauty were admired by all, and three *Lampropteryx otregiata* Devon Carpet were a new species for most people present. For those new to moths a couple of *Abraxas grossulariata* Magpie Moth and three *Ptilodon capucina* Coxcomb Prominent were the highlights.



Orange Swift (left) and Coxcomb Prominent (right)
(Kim Leaver)

For the invitation to hold the event and for the hot beverages I would like to thank Tracey and her family.
Kim Leaver

Butler's Farm, Chittlehamholt, 26.8.2014

Following a week or more of unseasonably cold weather, and heavy rain the night before, we were very fortunate in having a warm dry night, with a light SE breeze, for this joint meeting with Devon Wildlife Trust at Butler's Farm, courtesy of Clare Payne. Space was limited at Butler's Farm itself for the selection MV and actinic traps that John Breeds and I brought, but Sally Oatley kindly allowed us to place some on her adjoining land, moving horses, ponies and sheep out of the field first.



This was the first time that any moth recording had been done at this site, so we knew all records would be valuable, even if nothing exceptional turned up. Shortly after dark, the 16 or so people present started doing the rounds of the traps. Moths started to arrive early and kept on coming right until our final round which finished at about 1 am. The most numerous moths were, as might be expected, *Ochropleura plecta* Flame Shoulder and *Noctua pronuba* Large Yellow Underwing, with about 50 of each – not huge numbers, but compared to last season, when the underwing was recorded across much of the county in remarkably low numbers, of some passing interest.

Tholera decimalis Feathered Gothic, *Lymantria monacha* Black Arches and *Ennomos alniaria* Canary-shouldered Thorn were among the more attractive moths seen, while a fresh *Laothoe populi* Poplar Hawk-moth was unexpected so late in the year. The best moths of the night were probably *Ennomos fuscantaria* Dusky Thorn and *Xanthia aurago* Barred Sallow. The former is a species which decreased nationally by 98% between 1968 and

2003, the greatest decline of all 337 common larger moth species analysed using data from the Rothamsted network of light traps: we had about a dozen coming to our traps. The Barred Sallow is a pretty yellow moth which appears to be patchily distributed across Devon – its larvae feed on beech and field maple. Shortly before we packed up, singles of *Cyclophora punctaria* Maiden's Blush, *Hypsopygia costalis* Gold Triangle and *Amphipoea oculea* Ear Moth (later confirmed by dissection) appeared, all good to find.

A fine selection of other insect orders, especially of true flies, caddisflies and shieldbugs, along with the occasional lacewing and ichneumon wasp, came to our lights and added interest, although it was difficult to avoid breathing in some of the smaller flies at times!

In all we recorded 54 moth species, a very acceptable tally for the time of year, although of course only a fraction of all the species that will be present within the extensively-farmed and well treed landscape around Butler's Farm. Rob Wolton

Saltram House, Plymouth, 30.8.2014

This was a joint meeting with the National Trust at their Saltram House property on the outskirts of Plymouth. The event, which included a bat walk led by NT Warden Stephen Holley, had been advertised to the general public, and in due course 25 paid an entrance fee, the total income being shared jointly by Devon Moth Group and NT.

When I met Stephen at Saltram at 19.15 there was cloud cover and a decreasing wind. We met Roy McCormick and Veronica in the car park and transported the equipment to the Saltram Orangery where we set out our traps. Despite the promising conditions it turned out to be a slow evening with none of the excitement of the Group meeting at Parke. First to appear were females of *Hepialus sylvina* Orange Swift and the first of many worn specimens of *Idaea biselata* Small Fan-footed Wave. Apart from Roy, Veronica and me there were only two other moth group members in attendance, but the meeting did provide the chance to talk to the public about the attraction of moths and moth recording. I would have particularly liked to have been able to show them *Euplagia quadripunctaria* Jersey Tiger, always a favourite, but unfortunately on the night none came to the lights. Among other species recorded were *Epirrhoe galiata* Galium Carpet and *Lymantia monacha* Black Arches. Roy was able to show the Moth Group members present how to identify *Amphipyra berbera* Svensson's Copper Underwing which was a new species for some. Altogether on the night there were 30 species recorded.

John Boon

A Royal Bioblitz

Although not relating to Devon, I think it will be of interest that Devon Moth Group member Bob Heckford was invited to take part in a Bioblitz at Prince Charles's Highgrove Estate in Gloucestershire on 27.6.14. This was part of National Insect Week and was organised by the Royal Entomological Society. Bob was the only moth-er of 14 entomologists who were invited. There were two others from Devon: Peter Smithers (spiders) and Keith Alexander (beetles and certain other Orders). Security was important and all invitees had to produce photographic identification; one of the acceptable documents was a gun licence!

