



# DEVON MOTH GROUP

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## NEWSLETTER 2021 ISSUE 1 (April)

Despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and third national lockdown, it has been a good spring so far for moths. Cloudier conditions than last year and some very mild nights have given rise to some good garden moth lists and a few large catches from woodland sites.

Undoubtedly the species of the spring so far is *Pammene giganteana*. Associated with oak, where the larvae feed on galls, this moth flies on sunny spring afternoons and also comes to light. Until this year, there was only one record of it on the Devon Moth Group database, from 1987. It seems, however, that *P. giganteana* is not rare in Devon, just rarely recorded. Its recording has been revolutionised this spring by pheromone lures sold to attract different tortricid species but which are highly attractive to *P.*



*Pammene giganteana* (Patrick Clement)

*giganteana*. The first sighting this year, however, did not involve the use of a pheromone lure - Mike Symes recorded two *P. giganteana* in his Exeter garden on 21 March 2021, the moths seemingly attracted to his hands after he had been eating grapes. Subsequently, I'm aware of records (all to lures) by Barry Henwood at two sites in Abbotskerswell, Chris Vincent at two sites in the Plymouth area, Mark Marshall at two sites near Blackawton, Sam Grey at three sites including Tottiford Reservoir and Dunsford, and I found the moth of the moment myself at Bovey Heathfield.

It's not just been under-recorded residents that have caught the eye in recent weeks. There has also been a smattering of immigrants, borne in on warm southerly winds. Most exciting was a *Hyles livornica* Striped Hawk-moth (see photo right) found by Jayne Wraxall at the side of a road at Exwick on 3 April 2021. Not only is this the first Devon record since 2015, but this species is almost always seen in summer. The Devon individual was one of several recorded across Britain at the end of March/beginning of April, including one on the Lancashire coast, one on the Brecks in Norfolk and one near Newquay, Cornwall. Sadly, the recent shift to cold northerly winds will likely put pay to moth immigration for a while.

Richard Fox



Striped Hawk-moth (Jayne Wraxall)

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)

## Annual General Meeting on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021

For the first time in its history, the Devon Moth Group AGM was held online rather than in person, as a result of the national lockdown to tackle Covid-19. It proved a success with 45 user accounts joining the Zoom meeting, some of which had two people participating, equating to at least 50 people. It was a stripped back AGM with just the Chairman speaking and running through the previous year, annual accounts (which had been circulated in advance by email or post) and elections. Grateful thanks are due to Roy and Veronica for preparing the accounts and to Nick Pratt who undertook an independent check of the figures. We are also very grateful to the existing Council officers who all agreed to stand again for another year. There being no other candidates, Nicola Bacciu, Phil Dean, Barry Henwood, Roy McCormick, Rob Price and Rob Wolton were re-elected unanimously.

The AGM and following talk by Dr Tom Prescott were recorded and can be watched at <https://youtu.be/1g-5jurtpF8>

### **Chairman's AGM Report**

It seems that one of the few good things to come out of the global pandemic of 2020 was the reconnection of people with the natural world. In part because of this and probably in part because of the limitations on international holidays, moth recording in Devon went through the roof in 2020, with a 62% increase in the number of records received by Barry Henwood, the County Recorder, and a 72% increase in the number of recorders.

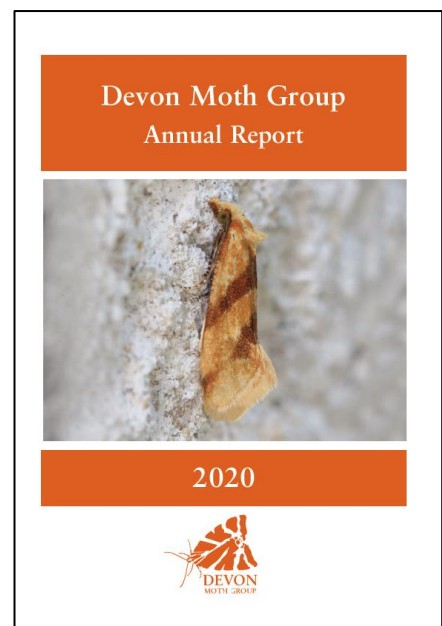
New species recorded in the county during 2020 included *Caryocolum junctella* found by Jack Oughton at Castle Drogo. The nearest vice county where this species has been recorded is Glamorganshire (VC41), but that was a single record from 1920. The nearest vice-county with modern records is Warwickshire (VC38)! Jack also recorded a second new species for Devon during the year - *Triaxomasia caprimulgella* which he recorded at two widely separated sites, on both occasions using a clearwing pheromone lure. These are remarkable records as the nearest vice-county where the species has been recorded is Berkshire (VC22).

