



# DEVON MOTH GROUP

Please reply to: The Secretary/Treasurer  
Roy McCormick  
36 Paradise Road  
TEIGNMOUTH  
Devon TQ14 8NR  
Telephone: 01626 7795

## NEWSLETTER 2019 ISSUE 3 (July)

After a poor spring, with generally inclement conditions for moth recording, the weather has been much improved over the past month and the moths have responded. In addition to the various exciting sightings reported later in this newsletter, Bob Heckford notched up yet another first for Devon when he found mines of *Ectoedemia heringella* on *Quercus ilex* Evergreen Oak in Exeter on 1st July 2019.

More day-time finds of note included a mating pair of Lunar Hornet Moths *Sesia bembeciformis* in the Heddon Valley, Exmoor by Simon Phelps on 9th July. There are no previous records of this species in the Devon part of Exmoor. One was seen in Plymouth too in the same week

Also significant was the Wood Tiger *Parasemia plantaginis* (photo right) recorded by Roy Williams at Headland Warren, Dartmoor on 21st June. This is the first Devon record for several years.  
Richard Fox



## Field Meeting Reports

### **New England Wood, 14.6.19**

This event followed a spell of wet weather. The forecast was ok, but as we arrived there was a heavy shower. Nevertheless, the rain stopped and the light traps were set up in the mud, after waiting to see what the weather would do. About 12 people attended the event including two children. Soon after starting the generator the first moth arrived, which was a beautiful, fresh Orange Moth *Angerona prunaria*. That was a good start as until that point those attending must have wondered what they had let themselves in for! In the end we recorded 53 species including Brindled White-spot *Paractropis similaria*, Pretty Chalk Carpet *Melanthia procellata*, Clay Triple-lines *Cyclophora linearia* and Peach Blossom *Thyatira batis*. Thank you to Jackie Gage, Devon Wildlife Trust nature reserves officer for facilitating the event.

Barry Henwood

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

### **New Bridge, 21.6.19**

In contrast to the event the previous week, the ground was dry and we had no rain. However, the temperature was low so conditions were not ideal. In fact, the species total ended up considerably lower. Nevertheless, about 14 people attended. Jackie Gage, Devon Wildlife Trust nature reserves officer took the attendees for a walk through the reserve while I set up the traps. On the walk Nightjars were seen and heard, as well as Daubenton's Bat and a Dormouse nest. Although the moths were few, the small crowd enjoyed the event. A total of 31 species were recorded including Brindled White-spot *Parectropis similaria*, Pinion-streaked Snout *Schrankia costaestrigalis*, Double-line *Mythimna turca* and *Spatalistic bifasciana*. Thank you to Jackie Gage for facilitating the event.

Barry Henwood

### **Plymbridge Woods, 6.7.19**

The evening went well with favourable weather conditions. I was joined by new member Tom Clark and my friend Frank Johns from Cornwall. Unfortunately no other DMG members turned up with their traps. The National Trust ranger Chris Acraman shepherded the 12 or so members of the public between my 15W Actinic Skinner trap set up with the side of my motorhome acting as a white sheet and Frank's 125W MV set up on a white sheet. My lamp attracted 33 species and Frank's about 60. Highlights for me were Dingy Shears *Apterogenum ypsilon*, which I've never seen before, Mouse Moth *Amphipyra tragopoginis* and Satin Beauty *Deileptenia ribeata*.

The members of the public appreciated the variety of patterns and colours of the moths and expressed their thanks at the end of the evening. The second of these meetings will go ahead as planned on 24th August and I hope more DMG members will be able to attend.

Dave Gibbon



Dingy Shears (left) and Satin Beauty (right) (Dave Gibbon)

### **Small Ranunculus new to Devon in Exeter city centre**

The Exe Bridges roundabout system includes three pedestrian subways which are lit day and night. Since May 2018 staff at Devon Biodiversity Records Centre have been recording any moths they see roosting by day in these man-made tunnels and this has resulted in a modest list of mostly 'common or garden' species. However, on 25th June I was surprised to find a pristine Small Ranunculus (*Hecatera dysodea*) on the wall, the orange spots along the outer cross lines of the forewings looking like they had been carefully drawn on with a child's felt-tip pen. This is believed to be the first record for Devon.

The food plant of Small Ranunculus is Prickly Lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*) and possibly other related composites including Wall Lettuce (*Mycelis muralis*) and cultivated lettuces. In continental Europe, the moth is a ruderal species associated with unmown urban road verges and brownfield habitats where tall weeds are allowed to grow to maturity (the larvae feed on flowers and seeds). It appears to be capable of rapid spread as an adventive species (e.g. Landolt *et al.* 2010) where suitable habitat is available. Waring and Townsend (2009) refer to an association with allotments in England.

Small Ranunculus (Phil Sansum)



Prickly Lettuce is a reasonably frequent wild plant along the urban Exe river corridor where the moth was seen and also in some other areas of Devon. Members who encounter flowering lettuce plants this summer are encouraged to check the inflorescences for caterpillars. Writing before the extinction of the moth in Britain (and its subsequent recolonisation) Barrett (1893-1907) remarked on the adult moth's partiality for feeding at Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*) flowers; this could also be a worthwhile avenue to explore for further records.  
Phil Sansum

#### References

- Barrett, C.G. (1893–1907). The Lepidoptera of the British Isles. 11 vols. Reeve and Co., London.
- Landolt, P.J., Worth, R.A. & Zack, R.S. (2010). First Report of Hecatera dysodea (Denis and Schiffermüller) (Noctuidae) in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. *The Journal of the Lepidopterists' Society* 64, 192-196.
- Waring, P. & Townsend, M. (2009). Field guide to the moths of Great Britain and Ireland. Illustrated by Richard Lewington. 2nd Edition. British Wildlife Publishing, Gillingham.

