



DEVON MOTH GROUP

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The exciting immigrant moth activity that has been a real feature of this year has continued into the autumn. Of course, this is traditionally a good time for moths arriving from the south and this autumn has been no exception. There have been quite a few reports of *Agrius convolvuli* Convolvulus Hawk-moth, as well as *Rhodometra sacraria* Vestal, *Spodoptera exigua* Small Mottled Willow and lots of *Autographa gamma* Silver Y and *Macroglossum stellatarum* Humming-bird Hawk-moth. However, the pick of the bunch was, once again, found by Dave Wall. He recorded a *Catocala fraxini* Clifden Nonpareil in a skinner trap at Lypstone near Exmouth on 10.9.2015 (see photo below). Not only is this a fantastic moth to see, but he also managed to catch it as part of the annual, UK-wide Moth Night event, which this year had the theme of migration!

On the subject of Moth Night, many thanks to all those members who have supported the event by entering their moth records from 10-12 September via the website www.mothnight.info. Devon looks pretty healthy at present on the live, online results map (there are even records from Lundy!), but it is not too late to add your sightings.

And finally, now's a good time to think about setting up your Devon Moth Group membership renewal for next year. Subs (£8 for a single member, £12 for a family) are due from 1st January and can be paid direct (e.g. by Standing Order) to Devon Moth Group at NatWest Bank, Den Road, Teignmouth, TQ14 8AR account number: 94850593, sort code: 60-21-47. It is important that you use your own name as the reference in the payment so that we can match it to you and renew your membership. That way you won't miss out on any newsletters or get Roy chasing you for subs! Many thanks.

Richard Fox



Clifden Nonpareil caught at Lypstone (Dave Wall)

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

Field Meeting Reports

Meeth Quarry DWT reserve, 17.7.2015

There was a good turnout for this event with the potential of the site luring many moths from south Devon. Conditions were moderately good although the initial cloud cover disappeared earlier than we would have liked, with the temperature falling to around 12°C when the traps were switched off, soon after midnight.

Early species to be recorded included the very attractive, bright yellow and chestnut marked micro *Agapeta zoegana* and the Plume moth *Amblyptilia punctidactyla*, which were both netted before dark. Interestingly we noticed the former species aggregating amongst tall grasses presumably in some mating or courtship behaviour. Another less frequently encountered moth also showed itself early on, *Euchoeca nebulata* Dingy Shell, immediately recognisable by its upright posture and wings pushed forward and tightly shut together in butterfly style. An *Epione repandaria* Bordered Beauty was also netted as dusk fell, a lovely fresh specimen mustard yellow edged in chestnut brown.

As it became darker the MV lamps started to attract moths in. A *Mesoligia furuncula* Cloaked Minor was rather unicolorous in the form seen, as was the tired brown *Pseudoterpnina pruinata* Grass Emerald. Second broods of *Colocasia coryli* Nut-tree Tussock, *Notodonta dromedarius* Iron Prominent, *Selenia tetralunaria* Purple Thorn and *Ptilodon capucina* Coxcomb Prominent all made an appearance. *Brachylomia viminalis* Minor Shoulder-knot, *Abrostola triplasia* Dark Spectacle, *Zeuzera pyrina* Leopard and *Hydrelia sylvata* Waved Carpet were amongst those species new to some of the group. Biggest moth of the night was a female *Lasiocampa quercus* Oak Eggar, which was the size of a small bird, and most beautiful was maybe the fresh *Scoliopteryx libatrix* Herald, which will soon be tucked away for the winter to re-emerge next year to herald the spring. Overall 90 species were recorded on the night with Waved Carpet the only Notable species.



Herald (Paul Butter)

Many of the moths were retained overnight to show to Butterfly Conservation members who came on the following day for the butterfly walk around the reserve and were much admired and photographed.

Paul Butter

Eggesford Forest, 1.8.2015

The nights before this event had been amongst the coldest on record for summer months – some parts of the county had experienced frosts! So, it was with no great expectation that a small group of us assembled in Hilltown Wood, part of the Eggesford Forest complex, which is managed by the Forestry Commission. But the evening was mild and cloud cover rolled in to retain the day's warmth; prospects started to look up.

Hand netting as dark fell turned up several *Schrankia taenialis* White-lined Snout, all with curiously white ends to their wings. This is a rather scarce species, so a promising start. Then the light traps – we had seven between us – started to pull in the moths. *Hydrelia sylvata* Waved Carpet was among the early arrivals, another scarce species. The following flood carried several nice-to-see moths including the ash-feeding pyralid *Euzophera pinguis*, *Nycteola revayana* Oak Nycteoline, *Laspeyria flexula* Beautiful Hook-tip and *Chloroclysta citrata* Dark Marbled Carpet. The species counted grew and, as we started our last round of the traps, breached the 100 mark. A solitary *Mormo maura* Old Lady was among the last recorded, and a *Mesoleuca albicillata* Beautiful Carpet the very last. Exciting moths to finish with.

