



# DEVON MOTH GROUP

Please reply to: The Secretary/Treasurer  
Roy McCormick  
36 Paradise Road  
TEIGNMOUTH  
Devon TQ14 8NR  
Telephone: 01626 779543  
181525131225.devmg@talktalk.net

## NEWSLETTER 2015 ISSUE 3 (June)

The main moth news over the past few weeks has been about immigrant species. There has been a huge influx of *Heliothis peltigera* Bordered Straw into Britain, and some are already predicting 2015 to be a record breaking year for this migrant moth. I suspect that most members who run a trap regularly in Devon will have recorded this species during June. Bordered Straws are also active by day, so some recorders have been fortunate to encounter them out in the sunshine. With such a large influx at the start of summer, we can expect Bordered Straw larvae in the coming weeks (e.g. feeding on flowers of garden Marigold) followed by a 'home grown' generation later on.

Another migrant species arriving in good numbers from the south in recent weeks has been *Spodoptera exigua* Small Mottled Willow (image on p.6). As with Bordered Straw, this species can be quite a frequent migrant in the best years, but is otherwise pretty thin on the ground. I'd never seen one in the 10 years that I've been living and mothing in Devon until this month. I only caught one, but others have fared better; Kim Leaver, for example caught nine Bordered Straw, five Small Mottled Willow and a *Mythimna vitellina* Delicate in his garden near Ottery St Mary on the night of 13.6.2015.

However, the star of the migrant show so far this year has undoubtedly been a good number of *Hyles livornica* Striped Hawk-moth. These have been seen all over southern Britain and Devon has been no exception. Mark Marshall, amazingly, has caught two so far this year at his home nr Blackawton in the South Hams (on 15.5.2015 and 13.6.2015). The second of these is shown in the image below. Other sightings included one on 5.6.2015 at Halberton, north of Cullompton by George Maunder and one in Alphington, Exeter, on 13.6.2015 by Rob Rowden.



Striped Hawk-moth (Mark Marshall)

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](http://www.devonmoths.org.uk)

Meanwhile, away from the excitement of migrant moths, Devon Moth Group member Bob Heckford attended a grand reception at the Linnean Society in Piccadilly, London to accept the HH Bloomer Medal, as announced in the previous issue of this newsletter (see image right, courtesy of The Linnean Society of London).

And finally, our field programme is now underway. We have more meetings this summer than for many years and you are very welcome to attend any or all of them.

Happy mothing!  
Richard Fox



### A new species for Devon and possible third locality in Britain – *Pachyrhabda steropodes*

Whilst out for an early evening walk on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015, I netted a small moth (image below) in a shaded lane near Talewater, a few miles west of Honiton. I tentatively identified it as *P. steropodes*. As Bob Heckford was away, Barry Henwood kindly forwarded my enquiry to Phil Sterling who knew the moth from Dorset. Upon his return, Bob kindly drew my attention to the reference below.



*Pachyrhabda steropodes* (Kim Leaver)

First published as a *Calicotetes* sp. but then unidentified in Parsons, M. [S.], Sterling, M. J. & Sterling, P. H. 2012. Exhibit – Annual Exhibition, 2011. *British Journal of Entomology and Natural History* 25(3): 16. Added to the British list (Sterling & Sterling, in prep.) from Abbotsbury Sub-tropical Gardens, Dorset.

The only other known British locality is Aberglasney Gardens, Camarthenshire, where it was found in 2005, but not identified until it was found at Abbotsbury. A photograph of both the moth and its larval tube appear in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition of Chris Manley's book "British Moths" published earlier this year.

It was probably imported into this country via garden centres. The moth is otherwise known from the southern tip of Australia and Tasmania and feeds in a tube on the sporangia of ferns.

Kim Leaver

### Field Meeting Reports

#### **Hazelwood Farm, Sampford Courtenay, 23.5.2015**

After the warmest day of the year so far in this part of Devon, things were looking fairly promising for the night ahead. Unfortunately the skies cleared so temperatures dropped to a min of 7°C with virtually no wind. A small moon gave us a good night sky with planets and stars clearly visible. Fifteen people turned up including three children and we ended up running seven MV traps of various home-made designs, a 20w Wemlight and an Actinic.

