



DEVON MOTH GROUP

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NEWSLETTER 2015 ISSUE 2 (May)

Time seems to be flying by this year and the moths are already in full spring swing! So there's a lot to catch up on in this newsletter.

First, if you have paid your annual subscription you should now have received your copy of the Annual Report for 2014 (image right). If not, please contact Roy via the details above or info@devonmoths.org.uk and we'll try to work out what has gone wrong. While paying by standing order is certainly the best way to ensure that your subs are paid on time and not accidentally forgotten, please remember to let us know of any changes to your postal or email address, so that we can make sure that you continue to receive newsletters and the Annual Report.

Second, I'm sorry to report that Bob Heckford has had to step down from Devon Moth Group Council due to the pressure of his many other mothing and entomological commitments. Bob has made a huge contribution to the Group's activities in recent years, notably undertaking a massive verification of micro-moth records and co-authoring the county micro-moth list, Annual Reports and the new Devon moths of conservation importance document (see p.5). We are very fortunate that Bob will remain involved with Devon Moth Group and the recording and study of moths, especially micros, in the county. Those of you who know Bob will be well aware of his exceedingly high level of expertise and it is very pleasing to see this recognised at the national level as Bob has been awarded the H.H. Bloomer Award in 2015 by the Linnean Society of London. This prestigious award is given to an amateur naturalist who has made an important contribution to biological knowledge and previous winners include Miriam Rothschild! Many congratulations to Bob!

Richard Fox

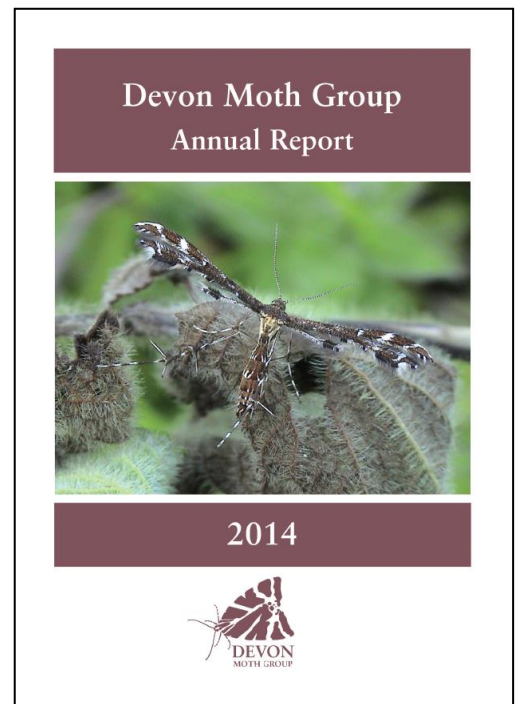
Annual General Meeting on Thursday 29th January 2015

The AGM was held at the Kenn Centre, Kennford and attended by 29 members. Apologies were received from Roy McCormick, Graham and Jean Jarvis, Malcolm Scoble and John Barkham. The minutes of the previous AGM were approved unanimously. This year, in the absence of Roy McCormick, Richard Fox delivered the reports of the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary. The annual accounts were displayed to those present. It was pointed out that while the accounts show only a small surplus in the last year, the Group has a substantial sum in the bank. Council would welcome suggestions for suitable projects that the Group could support financially. No other issues were raised and the accounts were approved unanimously.

The annual election of Council members (excluding the Chairman) was then held. All current incumbents were also willing to stand again and, there being no other candidates, Nicola Bacciu, Bob Heckford, Barry Henwood, Roy McCormick and Rob Wolton were elected unanimously to serve on Devon Moth Group Council for 2015.

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

www.devonmoths.org.uk



Chairman's & Secretary's AGM Report

2014 was the warmest year on record in the UK, which is particularly impressive as the records go back to 1659. All months except August (!) were above the long-term average temperature. The year was also notable for moths, with some amazing records including *Ctenoplusia accentifera* Accent Gem by Dave Wall (new to Devon, 2nd for Britain), *Stegania cararia* Ringed Border on a DMG field meeting (new to Devon, 3rd for Britain), *Cosmopterix orichalcea* by Phil Barden (new for Devon) and *Pancalia leuwenhoekella* by Andrew Cunningham (new for Devon). It was generally a good year for moth immigration into the county, with several *Cyclophora puppillaria* Blair's Mocha, the first Devon *Hyles gallii* Bedstraw Hawk-moth since 1995, several larval records of *Acherontia atropos* Death's-head Hawk-moth, and three records of *Catocala fraxini* Clifden Nonpareil. Among the scarcer resident species, 2014 seemed to be a good year for *Eriogaster lanestris* Small Eggar, while *Idaea trigeminata* Treble Brown Spot, *Pasiphila chloerata* Sloe Pug and *Idaea rusticata* Least Carpet were all found in new areas, perhaps reflecting range expansion. In addition, the very warm weather caused unusual additional broods leading to a significant number of unseasonal autumn records (e.g. *Eilema depressa* Buff Footman in October).