Our final tally was 127 species! Given that the 10km square SS61 was among the worst recorded in the county prior to our visit, this was more than pleasing. Indeed, before this year only 10 macromoths had been recorded from the square – we found 90! Paul Butter has made further records from the square this year, so a gaping hole in cover for the forthcoming 2018 national moth atlas has been partially filled – although there probably remains a further 300 macros to be found.

Since we were trapping in a conifer plantation, we might have expected to catch a fair few specialists of pines, spruces or firs. In fact, we found just two: *Macaria liturata* Tawny-barred Angle and *Deileptenia ribeata* Satin Beauty. The larvae of all the other species feed on broad-leaved trees and shrubs, or on herbs and grasses. This shows just how important remnants of broadleaved woodland, together with herb-rich ride margins and patches of scrub are in these conifer plantations.

Rob Wolton

Moth Night 2015 Wembury Point, 11.9.2015

The forecast was not good but despite this five, including myself, turned up at an exposed, windy and wet National Trust car park. Showers turned to heavy rain as the evening progressed, and we were only able to continue in at least a modicum of comfort as Dave Gibbon, who arrived in his campervan and set up an awning which kept the worst of the rain off us. We had three traps, my MV and actinic lights and one brought by Paul Butter.

The hope of a migrant or two kept us going, but unsurprisingly, given the conditions, it was a slow night. The first species to appear was *Hepialus sylvina* Orange Swift, followed by other common species such as *Phlogophora meticulosa* Angle Shades, *Xestia c-nigrum* Setaceous Hebrew Character and *Hypena proboscidalis* Snout. Only a disappointing 15 species were recorded on the night. We persisted stoically until 10.30pm when, with very few moths coming to light, we decided to call it a night.

John Boon



Angle Shades (John Boon)

Moth Night 2015 Bolberry Down, Malborough 12.9.2015

Despite it being a far from perfect evening, with a strong cool breeze, a small but determined group assembled in the car park at 7pm on the last night of Moth Night 2015. Finding sites that were reasonably sheltered was not easy, but eventually about eight traps (a mixture MV and 15W Actinic) were put out in an open area of gorse, scrub and grass. The bushes offering a little protection.



Grass Eggar (Barry Henwood)

An early highlight was a *Lasiocampa trifolii* Grass Eggar attracted to an MV, although most traps eventually managed to catch one during the evening. This is a large and spectacular moth which is nationally scarce and confined to a few coastal localities, mainly in the south and south-west. Also seen early on in the evening were *Agonopterix umbellana* and several *Triodia sylvina* Orange Swift. Other resident species that appeared included *Gortyna flavago* Frosted Orange, always a lovely moth to see, *Aspitates ochrearia* Yellow Belle, *Mythimna pallens* Common Wainscot and *Phlogophora meticulosa* Angle Shades.

Migrants included three *Autographa gamma* Silver Y, two *Nomophila noctuella* Rush Veneer and a *Mythimna unipuncta* White-speck. There were a few frantic moments at one trap when a call went out for a larger box. One member was crouched on the ground trying to prevent a large moth from flying away! Luckily it was boxed and viewed well by everybody - the highlight of the

evening, an *Agrius convolvuli* Convolvulus Hawk-moth! Incidentally Barry Henwood left one trap out all night and caught another different Convolvulus Hawk-moth.

As the wind gradually increased during the evening, it was decided to pack up at about 11.30pm during which process a further migrant was found – an *Agrotis ipsilon* Dark Sword-grass. In total 39 species were recorded, which included two larvae (*Macrothylacia rubi* Fox Moth and *Spilosoma lubricipeda* White Ermine) and a mine (*Enteuche acetosae*). So despite the wind, a very successful evening.

Thanks must go to the National Trust for allowing us to visit the site. Thanks also to Rob Wolton for his help and support, Barry Henwood for identification and for all those who attended for making it so worthwhile and enjoyable.

Phil Barden



Convolvulus Hawk-moth (Barry Henwood)

Yellow-legged Clearwing at Dunsland Park

The Devon Fungus Group visited Dunsland Park (SS4005, VC4), which is owned by the National Trust and holds several mature trees. Within an open field stood a mature Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) tree that drew our attention. John Day calculated the tree to be between 500 to 700 years old. Low down on the main trunk were two freshly emerged specimens of *Synanthedon vespiformis* Yellow-legged Clearwing.

Since the year 2000, there have been 12 Devon records of this species submitted to the county recorder with a majority of these coming from Stover Country Park (five) and Lydford Gorge (three). Prior to this sighting, there have been just three records from VC4 since the year 2000. For some of us, this was undoubtedly the highlight of the day.

Andrew Cunningham



Yellow-legged Clearwing (Andrew Cunningham)

Cydia illutana – new to Devon

On 27.5.2015 I trapped in an area of woodland near Bere Ferrers, West Devon using a Skinner trap with a 15W synergetic green bulb. It was mixed woodland and contained a reasonable patch of Larch (*Larix sp* – showing features of *decidua*), as well as other conifer species but mainly Norway Spruce (*Picea abies*). I was hoping to catch *Eupithecia lariciata* Larch Pug but with this I was unsuccessful.