The first moths started to appear about 21.45 with a *Ligdia adustata* Scorched Carpet and a few *Xanthorrhoe montanata* Silver-ground Carpet found by dusking with a net. The first moth into a trap was a lovely green *Pseudoips prasinana* Green Silver-lines on its earliest date at Hazelwood Farm, a surprisingly early date for this site. Two *Ochropacha duplaris* Common Lutestring were found sitting on one trap in the garden area and *Drymonia dodonaea* Marbled Brown appeared at the bottom of the field adjacent to a line of ancient Oak trees. A little later, three *Plagodis dolabraria* Scorched Wing were followed by seven of the rather scarce *Plagodis pulveraria* Barred Umber, which was photographed in due course. Photographs were also taken of the common *Colostygia pectinataria* Green Carpet, several of which had obviously just emerged and were a spectacular shade of turquoise. Another local moth, *Tethea ocellaris* Figure of Eighty made an appearance, as well as one of the "target" species, *Selenia lunularia* Lunar Thorn.

After a few *Eupethicia vulgata* Common Pug and *E. subfuscata* Grey Pug were identified, we also saw the less common *E. tripunctaria* White-spotted Pug in good condition. A couple of *Notodonta anceps* Great Prominent came in too late for some of the visitors, as did another target moth, *Hydriomena ruberata* Ruddy Highflyer, which is uncommon in Devon. In the morning a *Clostera curtula* Chocolate-tip was added to the list, as did two *Laothe populi* Poplar Hawk-moth, which were both species that some of the visitors had hoped to see earlier.

All in all a very successful event with an excellent total of 59 species with many nationally local species not previously seen by many of the night's mothers. Unfortunately, *Cerura vinula* Puss Moth did not appear, nor any *Furcula furcula* Sallow Kitten, and it was too late in the season for *Lampropteryx suffumata* Water Carpet.  
Paul Butter

### White larva: Green Pug

In Issue 2 of Newsletter 2014 Barry Henwood gave an interesting account both of the history of *Pasiphila chloerata* Sloe Pug in the British Isles as well as all known Devon records (a further Devon record was added by Barry in the following Issue). It is a long term overlooked resident species that was not detected in Britain until 1971, by Teddy Pelham-Clinton, because of the adult's similarity to the fairly common and widespread *Pasiphila rectangulata* Green Pug. The larvae of both species feed in the flowers of Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* (although those of Green Pug also feed in flowers other members of the Rosaceae). Teddy published his discovery in 1972: Pelham-Clinton, E. C. 1972. *Chloroclystis chloerata* (Mabille, 1870), a Geometrid Moth new to the British list breeding in southern England. *Entomologist's Gazette* **23**: 151–152, 2 pls. In passing we note that the second edition of John Bradley's *Checklist of Lepidoptera recorded from the British Isles* published in 2000 wrongly gives the journal's name as 'Entomologist's Rec.'

Teddy detected the species as a result of beating two larvae from Blackthorn near Effingham, Surrey on 16 April 1971. Moths resulted from both larvae the following month and confirmed his provisional determination that they were *Chloroclystis chloerata* (now *Pasiphila chloerata*). He states that 'The larvae of *rectangulata* are bright green with a continuous red dorsal line whereas those of *chloerata* are whitish green and the red dorsal line is normally broadly interrupted in the middle.'

Barry described the differences between the adults and said this of the larvae:

'Larvae also show differences. Sloe Pug larvae feed on blackthorn, whereas Green Pug larvae have a variety of different foodplants, including apple, pear, cherry, hawthorn and blackthorn. The larvae of both species feed on the buds and flowers of their foodplants. Larvae of both species are variable with a reddish dorsal line which tends to be broadly interrupted in the middle in Sloe Pug but continuous in Green Pug. The larva of Sloe Pug is greenish white whereas Green Pug is green. So, a greenish white larva with a broadly interrupted, reddish dorsal line on the flowers of blackthorn is a good candidate for Sloe Pug. Rearing through to the adult will enable confirmation.' Photographs of an adult and a larva accompany the text.

This account of the differences in the larvae accords in general with both the information as well as photographs given in Jim Porter's excellent publication *The Colour Identification Guide to Caterpillars of the British Isles*. Porter describes the larva of Sloe Pug as, 'Body dull greenish-white, often with a reddish-purple dorsal line that is most obvious on the thoracic and first abdominal segments.' In contrast that of the Green Pug is given as, 'Body green, usually with a dorsal line that is dark green or dark reddish-purple.'