Devon Moth Group held four Council meetings during 2014, nine field meetings and three indoor meetings plus the Christmas dinner. Many thanks to Council members, field meeting leaders and speakers for all their hard work during the year. The Group website continued to prove popular: since its launch in April 2012, the website has received 24,000 page views by 6,348 different people, while on Facebook our page has a respectable 150 'likes'.

Membership is currently a bit down on last year, at 133 members. It was noted that John Randall, one of our most active members, had passed away during the year. Our finances remain healthy, with a small (£75) surplus over the year. As hoped, the increased costs of printing/postage have been offset by the recent increase in membership fees.

The Group has undertaken some excellent conservation initiatives during the past year. These included work on *Coleophora linosyridella* at Berry Head, an intensive survey for *Cyclophora porata* False Mocha at Yarner Wood NNR and the production of the Devon moths of conservation significance document. Bob Heckford, Barry Henwood and Rob Wolton deserve particular thanks for these activities.

Richard Fox

AGM illustrated talk: *Dartmoor Wildlife: Past, present and future* by Phil Page

After the AGM, experienced conservationist and Dartmoor resident, Phil Page, discussed the long-term view of the important wildlife of the area. He outlined the key habitats and species of the moor over the centuries and millennia and the forces that have shaped them; glaciations, the formation of peat and blanket bog through high rainfall over impervious rock, the impact of humans (prehistoric through to modern times) and the changing climate. There were lots of fascinating snippets of information along the way. For example archaeological evidence suggests that early humans deliberately created clearings in the forest to attract large mammals for hunting.

Humans have, of course, had a major impact. Permanent farming became established on Dartmoor from c.4,000 BC and Dartmoor became densely populated until the climate started to deteriorate. From the Mediaeval period, mining started to become a major influence on the landscape of the moor, while in Victorian times, livestock from the South Hams was summered on Dartmoor. More recently, the breakdown of this 'transhumance' tradition of summer livestock grazing, combined with a warming climate has led to increased woodland cover on the moor. In the modern era, both farming subsidies and 'conservation by design' have been the powerful forces shaping the moorland landscape. Phil's portrayal of overly bureaucratic, unsustainable conservation interventions stimulated some lively discussion at the end of the evening.

Finally, for the future, Phil spoke about the potential for reintroduction of large animals, long extinct on Dartmoor, and of the controversy such ideas often spark. While Beaver, Red Kite and perhaps even Pine Marten might one day live again on the moor, the prospects for species such as Wolf and Brown Bear seemed very remote. Many thanks to Phil for an interesting and thought-provoking evening.

Richard Fox

Verification of records

Moth recording in Devon is more prolific than ever before. That is fantastic, but I had around 71,500 records to deal with last year. I can no longer cope with doing all this verification myself. Phil Barden has kindly agreed to help. Phil has an excellent knowledge of moths and is extremely accurate with his own identifications. Please continue to send your records to me as before. However, I shall then forward many of them to Phil for verification. Barry Henwood

Requests for mothing help

We frequently receive requests for Devon Moth Group members to help with surveys and public events of various kinds. A recent request came from the Devon Bird Watching and Preservation Society to do a moth survey at South Milton Ley. If anyone is interested in helping, please contact Barry Henwood (barry.henwood@btinternet.com or 01626 364080).

Indoor Meeting Report: Spring Meeting, the Kenn Centre, Kennford, 26.3.2015

Looking for Larvae, a talk by Barry Henwood, County Moth Recorder for Devon.

Approximately 30 members were welcomed to the meeting by Rob Wolton. They were all there to listen to Barry Henwood's timely talk, now that spring is here, about searching for larvae, as well as to collect their copies of the new Annual Report. Rob introduced Barry by reminding us that he is not only the Devon County Moth Recorder, a Trustee of the Devon Wildlife Trust, Chair of the Devon branch of Butterfly Conservation, but also very, very good at finding larvae, and he was about to tell us how.