Another new micro-moth for Devon in 2020 was *Aethes deaurana*, first recorded by Peter Leigh in Dawlish Warren village in May. This is a southern European species that feeds on Alexanders and which was recorded new to Britain in Weymouth, Dorset, in 2017. Amazingly, a second Devon sighting was reported in June from Nigel Hewitt's trap in Kenton.

Macro-moth highlights included the first Devon records of *Ctenoplusia limbirena* Scar Bank Gem, one at light in Exmouth by Dave Wall and one in Plymouth by Steve Bird. Both records were in August. There had only been 27 records of this rare immigrant in Britain up to the end of 2018. Another first was *Sedina buettneri* Blair's Wainscot caught by Richard Cottle in his garden trap at Ide, near Exeter in October. Blair's Wainscot is a rare species in Britain, restricted to several river systems in Dorset and probably also on the Isle of Wight, but has occurred occasionally as a presumed immigrant on the coast of south-east England. There was considerable immigrant moth activity at the time of the Devon record so it is assumed to be a visitor, although there is a slight possibility that the species might be established somewhere in the upper Exe Estuary.

Other significant records included a *Dysgonia algira* Passenger caught by Mike Symes in his garden on the northern outskirts of Exeter in July. There is only one previous Devon record of this moth, at Ottery St Mary in 2007. There were three records of *Catocala sponsa* Dark Crimson Underwing in the county during August, part of a major surge in sightings of this spectacular species across southern Britain. Given that there are only three previous records in the DMG database, the most recent from 2009, three records in just a few days in August 2020 was amazing. Dave Gibbon caught the first in his Plymouth garden, Roy Williams recorded one in Paignton and Matt Knott found the third in Exmouth.

More information on notable sightings can be found the 2020 Annual Report, which all members should have received by the end of March.  
Richard Fox



## Treasurer's AGM Report

As you will see from the Accounts, we started this year with a Bank balance of £2885 and ended with £2985, a surplus of £100 against a deficit last year of £274.

The subscriptions are slightly down to £1292 from £1305 and we also had donations of £21. Expenditure on Members' newsletters and information decreased by £371, as we had a lot of stamps in hand from last year. The web site cost us £202 this year instead of £169 and we made a donation of £200 to Butterfly Conservation.

Roy McCormick

## Secretary's AGM Report

The Group is still gaining new members and we had 152 members at the beginning of 2021 including three new members at the start of this year. We have 19 members who do not live in the county, with a high proportion of these living in Cornwall and Dorset. We have two Honorary Members and two who get free membership, with one of these our previous Accountant (this job is now done by my wife, Veronica and we have Nick Pratt auditing the accounts). We now only have 17 members who get their newsletters by post, with the remaining 135 receiving them by e-mail, which makes a considerable saving on our expenses. We are very grateful to the staff of Devon Biodiversity Records Centre, who have continued to produce print copies of our newsletters during the pandemic. Nevertheless, with the cost of second class stamps @ 66p each, rising every year, each "snail mail" distribution of the newsletter still costs us over £11 and we typically publish five of these a year. Fortunately, I have a reserve of stamps which saves the Group more money.

We had most of our 2020 Indoor Meetings cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic, with the exception of our AGM at the Kenn Centre in Kennford. Our Christmas event was also cancelled, along with all of the field meetings, but we are still soldiering on with the hope that 2021 will turn out better - we shall see!

We will continue to hold our indoor meetings either online and, **when we are able**, also in person, on Thursday evenings with a starting time of 19.30 for 20.00. Our Christmas event will be on a Saturday and will be held at a suitable venue (watch this space). Our Annual Report will be published in the spring as usual and will, of course, be posted to members. Your Council continued to hold regular meetings via Zoom during 2020 to ensure the smooth running of the Group.

