



DEVON MOTH GROUP

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NEWSLETTER 2019 ISSUE 5 (November)

The weeks have flown past and Christmas is approaching. You are warmly invited to the Devon Moth Group Christmas meal on Saturday 7th December 2019 at the Cowick Barton (www.thecowickbarton.co.uk) at 6.45pm for 7.00. The pub is located on the edge of Exeter, less than 5 minutes from the Alphington junction of the A30 and easily accessible to those travelling from the M5, A38, A380 etc. The menu can be found at the end of this newsletter and costs £16.95 for two courses or £19.95 for three. If you would like to attend, please send your menu choices and a cheque (payable to Devon Moth Group) for the full amount to Nicola Bacciu 3 Allhallows Court, Bartholomew Street West, Exeter EX4 3BJ (ngbacciu@gmail.com) by **25th November**. Sorry for the short deadline, but we need to provide final numbers and choices to the pub well in advance.

Another important date for your diary is 12th January 2020, which will be the deadline for submission of moth records for incorporation into the 2019 annual report. Records should be sent to Barry Henwood (barryhenwood@gmail.com) as usual. Guidance on how to submit records is available on our website at <https://devonmoths.org.uk/recording-moths/>

Following the pattern set in the previous two years, there has been much excitement over sightings of Clifden Nonpareil *Catocala fraxini* in Devon this autumn. There were sightings scattered across the county, in both Vice-counties (see photo below and on p.4). Incredibly, Paul Lister has recorded this species in his garden in three of the four years since he moved to Devon! The rate of spread of this species has been phenomenal, not only across our county but also in many other parts of Britain.

Another exciting record was of a Bedstraw Hawk-moth larva (*Hyles gallii*) found feeding on Fuschia in Jan Gannaway's Exmouth garden on 1st October (photo below). Given the timing, it was probably the offspring of a female that arrived on the south coast as part of this summer's influx. In terms of resident species, Ieuan Blackwood and Dave Bromley trapped 12 Black-banded *Polymixis xanthomista* at Bull Point on 20th September. Richard Fox



Clifden Nonpareil (left, Rob Wolton) and Bedstraw Hawk-moth (right, Jan Gannaway)

**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

Field Meeting Reports

Meeth Quarry, 27.9.19

The target species for this Moth Night event were the magnificent Clifden Nonpareil *Catocala fraxini* and migrant moths. The Devon Wildlife Trust reserve of Meeth Quarry was chosen for its fine stand of Aspen growing on the edge of the car park, Aspen being one of the larval foodplants of the Clifden Nonpareil. These very large moths are colonising Devon at a remarkable rate and one was caught at Meeth a few weeks earlier, one had been observed through binoculars roosting high up in an Aspen on another occasion, and a single wing found on a third. So our hopes were high.

During a prolonged spell of wet and windy weather, we were fortunate to have a small break in the weather and were able to sprinkle light traps in the vicinity of the Aspens. A good number of people joined the event, about 20, including no less than two poets! For the time of year and weather conditions, a pleasing number of moths appeared, enough, along with other wildlife, to keep us happily amused and occupied. The other wildlife included a toad, a newt (probably palmate, but telling these apart from smooth newts outside the breeding season is very tricky) and a large Leopard Slug. You can tell that the ground was all rather wet!



Moth recording (left), Flounced Rustic (middle) and Pink-barred Sallow (right) (Rob Price)

Paul Butter joined us all the way from Lyme Regis and I'm very glad he did, since I'm pretty hopeless at identifying moths under the harsh light of traps and he identified nearly all the catch. Thanks Paul! And thanks too to Kevin New for hosting the event on behalf of the DWT, and to Rob Price, fellow DMG committee member, for coming all the way up from Plymouth to help.

Altogether we recorded 27 species of moth. Not all of these came to light – indeed the most numerous moth of the night was the Sallow *Cirrhia icteritia*, with about 50 of these beautiful moths seen, many feeding on blackberries. A Knot Grass *Acrionicta rumicis* caterpillar was found feeding on a Red Clover flower, and the green island mines of the tiny nepticulid micro-moth *Ectoedemia argyropeza* were found on fallen Aspen leaves. The latter is a very local species in Devon, reflecting the scarcity of its host plant.

