



DEVON MOTH GROUP

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NEWSLETTER 2014 ISSUE 1 (February)

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2014. Many thanks to all of you who've submitted your moth records for last year already – looks to be a record-breaking haul and work will begin imminently on the Annual Report and you'll be able to see your sightings in context with those of everyone else across the County. Let's hope that 2014 also affords some excellent moth recording weather, assuming that these storms eventually subside!

One very exciting record from last year that has only just come to light (so to speak) is of *Pasiphila chloerata* Sloe Pug caught by Dave Wall in Exmouth on 17 June 2013. This is only the third known Devon record of Sloe Pug ever; the moth was first caught by Teddy Pelham-Clinton near Axminster in the 1980s, followed by Roy McCormick's discovery of larvae in 1997 by close to the Dorset border nr Lyme Regis.

Finally, many apologies to members for the confusion over new subscription rates. At the beginning of 2013, we agreed to raise the annual subscription cost to £8 for a single member and £12 for a family membership. Unfortunately, in the last newsletter and subsequent reminders to members, I mistakenly stated that the single membership rate was now £9. As a result a number of members have paid £1 too much for their membership this year. We will, of course, be happy to refund this overpayment, so please get in touch with Roy McCormick (181525131225.devmg@talktalk.net or 01626 779543) if you would like a refund. Please accept my sincere apologies for this mistake.

Happy mothing!
Richard Fox

Annual General Meeting on Thursday 30th January 2014

The AGM was held at the Kenn Centre, Kennford and attended by c. 35 members. Apologies were received from Mike Braid, Barry Henwood, Leon Truscott, George Williams and Oliver Woodland. The minutes of the previous AGM were approved unanimously and signed by the Chairman. The reports of the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary followed (see below). Copies of the accounts were distributed by email in advance and made available to those present. No issues were raised. The accounts were approved unanimously and signed by the Chairman.

The annual election of Council members (excluding the Chairman) was then held. The Chairman announced that Council had invited, subject to election at the AGM, Bob Heckford to join the Council in a new Ordinary Member post, and that he had agreed to stand. All current incumbents were also willing to stand again and, there being no other candidates, Nicola Bacciu, Bob Heckford, Barry Henwood, Roy McCormick and Rob Wolton were elected unanimously to serve on Devon Moth Group Council for 2014.

Chairman's AGM Report

The past mothing year was one of two halves. Average temperatures in the first six months of the year were below the long-term normal, often strikingly so, and this had the impact of delaying moth emergences and greatly reducing catches in moth traps right through until early summer. Then, in July, the situation turned on its head, a prolonged heatwave arrived and moth populations prospered. Many recorders enjoyed bumper moth trapping nights during the summer and autumn as a result, with a substantial autumn immigration (particularly of *Vestal Rhodometra sacraria*) adding to the excitement. There were two new species recorded for Devon during the year,

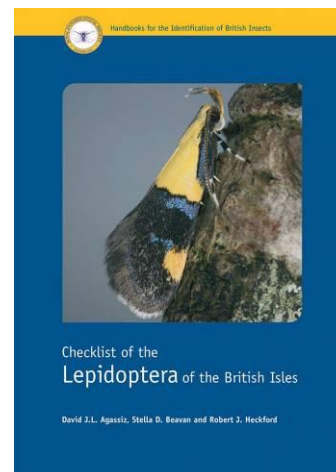
**Members of Council: Richard Fox (Chairman) Nicola Bacciu (Membership & Distribution) Bob Heckford (Ordinary Member)
Roy McCormick (Secretary/Treasurer) Rob Wolton (Conservation) Barry Henwood (County Moth Recorder)**

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both micro-moths (*Coleophora linosyridella* and *Parapoynx diminutalis*) and both found by Bob Heckford, though Stella Beavan also shared the limelight for the former discovery. A number of new species were recorded at Vice-county level, such as Obscure Wainscot *Leucania obsoleta*, *Metzneria metzneriella* and *Phyllonorycter stettinensis*, all new for VC4 (North Devon).

The fine summer weather was no doubt responsible, at least in part, for a big increase in the number of moth records submitted for the year. Barry Henwood, the County Moth Recorder, has already received 50,580 records and both he and I want to convey our great thanks to all the recorders, as well as to Geoff Wisdom and Mary Luisa Hartley who have assisted Barry during the year with the digitisation of moth records from members who do not have access to a computer. I'd also like to thank Barry, on behalf of the whole Group for all his hard work since taking up the considerable responsibility of County Recorder. If you have not already sent in your records from last year, Barry would still be very grateful to receive them.

Two significant events towards the end of the year are worthy of special mention. The first was the publication of the new Checklist of Lepidoptera of the British Isles. This much-needed publication provides a complete overhaul of the out-of-date Bradley list and numbering system and brings British moth recorders into line with European taxonomic changes. I've no doubt that field guides, journals and recording software will adopt the new checklist in due course. The reason for mentioning it in this report is that Devon Moth Group members played a very significant role in the herculean task of assembling the new checklist. Stella Beavan and Bob Heckford are two of the three main authors of the new publication, Barry Henwood also made a significant contribution and Roy McCormick is listed in the acknowledgements. Even the foreword of the new book was written by a DMG member, Malcolm Scoble!