I reiterate my thanks to the people doing the work I used to be involved in, with secretarial tasks being taken care of by others; I am pleased to be relieved of some of this work, and hope this state of affairs will continue. Most of these tasks are being done by Richard Fox and Rob Wolton. Thank you, Richard and Rob.

Roy McCormick

## AGM talk: *Burnets, Beauties and Glories - Conserving Scotland's Rare and Threatened Moths by Dr Tom Prescott, Butterfly Conservation*

Tom gave an inspiring talk about work to conserve some of the rarest moth species in Scotland (and indeed the UK). In a humorous and informative presentation filled with beautiful images of Scottish moths and landscapes, Tom showcased various aspects of work for threatened species. This ranged from survey work to improve baseline knowledge for *Endromis versicolora* Kentish Glory (where the use of a new pheromone lure has led to the species being discovered in 89 new 1km squares) and monitoring of *Zygaena exulans* Mountain Burnet, to improving habitat quality through reducing grazing (e.g. for *Z. viciae* New Forest Burnet) or scrub clearance (e.g. for *Coranarta cordigera* Small Dark Yellow Underwing) and even creating new habitat (e.g. by planting Aspen for *Epione vespertaria* Dark Bordered Beauty).



Dark Bordered Beauty (Keith Tailby)

The micro-moths were not neglected, with Tom describing the natural history, ecology and conservation challenges of various species, and highlighting the important role played by Devon Moth Group member Bob Heckford in advancing our understanding of several key species. These included *Coleophora arctostaphyli* a leaf-miner and

then case-bearer on Bearberry and *Choreutis diana*, which feeds on birch and is known from only a single glen (Glen Affric) in the whole of the UK. Tom described a successful student project in Glen Tilt on *Eana argentana* and of community surveys for *Periclepsis cinctana*, which is currently only known from the island of Tiree.

Overall it was a very engaging and inspiring presentation that stimulated numerous questions and discussion at the end of the talk and much positive feedback afterwards. Many thanks to Tom for speaking to us from his home in the Highlands.

Richard Fox

### Indoor Meeting Report: Spring Meeting, online, 25.3.2021

*Moth Schools – how the pandemic has opened up new ways to share our interests* by Dr Phil Sterling

During the first lockdown in Spring 2020, Phil hit upon the idea of a regular online meet-up for moth enthusiasts to share their catches and chat about moths. In his talk, Phil explained how solutions were devised and refined to make these sessions enjoyable and effective and then treated the small (18 participants) DMG audience to a moth school session.

First the technology. Phil explained how and why he uses Zoom for online sessions and free software called Open Board for virtual teaching. Adding a smartphone as an additional Zoom participant allows him to show live moths on a chilled stage below a fixed phone camera, while still interacting fully with the audience. The Open Board software is like an electronic whiteboard on which he can display images of moths, enlarging and highlighting features to demonstrate identification techniques. While not the same as meeting face-to-face, Phil has found this a really good way to share information, enthuse people and teach moth ID. It is very inclusive and Phil thinks this way of interacting should and will continue after the pandemic has finally subsided.

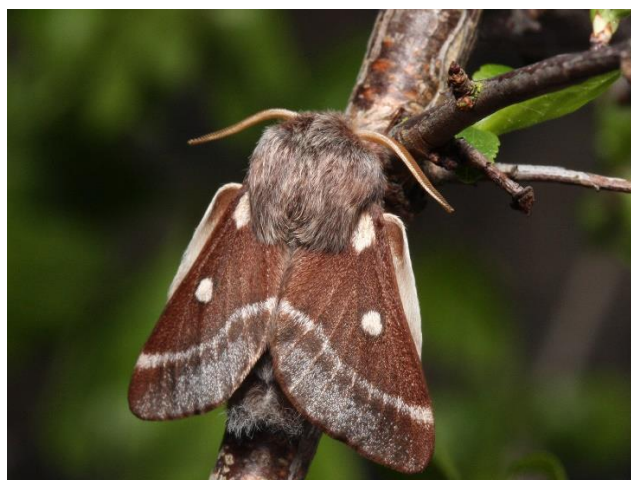
Having demonstrated the set-up, Phil then gave a three-part session of moth school. First he talked about ways to find moths in the spring, enthusing in particular, about ‘sallowing’ – searching for moths feeding on the flowers of willows. The male trees are best, when the catkins are bright yellow, and an effective technique is to lay a sheet under the tree and then beat the branches to dislodge nectaring moths. Phil also talked about the modern revolution of pheromone lures, including the recent upsurge in national sightings of *Pammene giganteana* to lures sold for various other tortricid species. Second, he used his phone camera set-up to show us a range of live moths caught in Dorset over recent nights, including *Biston strataria* Oak Beauty, *Achlya flavicornis* Yellow Horned, *Lithophane semibrunnea* Tawny Pinion and a stunning *Eriogaster lanestris* Small Eggar. Finally, Phil gave us a spring-species ID masterclass on the separation of the quakers, drabs and, most interestingly, kittens. I struggle with separating *Furcula bifida* Poplar Kitten and *F. furcula* Sallow Kitten from the field guides, but Phil pointed out a very helpful feature on the male hindwing, which has a grey band on the upperside in Sallow Kitten that is not present in Poplar Kitten.