Only about 3% of the hundreds of thousands of records that Barry receives are for larval sightings but they are very important because many moths can only be identified reliably from their larva.

For most of us serendipity is responsible for our larval sightings, but Barry has been more fortunate than most as he once found a Goat Moth larva which was on the move looking for a place to pupate. But there are better, more reliable, ways of finding larvae and you don't have to travel far or have special equipment; an afternoon weeding can be very productive – Elephant Hawk-moth larvae on Fuschia (right) or Willow-herb, or Large Yellow Underwings and Heart and Darts found in the soil where they spend the day sheltering.



Elephant Hawk-moth larva (M. Parsons/Butterfly Conservation)

To become expert spotters we must search out sickly or damaged plants that have a lower resistance, then we can search for the larva which may be prominent on the plant, curled up in a leaf or hiding within the stem. A drooping Foxglove could be home to a Frosted Orange and your evidence would be the entry hole on the stem. Look for feeding damage, defoliated branches, although the culprits may have already gone or look for eaten leaves but where the edges have not browned with time. Search for frass, and notice unusual looking flowers, for instance *Hellinsia carphodactyla* pushes up individual florets of Ploughman's Spikenard.

Specialist equipment is available; a beating tray can be used to find larvae on trees and is best done in the spring, by day or night. Even beating low growing plants such as Sea Lavender can produce results such as *Agdistis meridionalis*. A Sweep net is useful for going through tough plants such as Heather in your search for Beautiful Yellow Underwing. Or why not try a feather duster to dislodge Dotted Carpet larvae from fluffy lichen? And if anyone asks what you want for Christmas, tell them to get you a powerful torch. Many larvae feed at night. April and May are optimal months, but a mild night even in the depths of winter might reveal something interesting.

Searching for specific larvae takes mastery and skill and, as Stella Beavan pointed out, you need to know your plants. Look for larval spinnings on Bilberry where the eponymous pugs, harder to identify as free flying adults, can be distinguished from other larvae in Bilberry spinnings by their proleg arrangement. Take note of habitat - Chamomile Sharks don't hide, you just have to know where to look in their shoreland habitat.

Barry told us of the lengths to which a committed Larvae Hunter will go as he described his uncomfortable, tiring, dangerous (?) search for Rosy Marsh Moth larvae in the extensive Cors Caron bog in Wales just to find a new foodplant for this moth. Could he find it? Fortunately, the answer was yes.

So why should we do it? Because it's fun, because you may find a new host plant, which might have implications for conservation, or because you may discover new behaviours which are interesting of themselves and may help others in their search for that species. But be prepared to assume the 'Larvae Hunter's Position' - kneeling, nose to the ground, backside in the air, for hours on end. So along with that torch, you might want some knee pads...