On that basis, a larva that is white either with or without a reddish-purple (incomplete) dorsal line feeding in flowers of Blackthorn should be that of the Sloe Pug. But this is not so, because two larvae that have been found in Devon have each proved to be Green Pug on emergence of the adult.

The first larva was found by Bob on 4 April 2009 at Heybrook Bay. It was white with an incomplete purplish dorsal line. Unfortunately no photograph was taken.

We found the second at Berry Head on 21 April 2015. As shown by the photograph taken the next day (Fig. 1), it was white with no dorsal line. It then moulted and in its final instar was pale green, with no dorsal line (Fig. 2).

Neither larva fits the accounts cited above for either Sloe or Green Pug. On the basis of admittedly only two larvae, the body colour and existence, or otherwise, of the dorsal line, are more variable between these species than hitherto recorded. So, in our view, any Pug larva found feeding in the flowers of Blackthorn should be reared before it can be safely determined as either species.

Stella Beavan & Bob Heckford





Fig. 1. Green Pug larva as at 22 April 2015



Fig. 2. Same Green Pug larva as at 24 April 2015

## Moths in the Classroom

Driving through the South Devon lanes early in the morning with a cargo of moth paraphernalia and moths made me reflect on the pleasures of retirement. No motorway race tracks, no heaving train carriages, no dulled workers dragging themselves to the daily grind. None of that. Just summer sun, verdant hedges, birds singing and only the occasional tractor to delay my meeting with the bright-eyed primary school children at the other end.

Helen Parr of the Devon Wildlife Trust, whose project on bats included, naturally, what bats eat, had invited me through Barry Henwood to get involved. Her brief to me was as open as could be – (the previous sentence about sums it up) – and the warm response from the teachers with whom she had put me in touch, left me feeling that I might be greeted as a person with something interesting to say rather than a moth nerd who should be left alone to get on with his weird interest. The welcome I received on arrival was touching.

This was my plan. Invite the children to ask me questions first, then do a very brief PowerPoint (seven slides – lots of visual, not many words), set up my moth trap in front of their eyes, then show them some moths in specimen containers I had caught the night before. It worked! We had a very engaged 45 minutes in each school.

So what do primary school children want to know about moths? Lots, in short. We had to stop the questions in order to leave time for the other bits. Here is a sample, in no particular order:

- How many types of moth are there?
- How are moths different from butterflies?
- What do moths eat?
- How many eggs do they lay?
- How big is the biggest moth?
- Why do moths get attracted to lights?
- Don't moths eat clothes?
- How long do moths live?
- Why do bats like to eat moths?
- Does anything else eat them besides bats?
- Where do they hide in the day?
- Do you have to look in special places to find them?

Then the slides prompted more questions about camouflage, defence against predators, and the moth's life cycle. And the light trap (a small Heath trap with actinic light) prompted still more – why do you use egg boxes in the bottom? Why is the light blue? Where do you have to put it? Do you have to leave it on all night?

The live moths really excited them. So much so that one school acquired two specimens of Heart & Dart released inadvertently by an enthusiastic seven year old who took the top off the specimen jar in order to have a closer look. The Buff-tip was the star, though all the moths displayed some feature that intrigued the children.

In all, I visited the following Primary Schools in the Totnes Federation: Diptford, Landscope, Stoke Gabriel, and Harbertonford, as well as Dartmouth Academy (Springboard years).

I enjoyed myself and I am pretty sure the children did. They perhaps learned something too - they know for sure why bats eat moths! Better still, they may have had the seeds of an interest sown.