It was a very enjoyable and educational way to spend an hour or so and we’re very grateful to Phil for his time and expertise.

Richard Fox



Yellow Horned (Iain Leach)



Small Eggar (Keith Tailby)

## A strange variety of *Schranksia costaestrigalis* (Stephens) Pinion-streaked Snout

This specimen (left) was seen and photographed by Malcolm and Sandra Dodds from Paignton on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020, at their moth trap. I went through all of my Pyralid books, as that is what I thought it was, but to no avail. I then asked Barry Henwood if he knew what this was and he then did some research and found a similar-looking form of *Schranksia costaestrigalis* Pinion-streaked Snout that occurs in the Outer Hebrides. I agreed with him after some consideration and Barry also asked the opinion of Phil Sterling from Dorset who confirmed the identification.  
Roy McCormick



Pinion-streaked Snout  
(Malcolm & Sandra Dodds)

## Macro-moth flight periods on DMG website

The Devon Moth Group website includes two very useful and informative tables showing the flight seasons of macro-moths based on data extracted from the DMG database. One shows month by month the species that you are likely to encounter in Devon (see image right), while the other is listed in taxonomic order, enabling you to look up the local flight period of any given species (see image below).

April		Species count = 199		
Species Name	Vernacular	ABH #	Recs	
<i>Orthosia gothica</i>	Hebrew Character	73.249	3654	
<i>Orthosia cerasi</i>	Common Quaker	73.244	2812	
<i>Xylocampa areola</i>	Early Grey	73.069	1888	
<i>Orthosia incerta</i>	Clouded Drab	73.242	1587	
<i>Orthosia cruda</i>	Small Quaker	73.245	1370	
<i>Eupithecia abbreviata</i>	Brindled Pug	70.156	1363	
<i>Lycia hirtaria</i>	Brindled Beauty	70.248	1277	
<i>Selenia dentaria</i>	Early Thorn	70.237	1221	
<i>Earophila badiata</i>	Shoulder Stripe	70.066	1080	
<i>Diaphora mendica</i>	Muslin Moth	72.022	1050	
<i>Opisthograptis luteolata</i>	Brimstone Moth	70.226	1004	
<i>Lampropteryx suffumata</i>	Water Carpet	70.103	828	
<i>Anticlea derivata</i>	Streamer	70.067	818	
<i>Colocasia coryli</i>	Nut-tree Tussock	73.032	805	
<i>Gymnoscelis rufifasciata</i>	Double-striped Pug	70.141	791	
<i>Anorthoa munda</i>	Twin-spotted Quaker	73.250	723	
<i>Drymonia ruficornis</i>	Lunar Marbled Brown	71.011	715	
<i>Alsophila aescularia</i>	March Moth	70.245	679	
<i>Orthosia gracilis</i>	Powdered Quaker	73.247	658	
<i>Cerastis rubricosa</i>	Red Chestnut	73.336	649	

Phil Dean, who created the original tables, has now updated both, using over 1 million records up to 2020, and these new versions are on the website, under the 'Devon moth' tab <https://devonmoths.org.uk/devons-moths/flight-periods/> Many thanks to Phil for his hard work on these excellent resources.