The second significant event was, on the other hand, a very sad one for the Group. This was the death of Brian Bewsher, former Chairman and stalwart moth recorder, whose obituary was printed in the last newsletter. Lorraine, Brian's widow, had kindly supplied a photo, showing Brian working through two moth traps, taken just weeks before he passed away. He'll be greatly missed by Devon Moth Group.

And finally, looking ahead, Butterfly Conservation has recently announced plans for the first ever atlas of macro-moths for Britain and Ireland. This will utilise records up to the end of 2016, so we have three more years in order to achieve the best possible coverage of moth records in the county. There are currently lots of gaps – some areas are just generally under-recorded for moths, while many scarcer species appear to have become extinct in some of their previous haunts. We need to be sure that these are genuine declines and not simply due to a lack of recent recording. Over the next three years, we will highlight such gaps in DMG newsletters in the hope of inspiring members to rise to the challenge and secure their place in mothing history by putting dots onto the atlas maps!

Richard Fox

Secretary's AGM Report

The Group is still gaining new Members, but membership is down on last year and on 19.01.2014 (when this report was produced) we had 142 members, which is down 21 on last year. We have 20 members who do not live in the county, with a high proportion of these living in Cornwall and one living in London. We now have two Honorary Members, with the loss of Brian Bewsher whose obituary was in 2013 newsletter issue 6 (November), and we lost another Member, Paul Stubbs, who tragically died on 02.12.2013 after having a heart attack at his home in Princetown, Dartmoor (he was found at the bottom of his stairs). We still have two people who get free Membership, with one of these our Accountant. We now have only 21 Members who get their Newsletters by post, with the remaining 121 receiving it by e-mail, which makes a considerable saving on our expenses. Nevertheless, the cost of printing the 25 Newsletters for posting has gone up considerably, with the last bill around £1.17 for each copy, and the cost of second class stamps @ 50p each makes a further £10.50 making a total of around £39 for distribution of our last Newsletter; and we publish around six of these a year.

Despite a few reminders, may I remind you all again that our subscriptions are now £8 for single Members and £12 for a family; this was passed at our 2013 AGM.

We held four Indoor Meetings at the Kenn Centre in Kennford (at £25 hire cost per meeting) with most of these attracting around 35 + Members. Our Christmas event at the Claycutters Arms in Chudleigh Knighton, was moderately attended with only 16 people coming. We had six field Meetings booked and these were led by Paul

Butter, Barry Henwood, Rob Wolton, John Boon and John Randall, Richard Fox and myself; we actually managed to get all of these completed with better weather conditions than 2012.

We will continue to hold our meetings on Thursday evening with a starting time of 19.30 for 20.00, this to accommodate our North County Members who find it difficult to get there on time with the distance they have to travel. Our Annual Report will continue to be issued at the Spring Meeting, as many records do not come in until the beginning of the year; this creates a big rush to get it out on time and with the changes in this document, it has become impossible to issue this sooner.

Your Council held four meetings during 2013 with the main topics of discussion: trying to find speakers for our indoor meetings, arranging Field Meetings and discussions about the Annual Report. DMG still remains a prominent partner in BAP activities along with Butterfly Conservation and the National Moth Recording Scheme.

I reiterate my thanks to the people who are helping to keep the group running taking on most of the work I used to be involved in before my wife had a stroke, with most of the work being taken over by Richard Fox; I certainly could not have been able to carry on without this valuable help, and although Mavis died on 15.03.2013, I still find it difficult to concentrate. Thank you Richard
Roy McCormick

AGM illustrated talk: *Recent Wildlife Highlights* by John Walters

Following the necessary bureaucracy of the AGM, members were treated to another brilliant talk by John Walters, which delved into many curious and fascinating corners of natural history that most of us have neither the time nor skill to discover.

The rare bee *Osmia bicolor*, for example, which make it nest in an empty snail shell and then covers the shell in a woven wigwam of sticks. John's photo (right) shows the bee flying with a bit of dead bramble to add to its stick structure.



There were lots of other incredible examples of behaviour, from the familiar murmuration display of starlings to the sleeping habits of insects; Red Mason bees, for example, sleep on their backs in their nest tunnels, while a brilliant photo of a cuckoo bee species showed it roosting in mid-air attached to a leaf only by its jaws. I loved the description of female Oil Beetles who dislodge unwanted amorous males from their backs by walking under low-hanging branches!