Among the moths coming to light were good autumnal species, all attractively coloured or well-marked, like Brindled Green *Dryobotodes eremita*, Red-green Carpet *Chloroclysta siterata*, Flounced Chestnut *Agrochola helvola*, Pink-barred Sallow *Xanthia togata*, Black Rustic *Aporophyla nigra*, Lunar Underwing *Omphaloscelis lunosa* and Brick *Agrochola circellaris*. The last I have raised in the past from fallen Aspen catkins collected in February or March. The most unusual moth found was Tawny Pinion *Lithophane semibrunnea*, a very local species in northern Devon.

A fair number of flies were attracted to the lights as well, giving me an excuse to mention that this happens to be International Year of the Fly! Amongst the flies were two unexpected ones, the muscid *Lipse tentaculata* with its oversized spoon-shaped palps and the delicate dolichopodid *Campsicnemus marginatus*. Both these are muddy river or pond edge specialists, the latter being scarce in Devon.

Did we catch any of our targets? Well, no. Not a big blue-winged moth in sight, nor or a migrant one. But did we have a successful evening? Yes!

Rob Wolton

Indoor Meeting Report: Autumn meeting, the Kenn Centre, Kennford, 31.10.2019

A renewed study of insect prey of the once-common Cuckoo, using novel DNA and photograph analyses by Dr Lowell Mills, University of Exeter.

It has long been known from observations with binoculars that Cuckoos eat large hairy caterpillars. However, there is a bias in this, in that smaller prey would not be so easily identifiable by this technique. The last review of the Cuckoo's diet was in 1981. Cuckoos have declined dramatically in England including Devon. Uplands are one of their last refuges. It therefore seems that, despite the fact that adult Cuckoos are only here for a short time each year, factors in their breeding areas are significantly responsible for the decline.

Lowell described his research based on two separate methods.

1. He picked photographs of Cuckoos with food in their beaks off the internet and sent them to me for identification of the prey item. There were about 200 photos and most I could identify. (Interestingly Puffin researchers are currently using a similar technique to research which fish Puffins are eating).
2. Collection of Cuckoo faecal samples and DNA analysis of them.

The results from the two techniques matched well in terms of the identity of caterpillars being eaten. The largest group was the family Lasiocampidae and, in particular, Drinker Moth *Euthrix potatoria* and Oak Eggar *Lasiocampa quercus*. Over 60% of faecal samples contained Lasiocampid DNA. Garden Tiger *Arctia caja* caterpillars were known to be prey items from the literature, but in the photos analysed only two showed this species and they were from Scotland. A surprising finding was that over 50% of faecal samples contained grasshopper DNA but they had not been previously reported as prey items. Diptera DNA was also found especially snipe flies and grass flies. The latter are so small that it is hard to believe that Cuckoos are hunting them, so the DNA may be present accidentally. Juvenile Cuckoos are around into the autumn when the adults have gone. They have different prey items available. The major prey item of juvenile Cuckoos was Cinnabar *Tyria jacobaeae* caterpillars. Fox Moth *Macrothylacia rubi* larvae and white butterfly caterpillars were also eaten. Adult burnet moths were also eaten despite containing cyanide.



Drinker Moth larva (Bob Eade)

Rothamsted Insect Survey data were used to assess the fortunes of the moth prey items between 1971 and 2013 and Devon Moth Group data were used for shorter term trends 2003-2016. The abundance trends were calculated in terms of probability of catching the species from three different land classes uplands, buffer zones and lowlands. For Oak Eggar and Drinker Moth, abundance had been fairly stable over all land classes over time. (Rothamsted data had shown a long-term increase in Drinker Moth.) However, Garden Tiger had decreased over all land classes. Cinnabar had a small sample size but indicated an increase on Dartmoor but decrease elsewhere. Common Ragwort, its main foodplant is controlled. Fox Moth was a small sample size and showed no significant change. Likely reasons for the demise of Cuckoos in lowland areas include: intensive grazing, drainage, mechanised hedge trimming and use of agrochemicals. Landscape scale conservation measures are needed.