Various types of trap were set up during the afternoon of the previous day, much to the amusement of parties being shown round the grounds. Bob took his 125W MV trap, being only its second outing of the year! There was only one other moth trap run, which was an 80W MV. With permission to place these anywhere within the extensive gardens, Bob sited his trap near the end of a very attractive flag-stone path leading to the house. By this time the heavens had opened and Bob had to cover various electrical components in bin-liners, just to be on the safe side, especially as he was not using a generator but an electric socket conveniently placed just inside a formal hedge.

Although the weather leading up to the event had been very hot and dry, things changed on 26/27 June resulting in very heavy rain both during the afternoon and again overnight. Despite that Bob's trap had about 1,000 moths, but c. 800 were *Agrotis exclamatoris* Heart & Dart (see image right). It was interesting that although the 80W MV trap had only (!) a few hundred moths, over a dozen



species there did not turn up in Bob's trap. Unfortunately nothing of any great significance put in an appearance.

About 50 youngsters had been invited, who were winners of a World Wildlife Fund competition, and these were shown the usual 'crowd pleasers' such as *Phalera bucephala* Buff-tip, *Laothoe populi* Poplar Hawk-moth and *Deilephila elpenor* Elephant Hawk-moth. It was a pity that *Catarhoe cuculata* Royal Mantle did not turn up, nor was *Limenitis camilla* White Admiral seen during the day, but *Craniophora ligustri* Coronet did make an appearance.

The estate, very generously, allowed full access and so additional records were able to be made in the field and some larvae were collected. Perhaps the parasitoids that emerged from some of these might be of more interest. But those looking at other Orders might have found something good – a Bioblitz was held at Prince Charles's Clarence House in London a couple of years ago and a fly new to Britain was recorded. So, who knows?

There was a return visit on 13 August when both Bob and Stella Beavan attended between 10.00 am and 4 pm. A few more species were added but again nothing exciting, although it was good to see a fresh *Macroglossum stellatarum* Humming-bird Hawk-moth nectaring in a walled garden.

A full list of species will be collated and a report will be prepared for Prince Charles in due course.
Richard Fox

Conservation of the Goldilocks Aster Case Bearer *Coleophora linosyridella*

In last year's September issue of this newsletter, Stella Beavan and Bob Heckford reported their exciting find of this very rare moth in the Brixham area of Torbay, the larvae being discovered on Goldilocks Aster *Aster linosyris*. Previously it had been known in the British Isles only from saltmarshes on the Thames Estuary where it feeds on Sea Aster *Aster tripolium*. Bob and Stella later published their discovery in *Entomologist's Rec. J. Var.* 125, pp 244-246 (2013). Here they noted that on mainland Europe the moth larvae feed on Goldilocks Aster, and suggested that the population at Torbay is likely to be a native, long standing one. This contrasts with the situation in the Thames estuary, where the moth was only discovered in 1978, uses an atypical foodplant, and could well be a recent arrival.

On 21 August, out of concern for the future survival of the moth, a site meeting was convened in the Berry Head area. Along with Bob, Stella and I, present were Noel Hughes of the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, Philip Stocks from Natural England, Andy Byfield from Plantlife and my wife Paula.

Goldilocks Aster is itself a rare plant in Britain, occurring on a few coastal limestone outcrops in England and Wales. Consequently, our attention focussed as much on the conservation of this plant as on that of the moth. The aster occurs on steep coastal slopes, in very specific vegetation communities.

It favours fairly short swards, as created by light levels of grazing. Unfortunately few coastal slopes in the area are now grazed by either cattle or sheep, and the sward is becoming ranker and a front of thick blackthorn scrub is advancing inexorably down slope threatening many of the colonies.

We agreed on a number of actions to address these threats. As an immediate short-term measure, Noel offered to remove blackthorn saplings from the handful of tiny patches of grassland containing Goldilocks Aster where the moth has been discovered. Outside these tiny patches, this winter staff of the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust will cut the grassland with a strimmer or brushcutter, and start on a process of removing the encroaching blackthorn scrub. In the longer term, the aspiration is to restore grazing to the slopes. Paula suggested that wethers (castrated male sheep) would do best, requiring less maintenance than ewes and being much less vulnerable to accidents than cattle. With time they will become habituated to the site and to its people and their dogs, and easy to handle.

Fortunately, as Phil remarked, much of the Berry Head area is under a Higher Level Stewardship agreement with Natural England, and so much of the funding necessary to carry out this habitat management is already in place.



Meanwhile, Bob and Stella have offered to monitor the populations of the moth over the next few years, and to check that the site management is creating favourable conditions for it. They are also endeavouring to find out where the moth overwinters – hopefully as larvae well down among the base of the plants and so safe from any cutting. The condition of the herb-rich maritime turf will be monitored more generally by the Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust and Andy.