John showed photos of the Leopard Slugs *Limax maximus* that he had kept as pets just to observe their incredible mating behaviour (below left) and of the amazing skill and strength of the wingless wasp *Methocha articulate* attacking the ferocious larva of Green Tiger-beetle *Cicindela campestris*, before parasitizing it with an egg and dragging it back into its own burrow (below centre and right). Fortunately, this chilling spectacle was offset by very cute pictures of Long-tailed Tits roosting and nest building, so we weren't left with nightmares!

Richard Fox



Field Meeting Reports

Ford Park Cemetery, Plymouth 30.8.2013

Sixteen people managed to find their way to Plymouth's oldest cemetery which is in the heart of the city. Weather conditions were favourable, being cloudy and mild. We had two MV traps, brought by myself and John Randall and recorded thirty five species during the course of the evening. The younger members particularly, were enthusiastic about *Euplagia quadripunctaria* Jersey Tiger, and for some *Cerapterix graminis* Antler Moth, found by a family with two young children, was a new species. Among the other moths recorded were *Hepialus sylvina* Orange Swift, *Cosmorhoe ocellata* Purple Bar and *Mormo Maura* Old Lady.

John Boon

Dissection workshop, Woodah Farm 30.11.2013

For the second year running, Devon Moth Group ran a dissection workshop at Devon Wildlife Trust's Woodah Farm. We were very fortunate in being able to use this facility. We had a large, well-lit room with ample tables and chairs, internet access and use of DWT's computer and projector. An event like this takes a great deal of planning and effort to ensure all necessary equipment and resources are available. Bob Heckford, Stella Beavan and myself were facilitating and there were nine "students", which is the maximum we could comfortably cope with. The DWT computer and projector was used to view images from the Dissection Group website. We also had brought along another laptop and projector, which together with a camera on Bob's microscope enabled a live dissection performed by Bob to be projected onto the wall. Some members were dissecting for the first time and tackled Noctuids, while others had come along for the second time and were tackling smaller moths like pugs. The four hours flew by very quickly. Hopefully the skills learnt on the day will be put to good use in the future.



Barry Henwood

Christmas dinner, Chudleigh Knighton 14.12.2013

The annual Christmas dinner was held this time at The Claycutters Arms at Chudleigh Knighton. Sixteen people attended including two travelling from Cornwall. We were sat around one long table at the far end of the pub. This was an excellent arrangement, facilitating conversation at dinner. Last year we had been split onto two different tables. We were treated to a three-course meal followed by coffee and mince pies for those who still had any room left for more food. There was much chatter about the year's moth experiences and discussion on plans for 2014 as well as much non moth related conversation. Towards the end of the evening a "nanobug" was let loose on the table and scuttled around in an amusing way.

Barry Henwood

Brown Hairstreaks in mid-Devon need recording please

If you live in the mid-Devon area you may be aware that Brown Hairstreak butterflies were well recorded there in 2000-2009 but less so from 2010 onwards. This is probably related to one butterfly recorder who was prolific with his recording, moving away. So, it would be wonderful if members of Devon Moth Group could help Butterfly Conservation by looking for this species

The adult butterfly is an elusive insect and so the most sensible method of looking for Brown Hairstreaks is to search for their eggs on blackthorn twigs during the winter months when there are no leaves on the blackthorn. This is a fun thing to do on a winter walk when most species are not on the wing (or otherwise visible). A good guide to finding them can be found in the leaflet 'Hedgerows for Hairstreaks' at <http://butterfly-conservation.org/files/habitat-hedgerows-for-hairstreaks.pdf>.

If you would like to see some actual Brown Hairstreak eggs (to help you when you go out looking) and are prepared to take a trip to Torquay, then Amanda Hunter (amanda.bc@clara.co.uk) would be happy to arrange a mutually convenient time to take you for a short walk at Walls Hill. (There is free car parking at SX934645 and a short muddy section of cliff path on the walk up to Walls Hill).

The following 10km x 10km OS grid squares in Devon had Brown Hairstreak records for 2000-2009 but no more recent records and are therefore in need of additional recording effort this winter:

SS40, SS41, SS51, SS61, SS62, SS71, SS72, SS81, SS91, SS92
ST01
SX38, SX39, SX48, SX59, SX68, SX77

Records should be submitted to Roger Bristow (devonbristows@btinternet.com) in the same spreadsheet format as you submit moth records.
Barry Henwood



Brown Hairstreak egg (Barry Henwood)

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Membership subscription for Devon Moth Group

Membership subscriptions, **£8.00 for single and £12.00 for a family annual membership**, are due by the end of February 2014.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____

Phone number: _____

I am happy to receive Devon Moth Group newsletters by email.

Please return with a cheque payable to Devon Moth Group to: Roy McCormick, 36 Paradise Road, Teignmouth TQ14 8NR.

For payment by Standing Order, please obtain the necessary form from your Bank. The account details are: **Devon Moth Group, A/C No: 94850593, sort code: 60-21-47 at NatWest Bank, Den Road, Teignmouth, TQ14 8AR.** Make the reference your own name as that will then be shown on our statements. Payment date is 1st January 2014, or a date soon after that, and 1st January from then on.