Richard Fox

Page 8 Taxon	Vernacular	ABH #	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Tot.	Tets.
<i>Orthosia populeti</i>	Lead-coloured Drab	73.246			8	24									32	7
<i>Orthosia gracilis</i>	Powdered Quaker	73.247			84	658	217	11							970	179
<i>Orthosia gothica</i>	Hebrew Character	73.249	31	252	1.7k	3.7k	2k	97	8	6	4	4	3	5	7758	335
<i>Anorthoa munda</i>	Twin-spotted Quaker	73.250		57	783	723	37								1601	197
<i>Tholera cespitis</i>	Hedge Rustic	73.252							3	60	61				124	49
<i>Tholera decimalis</i>	Feathered Gothic	73.253								91	340	3			434	105
<i>Cerapteryx graminis</i>	Antler Moth	73.254							201	496	93				791	138
<i>Anarta trifolii</i>	Nutmeg	73.255					5	20	20	20	2				69	40
<i>Anarta myrtilli</i>	Beautiful Yellow Underwing	73.257					4	3	11	5					24	20
<i>Polia nebulosa</i>	Grey Arches	73.261					11	504	474	7					996	245
<i>Lacanobia w-latinum</i>	Light Brocade	73.263				2	134	86	5						227	70
<i>Lacanobia thalassina</i>	Pale-shouldered Brocade	73.264				6	107	300	36	7	2				458	154
<i>Lacanobia contigua</i>	Beautiful Brocade	73.265					10	87	39						137	67
<i>Lacanobia suasa</i>	Dog's Tooth	73.266					4	20	23	25	2				74	16
<i>Lacanobia oleracea</i>	Bright-line Brown-eye	73.267		2	37	404	1.8k	2.5k	376	48	3				5139	381
<i>Lacanobia splendens</i>	Splendid Brocade	73.268						4	3						7	7
<i>Melanchnra persicariae</i>	Dot Moth	73.270					4	367	1.2k	71					1595	293
<i>Ceramica pisi</i>	Broom Moth	73.271					34	254	97	3					390	113
<i>Papestra biren</i>	Glaucous Shears	73.272				3	9	2							14	11
<i>Hada plebeja</i>	Shears	73.273					93	147	22	3	3				269	90
<i>Mamestra brassicae</i>	Cabbage Moth	73.274				12	78	172	269	340	85	2	2		960	164
<i>Sideridis turbida</i>	White Colon	73.275					2	18	7	2					29	6
<i>Sideridis rivularis</i>	Campion	73.276					42	108	53	38					242	114
<i>Conisania andalusica</i>	Barrett's Marbled Coronet	73.278					10	34	10	2					56	9

## Request for by-catch of beetles in light traps

The debris at the bottom of light traps can include many small overlooked insects, including both beetles and flies. Martin Luff, the Devon beetle recorder, is keen to record as many as possible of the beetles present.

He has asked: If you run a light trap, can you regularly tip the 'trash' in the bottom of the trap into a polythene bag, and put in the freezer to kill and store the material. Any larger beetles noted at the time of trap emptying can be included as well. Accumulate this material in the same bag and post monthly collections in a crush-proof tube or other container to:

Dr Martin Luff, 7 Southcote Orchard, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5PA.

Please include a record of your name, grid reference, date range of the samples and trap type. This would be much appreciated, thank you.

Barry Henwood

## Devon Moth Lookup Table for recording and submitting your records

A quick reminder that Phil Dean has created a spreadsheet specifically to help with recording Devon moth sightings. The Devon Moth Lookup Table (as it is known) is available in both Microsoft Excel and OpenOffice formats from the DMG website <https://devonmoths.org.uk/recording-moths/the-devon-moth-lookup-table/>

The aims of the Lookup Table are to:

- Simplify the process of entering moth record data, saving you time and effort.
- Provide moth record data in the form needed by the County Moth Recorder.
- Automatically correct and spelling mistakes or taxonomic changes to species' names

The Lookup Table has been recently revised to include the latest changes to the ABH Checklist, improved handling of aggregates and correction of a few minor errors. It is strongly recommended if you are looking for a simple way to note your sightings and pass them on to Barry Henwood, the County Moth Recorder.

Richard Fox



Large Yellow Underwing nectaring (Lindsey Norman)