Barry Henwood

Lifetime Achievement award for Bob Heckford

At the recent Butterfly Conservation national AGM in Shrewsbury, Bob Heckford was presented with the Marsh Christian Trust Lifetime Achievement in Lepidoptera Conservation Award for 2019. This was in recognition for Bob's tremendous contribution as a volunteer to knowledge and conservation of micro-moths, not least adding 16 species to the British list. Many congratulations Bob, a richly deserved award!

Richard Fox

Volunteer moth recorders wanted for Rowden Wildlife Project

A long-term programme of wildlife monitoring/promotion is being set up on a 400 acre farm and woodland at Rowden, mid-Devon and Kayleigh Walker has been in touch with Devon Moth Group to ask if any members might be willing to undertake moth recording there. The farm is managed very extensively, converting to organic production, with sustainability and nature at the core of their ethos. There are a variety of habitats on the farm, including small well-hedged fields, herbal leys, culm grassland, mature oak woodland, ponds, streams and the River Taw.

Initially, the aim of the project is to do a thorough baseline survey to find out what wildlife is here, and then make advised changes and monitor whether species are increasing in population over time. The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) will be involved in the project and will also help to advise on habitat creation and improvement. In the longer term, the aims are not only to increase the abundance and variety of wildlife, but also to demonstrate to the public and other farmers that wildlife can be promoted within a productive farming system.

If you are interested in helping the project by undertaking moth trapping at the site please contact Kayleigh Walker info@rowdenwildlifeproject.co.uk

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

Saturday 7 December 2019 Devon Moth Group Christmas Meal at The Cowick Barton (www.thecowickbarton.co.uk) 18.45 for 19.00. See p.5.

Thursday 30 January 2020 AGM and winter indoor meeting at the Kenn Centre, Kennford (www.kenncentre.co.uk) 19.30 for a 20.00 start. Illustrated talk about the new Atlas of Britain and Ireland's Larger Moths by Zoë Randle, Butterfly Conservation.



Clifden Nonpareil attracted to a garden moth trap at Stowford near Chittlehampton, North Devon on 16th September 2019
(Mike Braid)

Christmas Meal Menu

7 December 2019, The Cowick Barton, Exeter

Two courses... £16.95

Three courses... £19.95

Starters

Wild boar, venison and duck terrine, plum and apple chutney, toasted ciabatta, baby leaf

Oak smoked salmon, pickled cucumber, pumpkin seeds, charred lemon (*gf*)

Homemade breaded brie wedges, cranberry sauce, mixed leaf

Roast parsnip soup, toasted almonds, pea-shoots (*ve, gf*)

Main Courses

Hand carved roast turkey, sage and apple stuffing, roast potatoes, pig in smoked streaky blanket, seasonal vegetables

Slow roast beef brisket, rich mushroom and red wine sauce, roast potatoes, seasonal vegetables

Honey glazed roast salmon fillet, rosemary roasted new potatoes, lemon crème fraise, salad (*gf*)

Nut roast, cashew, peanut, almond & walnuts, cheddar cheese, vegetables and herbs, vegetarian gravy, roast potatoes, seasonal vegetables (*v*)

Mushroom and chestnut risotto, thyme, truffle oil (*ve, gf*)

Desserts

Traditional Christmas pudding, brandy sauce (*v*)

Vanilla crème brûlée, cinnamon sugar brûlée, shortbread (*v, gf**)

Deep filled cheesecake, gluten free honey and granola base, morello cherry compote (*v, gf*)

Belgian chocolate tart, raspberry coulis, raspberries, double cream (*v*)

Lemon, raspberry and mango sorbet (*ve, v, gf*)

Cheeseboard: Devon Oke Cheddar, Sharpham Brie, Devon Blue. Served with oat cakes, walnuts, celery, chutney and grapes... £9.95 per person (*supplement £5pp for dessert option on 2/3 course menu*)

v – vegetarian, ve – vegan, ve - vegan with amends, gf – gluten free, gf*- gluten free with amends*

Places **must** be booked in advance. If you would like to attend, please send your menu choices and a cheque (payable to Devon Moth Group) for the full amount to Nicola Bacciu 3 Allhallows Court, Bartholomew Street West, Exeter EX4 3BJ (ngbacciu@gmail.com) by 25th November.



(Patrick Clement)