#### Multiple occurrence of *Crombrughia laetus*, Scarce Light Plume - confirmed by gen det.

On the night of Saturday 29th June 2019, I was shattered. A long drive from Dartmouth to London and back on Thursday, a trip on Friday to Cornwall with 1,500 plus moths of 160 species into the small hours. But conditions looked good again, so I fired up the three garden traps.

Inspecting one of my traps about 10.30pm (an MV in front of a large backsheet, with a couple of actinic tubes hanging to one side) I spotted a very small Plume species. Whatever it was, it was clearly new for the garden. I potted it, and then noticed a second. I potted that too. I was intrigued and, back in the house, looked at the guides and thought it looked like *Crombrughia distans*. This has been reported from Devon, but not for the last couple of years at least. But I couldn't help thinking it looked rather closer to *Crombrughia laetus* - the Scarce Light Plume. But it was a migrant with, as its name suggested, very few records. So what are the odds of two? Or indeed three, as on the next round of trip visits at midnight, another one was potted - along with a Vestal *Rhodometra sacraria*. Other migrants were three Silver Y *Autographa gamma* and fifteen Diamond-back Moth *Plutella xylostella*.

With three in the fridge, next morning I sent images to Barry Henwood, suggesting the tentative identification of *C. laetus*. To my surprise, he also thought that was what they were.

Sunday 30th June, I again fired up the traps. Before I had a chance to release the three from the fridge, I had potted another three to join them. Half a dozen in the garden of what was, until this point, a very rare migrant? Surely

not. So I sent a specimen for gen det to Graeme J. Smith in Bishop's Stortford, who has been checking over some of my trickier moths - and released the other five. Graeme came back on Wednesday 3rd, confirming that the example was indeed *C. laetus*.

On the 2nd July, I caught a seventh. All seven came to the one trap. None of the seven were actually in the trap. The first six were high above the MV lamp, on the white backsheet, amongst the mass of flies, midges and ichneumon wasps. The seventh was low down behind the trap, but also on the backsheet.

Mark Marshall



*Crombrugghia laetus* (Mark Marshall)

### *Sitochroa verticalis*

Whilst somewhat distracted by the multiple occurrences of *Crombrugghia laetus* detailed above, I spotted a medium-sized moth that again looked unusual. It was holding its wings open and looked superficially perhaps like a carpet moth. I took a couple of quick photos and stuck it in a pot. It had a very strongly marked underwing pattern, but continued to sit in the pot with wings open.

I couldn't quite place it. Initially I thought maybe Yellow Belle, on the evidence of the underwing pattern, but that ID didn't feel right. I shared the image with a few people online, and Ben Sale came back suggesting a Crambid, *Sitochroa verticalis*. I sent images across to Barry Henwood, who not only confirmed the ID, but also said it was the first confirmed modern record for Devon. It is possible that it was a migrant, coming over with the others that night.

In my sleep-deprived state, I tried to get better images, but the moth came out the pot like a bullet out a gun. It wasn't retrapped and so the challenge is for somebody to another - and some decent images!

Mark Marshall



*Sitochroa verticalis* (Mark Marshall)

### Small Marbled *Eublemma parva*

On 4th July, Rob Wolton, Rob Skinner, Paul Butter, Jenny Plackett and I conducted a survey of Nottingham Catchfly *Silene nutans* between Beer and Branscombe. This is the foodplant of one of Devon's Special Moth Species the White Spot *Hadena albimacula*.

The purpose of this note is not to report the findings, but to record that Rob Skinner noticed a small moth at rest on Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* at the base of the cliff towards Branscombe. It was Small Marbled, a scarce immigrant moth, which just happened to be at rest on its foodplant. The larvae feed in the flowers pushing up florets and thus giving a clue as to their presence. However, larvae of *Phycitodes saxicola*, *Apodia bifractella* and *Ptocheuusa paupella* all push up florets in a similar way. The larva of *P.saxicola* is similar but, unlike Small Marbled, has a purplish red dorsal stripe. Interestingly, Sarah Alsbury trapped a Small Marbled at Smallbrook near Newton St Cyres on 6th July. There are likely to be larvae around in August.

Barry Henwood



Small Marbled (Barry Henwood)

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

Saturday 20 July 2019 Dawlish Warren. Meet at 21.00 at the Dawlish Warren car park at SX980787 (postcode EX7 0NF). Please phone Kim Leaver (07889 978223) in advance if the weather appears unfavourable.

Friday 26 July 2019 / Saturday 27 July 2019 Norman Lockyer Observatory, Sidmouth. Meet at 21.30 on 26th for moth recording and/or 10.00 on 27th to inspect the catch. Please phone Paul Butter (01297 442290) in advance if the weather appears unfavourable.

Saturday 24 August 2019 Plymbridge Woods, near Plymouth. Meet at 20.30 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.