



# DEVON MOTH GROUP

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## NEWSLETTER 2019 ISSUE 2 (June)

Since the amazing heatwave back in February, and the associated arrival of immigrant moths, the weather has been generally poor for night-time moth recording and there has been little to report by way of interesting sightings. Indeed, although we are approaching the peak of the moth season (in terms of species richness), the talk among moth-ers in Devon and elsewhere in the UK is about disappointing numbers in light-traps.

Looking back to last year then instead, you will hopefully have received and enjoyed the Devon Moth Group 2018 Annual Report. Featuring *Cirrhia gilvago* Dusky-lemon Sallow on the cover (right), the first record of this species in the county since 1976, the report summarises over 75,000 records of micro- and macro-moth species for 2018. Over 200 people contributed during the year – a fantastic effort! Many thanks to everyone who submitted sightings and especially to the highly skilled and extremely dedicated DMG team of volunteers, led by Barry Henwood, the County Moth Recorder, who collated, computerised and checked all these records: Phil Barden, Bob Heckford, Kim Leaver, Phil Dean and Darryl Rush.

Finally, just a reminder that our programme of field meetings starts soon. The first event is on the evening of Friday 14 June at New England Wood, near Ivybridge. These meetings are a great opportunity to see some new species and enjoy the company of other moth enthusiasts, and members are welcome to bring friends and family along. The full programme is in the Annual Report and on the DMG website events page (<https://devonmoths.org.uk/events/>). As always, if the weather is dodgy please check the website or the Facebook page, or contact the event leader, before travelling, in case the event has been cancelled.  
Richard Fox

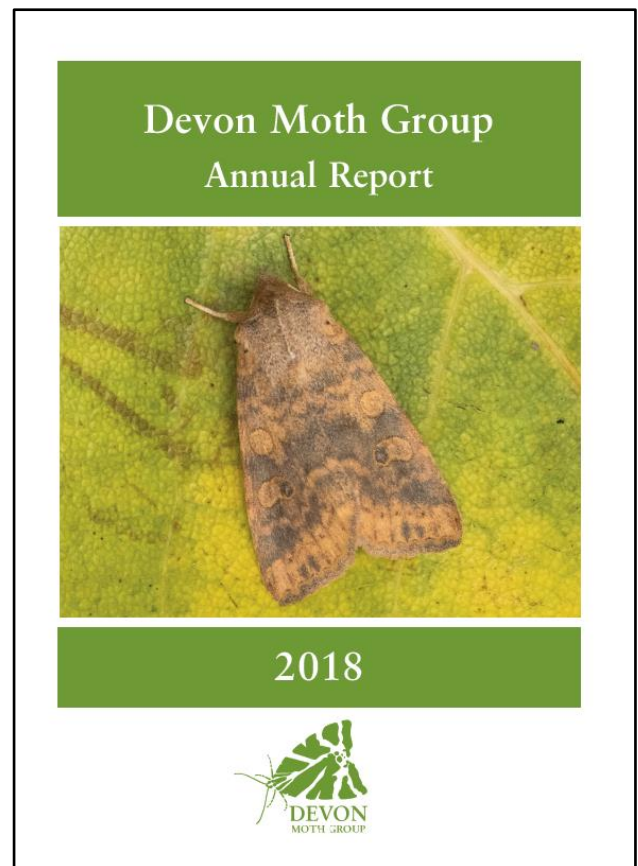
### Devon's special moths

There are over 1,600 species of plant, animal and fungus occurring in Devon which are either nationally uncommon or nationally threatened. Far too many for each to have its own conservation plan. So, which of them should we focus attention on? Which are the ones for which we in Devon have a particular responsibility, such that if we don't look after them, they are at risk perhaps even of extinction at a national level?

To answer this, the Devon Local Nature Partnership, led by Devon County Council, asked experts for their views on what these Devon Special Species may be, including members of the Devon Moth Group. In all 96 species of plant, animal and fungus were selected, including marine ones, and [announced](#) last year. Of these 96, a high

**Members of Council: Nicola Bacciu (Membership & Distribution) Phil Dean (Ordinary member) Richard Fox (Chairman)  
Barry Henwood (Recorder) Roy McCormick (Secretary/Treasurer) Rob Price (Publicity) Rob Wolton (Conservation)**

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proportion is moths: no less than nine species. This reflects the much better knowledge we have of moth distribution and changes in abundance than for most other invertebrates – carry on the good recording work!

The nine species are:

*Coleophora linosyridella*, a case-bearing micromoth

*Ectoedemia heckfordi*, a leaf-mining micromoth

*Infurcitinea albicomella*, a micromoth

*Hadena albimacula* White Spot

*Hemaris tityus* Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth

*Leucania putrescens* Devonshire Wainscot

*Leucochlaena oditis* Beautiful Gothic

*Lygephila cracca* Scarce Blackneck

*Photedes morrisii* Morris's Wainscot

Barry Henwood, Bob Heckford and I have drawn up a conservation action plan for them, which can be found on the [Moth Conservation](#) page of our website. It contains information on where the species can be found in Devon, on their habitats and larval food plants, and on the actions needed to retain healthy populations in the county. Your help, as members of the Devon Moth Group, in delivering these actions would be very welcome.