Peter Shaw

### *Sparganothis pilleriana* – observations on a Devon population

*Sparganothis pilleriana* is a member of the Tortricidae and a Nationally Scarce A species. The larva is very polyphagous. Razowski (2002, *Tortricidae (Lepidoptera) of Europe*. Tortricinae and Chlidanotinae **1**: 123) states that, 'Food plants belong to over 100 species both of deciduous plants and conifers of 30 families'. In the British Isles the species is only known from some of the southern counties in England as well as the Gower Peninsula in South Wales and the Great Orme in North Wales. It is often local but can be extremely common where it occurs. Hancock & Bland (*The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* **5** (2): 143–144) give the habitat as coastal salt marshes, chalk downs, bogs and wet heaths. Curiously no mention is made of coastal cliffs even though one of the known localities cited, the Great Orme, is a coastal limestone area with cliffs. Until 2013 the only Devon localities were Torquay (Barrett, 1905, *The Lepidoptera of the British Islands* **10**: 184–185) and Dartmouth, where it was found by David Agassiz at Rickham, on the coast opposite Salcombe, on 20 July 1964 (unpublished). Then on 24 July 2013 Jack Oughton photographed one during the day sitting on *Ulex europaeus* Gorse at Bolberry Down, on the south Devon coast between Bolt Head and Bolt Tail (owned by the National Trust). This record was submitted to Barry Henwood as County Recorder.



*Sparganothis pilleriana*  
(Bob Heckford)

We decided to try to find larvae at Bolberry Down this year. Hancock & Bland (*loc. cit.*) list 10 species or genera as 'recorded' foodplants, the implication being that there are others in the British Isles. All these are exactly those given over 40 years ago by Bradley, Tremewan & Smith (1973, *British Tortricoid Moths*. Cochyliidae and Tortricidae: Tortricinae: 143–144). Of these only three, *Stachys* spp. woundwort, *Centaurea* spp. knapweed and *Plantago* spp. plantain are known to occur at Bolberry Down.

We had a six figure grid reference for where the moth had been seen in 2013 that seemed to suggest that it was near the main path that runs along the top of the cliff. So on 30 May we looked there, but had no success and so decided to go on a little way and take a track that leads partly down the cliff. Here we almost immediately found a number of similar looking larvae all feeding in spinings towards the tips of *Teucrium scorodonia* Wood Sage and *Lonicera periclymenum* Honeysuckle and as well as one larva in a spinning on *Prunus spinosa* Blackthorn.



*Sparganothis pilleriana* larva  
(Bob Heckford)



Although none of these was a foodplant given by Hancock & Bland, it seemed likely that the larvae were those of *Sparganothis pilleriana* because in general they matched the description given in that publication.

Larvae were found feeding on *Rubus fruticosus* agg. bramble, *Hedera helix* Common Ivy and *Pteridium aquilinum* Bracken on a further visit on 16 June. Again none of these are mentioned as foodplants by Hancock & Bland. *Pteridium aquilinum* was a particular surprise because the larvae of very few species of Lepidoptera feed on this.

Confirmation that we had indeed found larvae of *Sparganothis pilleriana* was provided when the first moth emerged on 18 June.

The question is whether the species occurs more widely along the south Devon coast. There was not time to look at other parts of the cliff between Bolt Head and Bolt Tail, except for a brief excursion to a small area about 400 m away, where one larva and several empty spinnings were found on *Teucrium scorodonia*. However, it seems significant that we found no larvae on any of the plants mentioned above on either side of the path between where we had found larvae and the car park, a distance of about 1 km (and *Teucrium scorodonia* in particular is quite common on both sides of the path for most of that distance).

We encourage members to look for larvae elsewhere. If moths are found they can be determined as this species if they have long and obvious palps as shown in the accompanying photograph. If suspected larvae or adults are found they should at least be photographed because the larvae can be a variable shade of grey-green or green (but always with black heads and prothoracic plates) and the forewing colour and markings of the adult are also variable. The publications mentioned above suggest that the markings on the forewing of the female are either obscure or obsolete, but that has not proved to be the case in the only female that we have so far reared.

We thank the National Trust for granting permission to record on their land.  
Stella Beavan & Bob Heckford

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

Friday 3 July 2015 Bovey Heath DWT reserve. Meet at 21.00 at entrance to the reserve at SX823765 / TQ12 6TU. Please phone Barry Henwood (01626 364080) in advance, if the weather appears unfavourable.

Saturday 11 July 2015 Salcombe Hill, Sidmouth. Meet at 21.00 at the National Trust car park at SY138881. Please phone Kim Leaver (07889 978223) in advance, if the weather appears unfavourable.

Friday 17 July 2015 Meeth DWT reserve, nr Hatherleigh. Meet at 20.30 at the main reserve car park at SS540085. Please phone Paul Butter (01823 82378) in advance, if the weather appears unfavourable.



Small Mottled Willow (Phil Dean)