The inspection of the trap in the morning resulted in a reasonable list of about 50 species and included a dark micro-moth which I was unable to identify at first, but when examined later showed features of *Cydia illutana*. This is a moth whose larvae feed on the cones of Larch and some other conifers so I consulted the field guide 'Conifer Moths of the British Isles' by Jon Clifton and Jim Wheeler. This showed that there were several species, namely *Cydia indivisa*, *C. coniferana* and *C. cognatana*, that were very similar, although after reading the descriptions *C. illutana* still seemed the most likely.

Cydia illutana from Devon (Phil Barden)



Upon dissection it proved to be a male that showed the characteristics of *C. illutana*, although the only guide to the genitalia that I had was the photograph on the dissection website. Photographs of the moth and genitalia were viewed by Barry Henwood and Bob Heckford who confirmed the identification.

According to UK Moths it is a scarce species that was first recorded in Britain in 1975, although it was apparently only identified when another turned up in Berkshire in 1984. It now appears to be spreading as there have been several records at other locations. The larvae apparently feed on the seeds in the cones of coniferous trees such as European Larch (*Larix decidua*), Silver Fir (*Abies alba*) and Norway Spruce. The adult's main flight period is May and June.

It would be surprising if this moth did not occur in other parts of Devon so would be worth looking for both as an adult or as larvae. Some details of the larvae can be found on the Eurasian Tortricoidae website (<http://wbd.etibioinformatics.nl>) and the following is taken from that:

“*Cydia illutana* is an univoltine species. The females deposit their eggs on young cones in the second half of June. The larvae feed in the cones and bore into the seeds. The excrements are ejected and remain, mixed with resin, attached to the cones. Excrements can also be deposited in the feeding tunnels. The larvae continue to feed in spring after hibernation. Pupation takes place inside a web on the soil, or in rotten wood, in May.”

Excellent photographs of the moth can be found on various web sites such as UK Moths, Hants Moths and especially the Lepiforum site.

Thanks must go to Barry Henwood and Bob Heckford for confirming identification and giving additional information.

Phil Barden

Bats and moths

In July we were independently asked if we could help with moth trapping and identification as part of an ongoing research project in the Bovey Valley (part of the East Dartmoor NNR) looking at Barbastelle bats that was being undertaken by Bristol University. The object was to try to help find out more about their prey species. Apparently Barbastelle specialise in feeding on “eared” moths and it was hoped some trapping could be undertaken where the female bats were currently feeding.

There are only about 5,000 Barbastelle in the British Isles and they only occur in southern Britain.

The preferred site was on private land, so not only was it a chance to help the University project but also to visit a site that otherwise would not be accessible.

'Eared' moths are those with auditory organs, usually of a tympanal form which consists of a membrane stretched across a frame that is backed by a tympanal air sac. Further details can be found in Malcolm Scoble's excellent book *The Lepidoptera. Form, Function and Diversity*. In the British Isles, most families of the so-called Macrolepidoptera have some form of auditory organ, whereas most families of the so-called Microlepidoptera do not, but the Pyralidae, for example, do.

We were provided with a list of known prey species compiled from DNA-based sequencing of collected Barbastelle droppings from two other sites in the Bovey Valley. Most of the species were Macrolepidoptera. Rather surprisingly, the list included two species in the Arctiinae: *Spilosoma lubricipeda* White Ermine and *S. luteum* Buff Ermine. In general members of that family are considered to be distasteful to predators, a good example being *Tyria jacobaeae* Cinnabar, which has recognised warning colours (crimson and black adults and yellow and black larvae). Both White Ermine and Buff Ermine are toxic as they contain histamine. On the basis that DNA of both species was found in their droppings this must mean that the bats had eaten at least parts of the moth, but we wonder if they found them distasteful and, if so, whether they had the ability to 'avoid' them in the future.

The date chosen to trap was 10 August. Barry and I turned up, Barry with three traps whilst I had a torch! The person in charge of the project and two colleagues were also present, as was one Barbastelle for part of the time. Unfortunately the night was clear and cool and not many moths arrived at the traps, and none was particularly special in entomological terms. The total number of species was 33.

Nevertheless those involved with the project seemed very pleased and one in particular was very taken by the colour and variety of species and took quite a lot of photographs.

How a list of species at one site will help the understanding of what the bat's prey might be is something that we did not fully understand, but we are not the researchers. If we have helped in some way then that's the main object. Bob Heckford & Barry Henwood

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

Thursday 29 October 2015 Autumn indoor meeting at the Kenn Centre, Kennford (www.kenncentre.co.uk) 19.30 for 20.00 start. Illustrated talk by Andrew Whitehouse, Buglife entitled *Getting Britain Buzzing – how we can help our pollinator populations to recover*.

Saturday 12 December 2015 Christmas meal at the Welcome Stranger, Liverton (www.thewelcome.co.uk) at 19.30. Full details will appear in the next newsletter.

Thursday 28 January 2016 Annual General Meeting and Winter indoor meeting at the Kenn Centre, Kennford (www.kenncentre.co.uk) 19.30 for 20.00 start. Illustrated talk by Richard Fox, Butterfly Conservation entitled *The Secret Lives of Butterflies*.

Welcome to New Members

Paul and Toni Lister, Payhembury