I thought it might be helpful over the next few issues of the DMG newsletter to highlight some of the problems affecting these moths, and what we can do for them. No less than seven of the nine species are closely linked to our coastline, highlighting the outstanding importance of our coastal cliffs and slopes for invertebrate conservation. So, I thought I would start with four of the coastal macro-moths: White Spot, Devonshire Wainscot, Beautiful Gothic and Scarce Blackneck.

In Devon, the nationally rare **White Spot** is found on the coastal cliffs and slopes at Beer and Branscombe, where the larvae feed on the seeds of Nottingham Catchfly *Silene nutans*, itself a rare plant, occurring in Devon only on the greensand and chalk sea cliffs between Salcombe Mouth and Whitlands Ciff in East Devon (A New Flora of Devon, 2016). The plant is a species of short, broken calcareous turf as found on unstable coastal slopes and cliff tops, and the health of the moth is likely to be closely linked to its fortunes.

Unfortunately, the Catchfly's precarious habitat means that assessing its status is far from easy. If any member can help with this – safely! – then please do get in touch. Perhaps by drone? The plant's abundance is thought to be threatened by non-native plants such as Russian-vine *Fallopia baldschuanica* originating from privately owned chalets to the east of Branscombe Mouth. If so, then we will need to work together with major landowners such as the National Trust and Natural England to see what can be done to address this.



White Spot (Chris Manley)

The **Devonshire Wainscot**, although nationally rare, is found at numerous sites on both our northern and southern coasts: Devon is a national stronghold for the moth so it is appropriately named. The larvae feed on a range of fine-leaved grasses. Here the main threat is invasion by scrub. Gorse and blackthorn thickets are now dominant over many stretches of our coastlines, replacing the herb and grass-rich turf required by the Wainscot and indeed many other invertebrates. This scrub invasion is the result of land no longer being grazed because it is not commercially profitable to do so and especially because of conflicts between walkers and their dogs and livestock. We need to alert landowners such as the National Trust to the existence of the Devonshire Wainscot, and do what we can to support and to encourage them to enter environmental support schemes like Countryside Stewardship through which we the public help to pay for the necessary management.





Devonshire Wainscot (Barry Henwood) (left) and Beautiful Gothic (Keith Tailby) (right)

The **Beautiful Gothic** has similar requirements to the last species. Again, it is nationally rare, Devon is a national stronghold, and its larvae feed on grasses. But it is not restricted to coastal cliffs and slopes being also found on level areas, and neither is it found on our northern coast, just the southern one. The main Devon sites are Berry Head and Prawle Point. Scrub control is likely to be the key to retaining strong populations of this species, and again we must work with landowners to help them with this, and encourage their entry into environmental schemes. Given the moth's restricted distribution, this is one which we need to monitor particularly carefully: if you can help (safely!) through light-trapping, or through larval searches, please do get in contact. As always, do please make a note of the numbers of individuals found, not just presence. Does the moth breed at Dawlish Warren? There is a single record on the database from this site, made 26 years ago.

Finally, the **Scarce Blackneck** is a third rare species for which Devon is a national stronghold – actually, *the* national stronghold. Here it is restricted to the north coast, being found at Hartland Point, Buck's Mills and Bull Point. There are also unconfirmed records for Heddon's Mouth on Exmoor. In its coastal cliff, sometimes rocky, habitat, the larvae feed both on Wood Vetch *Vicia sylvatica* and Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca*. We need to assess the current state of the sites where the moth is known to occur. How are the food plants faring? Are these habitats also threatened by lack of grazing and scrub invasion? Can you help with this? (Searches for the nocturnal larvae need to be carried out with extreme caution given the dangers of working on cliff edges and slopes at any time, let alone night). Also, does the moth occur at Heddon's Mouth? Can you light trap here (with the landowner's permission, of course)?



Scarce Blackneck (Barry Henwood)

DMG can reimburse mileage costs for members willing to undertake survey work on any of Devon's special moths, but please contact DMG Council ([info@devonmoths.org.uk](mailto:info@devonmoths.org.uk)) in advance to discuss.

Rob Wolton, Conservation Officer

### Campaign for a Wilder Future

Many of you will already know of the campaign by the Wildlife Trusts for a wilder future. We are all painfully aware that the dreadful decline in wildlife including insects. Among invertebrates there are good data for butterflies and moths from the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme and the Rothamsted Insect Survey showing declines in abundance. Please sign up to the campaign from the link below and you will be provided with suggested actions you can take. These include writing to your MP to influence the content of the forthcoming Environment Bill. This is a rare opportunity, so please get involved. <https://action.wildlifetrusts.org/page/40436/data/1>