Thank you Barry for a very lively, informative talk.
Sam Stripp

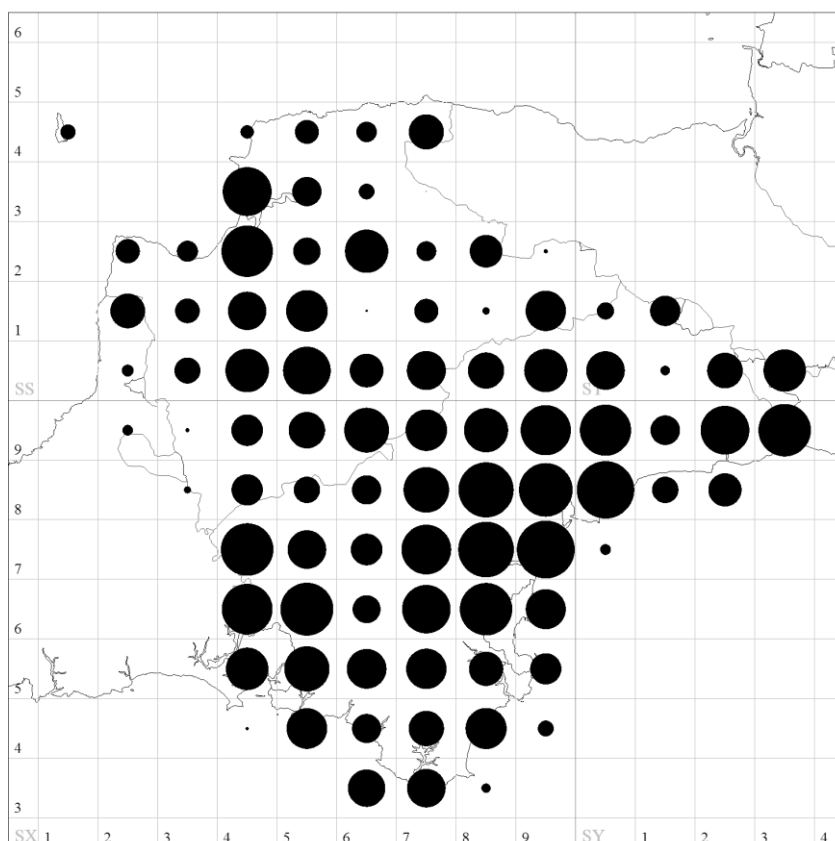
Under-recorded areas of Devon

As you may be aware, moth recorders all over Britain and Ireland are gearing up their activities over 2015 and 2016 for the planned national atlas of macro-moths. It is important that Devon is well recorded for this atlas so that local and national trends for species are reliable – i.e. based on real changes to the species' distribution rather than an artefact of changing recording effort.

The map below (also included in the 2014 Annual Report) gives an indication of the current levels of recording. The number of moth species recorded in each 10km x 10km grid square during the period 2000-2014 is represented by the different sized dots, ranging from over 460 species in SX97 and SY08 to fewer than 30 species in SS61, SS73, SS75, SS83, ST02, ST21, SX28, SX37, SX44 and SY38. The smaller the dot, the fewer moth species have been recorded and, therefore, the more under-recorded that area is likely to be. Of course, some of these squares with very low species counts are coastal, with only small areas of land.

Any help you can give by recording moths in the under-recorded parts of Devon this spring and summer will be very much appreciated. It doesn't have to be night-time trapping of course, there are plenty of macro-moths that fly during the day or can be recorded as distinctive caterpillars. Let's make sure Devon Moth Group plays its full part in the forthcoming national atlas!

Richard Fox



Traps for loan

In keeping with the theme of increasing recording effort this year, just a reminder that Devon Moth Group has moth traps that you can borrow for short or longer-term loan. Currently we have a mains-run, Skinner trap with an actinic bulb available to be loaned out to someone who wants to start trapping regularly in their garden or other location with mains electricity. We also have a new lightweight moth trap (which comprises a Heath trap, actinic bulb and lightweight battery) that can be borrowed for specific moth recording trips to out of the way places. Please contact Barry Henwood on barry.henwood@btinternet.com or 01626 364080.

Devon moths of conservation concern

This important new document, produced by Barry Henwood and Bob Heckford, identifies the moth species for which Devon is particularly significant in the national context. These species, therefore, are a natural focus for conservation effort in the county. The list includes 43 species, 16 micro-moths and 27 macros, providing details of their habitats, ecology and distribution in Devon. Over half the species (24 in total) are specifically associated with coastal habitats in the county, including cliff vegetation, sand dunes and saltmarsh, while woodland is the main habitat of a further 11 species. Many on the list are rare in Devon, but some are relatively widespread here but have limited distribution elsewhere in Britain (e.g. *Eupithecia irriguata* Marbled Pug, *Hydrelia sylvata* Waved Carpet).

The list is available in pdf and Excel formats at <http://devonmoths.org.uk/moth-conservation/> and has been sent to the Devon County ecologist and Devon Local Nature Partnership to inform the Devon State of Nature report.
Richard Fox

Aid to studying pugs

Phil Dean has produced an easy-reference spreadsheet to help with the study of pugs in Devon. It is available on the DMG website at <http://devonmoths.org.uk/moths-devon/guide-to-pugs/>. The spreadsheet contains information on phenology, size, foodplants and whether the species is known from Devon. This should aid narrowing down the possibilities when trying to identify a pug. Remember you are unlikely to catch a pug far from its foodplant. Rearing pugs from the appropriate plant is also a good way to get to grips with this difficult group of moths.
Barry Henwood

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

Saturday 23 May 2015 Hazelwood Farm, Sampford Courtenay. Meet at 20.30 at Hazelwood Farm SX641995. Please phone Paul Butter (01837 82378 or 07807 680455) in advance, if the weather appears unfavourable.

Saturday 6 June & Sunday 7 June 2015 Dunsdon DWT Reserve, nr Holsworthy. Meet at reserve entrance at SS302080/EX22 7JW at 21.00 Saturday for moth trapping and/or 09.30 Sunday to go through traps and walk round the site. **Advance booking required** with Steve Threlkeld sthrelkeld@devonwildlifetrust.org or 01288 331324.

Yellow Horned (Phil Barden)