While we were pondering these issues, Bob and Stella found and showed us some old larval cases, and we even spied an adult moth. They appear very loathe to fly, perhaps just as well for a weak flyer which inhabits exposed windy sites where the food plant is rare and patchy.



Coleophora linosyridella, larval case (left) and adult (right) (Rob Wolton)

In 2013 Bob and Stella had found the larval cases in two small, discrete, areas less than 50 m apart. There was no evidence of the species in a separate area about 200 m away where the plant was locally common. Fortunately Noel had a map showing all the areas where the plant had been recorded during a survey in 1998 and Andy had personal knowledge of its distribution. As a result we looked at four places that Bob and Stella had not visited. We were thrilled to find evidence of larval feeding at two of these, although at both there were very few plants. However where feeding was found at one place the plants were on the extreme edge of a fairly sheer drop and it is possible there were plants growing below that were not only inaccessible but also not visible.

The Devon population of the Goldilocks Aster Case Bearer is very special. It is the only known population in the British Isles whose larval foodplant is Goldilocks Aster, which itself is a very rare plant. It just shows that micro-moths are well worth studying.

Let us hope that its future is now more secure, and that it does not suffer the fate of another very rare micro, *Infurcitinea albicomella*, now only known in the British Isles from Torbay where it is associated with Cotoneaster (see July 2013 newsletter). All the Cotoneaster bushes where the moth occurs were meticulously removed (with the intention of benefitting rare native plants) so we can only hope that the moth still survives at Torbay.

Unfortunately the result has been an invasion by Charlock *Sinapis arvensis* and Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber*, not by the rare plants for which the management was undertaken.

Rob Wolton

Conservation Officer

Welcome to New Members

Jill Forshaw, 15 Harveys Close, Chudleigh Knighton, Newton Abbot, TQ14 0PE.
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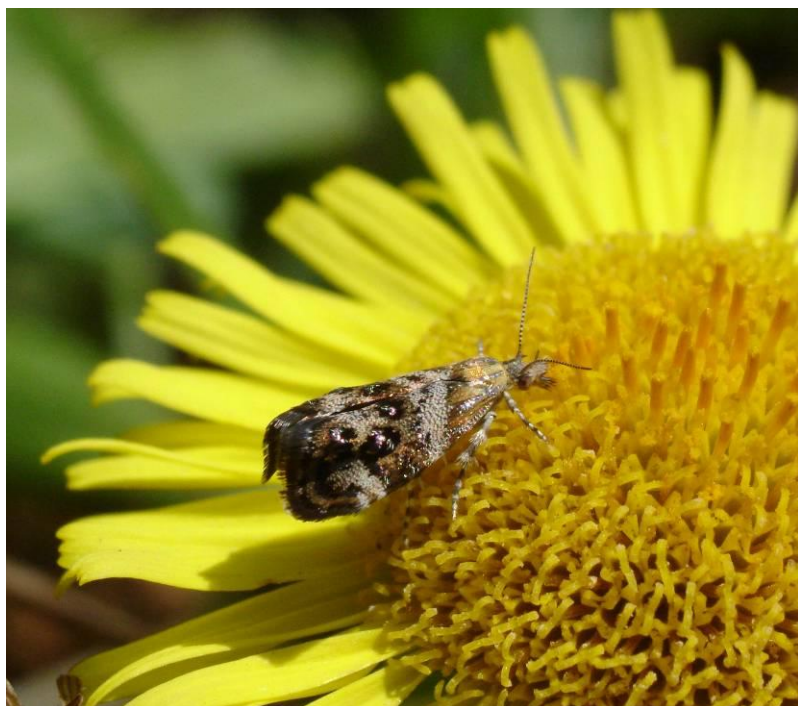
Forthcoming events (see Annual Report or www.devonmoths.org.uk for more details)

Thursday 23rd October 2014, Indoor meeting at the Kenn Centre, Kennford (www.kenncentre.co.uk) 19.30 for 20.00 start. Illustrated talk by Bob Heckford and Stella Beavan entitled *Micro Miscellany, observation and discrimination*.

Saturday 13th December 2014, Devon Moth Group Christmas Dinner, The Welcome Stranger, Liverton nr Bovey Tracey, 19.00 for 19.30 start.

Thursday 29th January 2015, AGM and indoor meeting at the Kenn Centre, Kennford (www.kenncentre.co.uk) 19.30 for 20.00 start. Illustrated talk by Phil Page entitled *Dartmoor Wildlife - Past Present & Future*.

Saturday 31st January 2015, National Moth Recorders' Meeting at Birmingham & Midland Institute, Birmingham. See http://www.mothscount.org/text/54/national_conferences.html for more details.



Tebenna micalis at Wembury
(Phil Barden)



Flounced Chestnut at Cheriton Bishop
(Julie Morris)