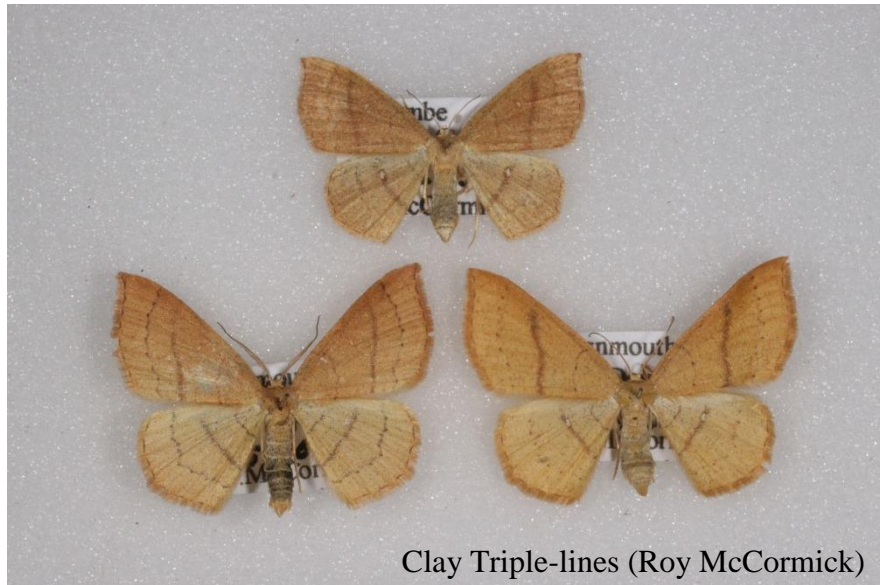
Barry Henwood

## Cyclophora confusion

In the October 2017 newsletter, we reported the capture and identification of a *Cyclophora ruficiliaria* Jersey Mocha in August of that year by Roy McCormick. Jersey Mocha is a scarce immigrant and recent colonist in Devon and Britain. Fortunately, it was a female and Roy managed to obtain eggs. The resulting progeny showed that the species was in fact *C. linearia* Clay Triple-lines, a widespread and common resident. The image (right) shows Roy's specimens, with the original misidentified female above and offspring below, as exhibited at the annual exhibitions of the Amateur Entomologists' Society and British Entomological and Natural History Society in 2018.

It just goes to show how tricky the identification of these *Cyclophora* species can be.

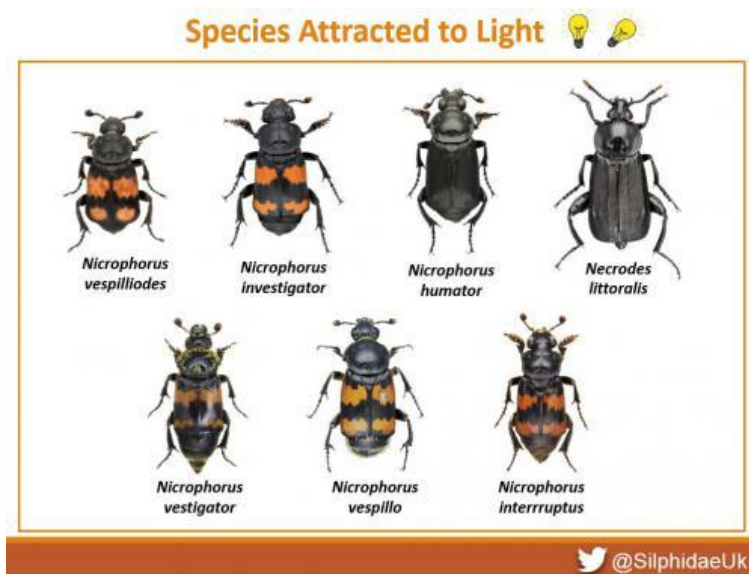
Richard Fox



## Recording Carrion Beetles in moth traps

I recently met Ashleigh Wiffen, one of the people who runs the Silphidae (Carrion Beetle) Recording Scheme. She would very much appreciate members sending in photos of any Carrion Beetles that turn up at light traps. The records can be sent to Ashleigh at [silphidae@brc.ac.uk](mailto:silphidae@brc.ac.uk). A key to Silphids that are attracted to light can be found at [http://www.coleoptera.org.uk/sites/www.coleoptera.org.uk/files/Silphidae%20Key 2019%20version.pdf](http://www.coleoptera.org.uk/sites/www.coleoptera.org.uk/files/Silphidae%20Key%202019%20version.pdf) if you want to identify the species for yourself but, if not, a photo with normal location/date info is good enough.

Kim Leaver



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

Friday 14 June 2019 New England Wood, near Ivybridge. Meet at 21.00 at New England Wood Devon Wildlife Trust nature reserve at SX597543 (nearest postcode is PL7 5BA). Please phone Barry Henwood (01626 364080) by 18.30, if the weather appears unfavourable.

Friday 21 June 2019 Dart Valley Devon Wildlife Trust Reserve. Meet at 21.00 at Newbridge car park at SX711708 (nearest postcode TQ13 7NT). Please phone Barry Henwood (01626 364080) by 18.30, if the weather appears unfavourable.

Saturday 6 July 2019 Plymbridge Woods, near Plymouth. Meet at 21.00 at Plymbridge Woods National Trust car park at SX523586 on the Plympton side of the river. Please phone Dave Gibbon (01752 666231 and 07904 129309) in advance if the weather appears unfavourable.