

Gloucestershire Moth Report 2004

The weather in 2004 was not as good for moth recording as 2003, nevertheless a good number of recorders have produced many interesting records some of which will be mentioned below.

As a general observation numbers of moths appear to be lower and a number of our former residents may well be extinct. This is difficult to prove as with such a large county and relatively few recorders it is difficult to make comparisons, even in one's own garden never mind the wider county. In support of this opinion however it seems that insectivorous birds are having a hard time. Here in the Forest of Dean Frank Lander reports that the pied flycatchers are having great difficulty feeding their young. The larvae of the Green Oak Tortrix *Tortrix viridana*, once a staple food for this species, are very scarce. [Historically the reason for the nest boxes being set up many years ago at Nagshead was to help the birds that would eat the caterpillars that were defoliating the oaks!] This year I have had only five records of Green Oak Tortrix from the whole county.

New County Records

Instead of just listing moths new to Gloucestershire I will also add a few notes relating to each species. The numbers are those given by Bradley and Fletcher.

88 *Stigmella samiatella*. This has been recorded by Robert Homan both at Staple Edge in the Forest of Dean and at Queen's Wood, Prestbury. This species is one of the leaf miners, in this case the larva makes a 'gallery' mine in a Sweet Chestnut leaf.

431 *Yponomeuta sedella*. This was trapped by Mike Bradley at Pool Hill near Newent and determined by Dr Michael Harper. It is a small pale moth with black dots, and the larvae feed on the leaves of orpine *Sedum telephium* or a closely related cultivar.

439 *Swammerdamia compunctella*. This moth was actually taken by me at Serridge, Forest of Dean, on 29th May 2003. I was unable to identify it and took it along with a number of others to David Gibbs who dissected it. (GNS have paid for this work). The larvae feed on young rowan in open woodland. It is quite a large greyish moth with a white mark near the tip of the wing. As there are several similar species it is necessary to examine the genitalia which are always distinct.

656 *Tachystola acroxantha*. This is an Australian species that was first reported in Devon in 1908. It is a pretty moth with a pinkish fringe to the brown forewing. It has since spread north but is confined to urban areas where the larvae spin together dead plane or possibly eucalyptus leaves between which they feed. Robert Homan trapped our first specimen in Cheltenham and Guy Meredith recorded another later in the summer in a different part of the town.

660 *Pseudatemelia josephinae*. This I took in Wye Valley woodland at Tidenham in 2003. I was fairly sure of the identification, and it was confirmed by David Gibbs as a female. The larvae feed in a case on decaying leaves on the ground. The moth is quite small, grey, with three darker dots.

864 *Dichomeris ustalella*. This came as a pleasant surprise when I took Mark Parsons of Butterfly Conservation to Shorn Cliff below Tintern to show him a good site for Pauper Pug and Scarce Hook-tip (which we also saw). It is quite a large, attractive moth with shades of brown and gold. The larvae feed on small-leaved lime. It was only known in the UK from a wood in Worcestershire until a few years ago when it was recorded on the Monmouthshire side of the Wye at Tintern.

1157 *Crociosema plebejana*. John Martin recorded this at Pilning near the Severn in South Gloucestershire. It was originally a sub-tropical or warm temperate species. It has distinctive markings and has been spreading in the south-west of the country. It was first recorded in Devon in 1900. The larvae feed on the seeds of tree mallow which not being frost hardy is found mostly in southern coastal areas.

1262 *Cydia amplana*. Also from John Martin at Pilning, this tortrix is a European species that seems to have become established fairly recently in this country. This and the preceding species were confirmed in Bristol City Museum where they have been retained.

2208 The Cosmopolitan *Mythimna loreyi*. This is a migrant that is a casual visitor to the UK. It is one of the wainscots that are associated with wetlands. Neil Woodward recorded it at WWT Slimbridge.

There were several new vice-county records which I briefly list below.

22 *Ectoedemia louisella*. New to VC33. Recorded by Robert Homan at St George's, Cheltenham on 27/9/04 and Queen's Wood, Southam on 3/10/04.

264 *Bedellia somnulentella*. (VC34) Bristol. Several adults reared from bindweed. David Gibbs.

321a *Phyllonorycter platani*. (VC33) Cheltenham.Mines on plane.9/11/04. (RH).

367 *Phyllocnistis saligna*. (VC33). Mines in willow, several sites, (RH).

792 *Mirificarma mulinella*.(VC33). N of Leckhampton Hill 16/8/03. Guy Meredith. Dissected by David Gibbs.

914 *Scythris crassiuscula*. (VC33). Windrush Valley 20/7/03. As above.

Migrants

2004 was not a particularly good year for migrants. These are the less common ones.

Humming-bird Hawk-moth. 15 records (57 in 2003)

Convolvulus Hawk-moth. St Briavels (RG) and Stroud (John Fleming)

White-point. Culkerton (Matthew Oates)

Vestal. St Briavels (RG)

Bordered Straw (2). Culkerton. (Matthew Oates)

Dewick's Plusia. Northwood Green. (Neil Tappin)

Pearly Underwing. St Briavels (RG) and Cirencester (Andy Johnson).

Cosmopolitan (details above).

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species

Only two of the seventeen species on our list were reported. Some of these haven't been recorded for many years, but there were six that could have been recorded, but were not.

Drab Looper. This was recorded from two (new) sites in the Forest of Dean, Brandrick's Green and Vallets Wood (RG). The best report however was from Chris Tracey who said it had a 'brilliant year'on the Cirencester Park Estate particularly in Oakley Wood and Hailey Wood.

Chalk Carpet. There were two reports from different parts of Cleeve Hill (Guy Meredith and Robert Homan), the first from there since 2000.

The records above do not convey any idea of the amount of work that some people put in to their recording.

Peter Hugo has regularly left traps overnight in several GWT reserves often with difficult access as well as recording and photographing many moths at home. He made many sorties in the dark evenings of November and December looking in vain for the Plumed Prominent.

Guy Meredith with his incomparable knowledge of sites and food-plants has been working steadily through the list recording many micromoths that haven't been seen for many years. He has also had his share of lonely vigils with a trap in a dark wood.

Jon Brock has set up several traps at a time in several locations. Packing all his kit up at the end of a session can take up to an hour.

Robert Homan has concentrated on the smaller moths and also ranged far and wide. He has proved that the rare RDB *Stigmella aceris* has undergone an amazing range expansion very recently. On the GNS website www.glosnats.org.uk which he runs you will see a picture of the mine of *Phyllocnistis citrata* new to Britain that he found after doing his Christmas shopping.

Gordon Avery runs a trap most nights in his garden at Hempsted. He has recorded an amazing list, including many unusual micros. Although on the edge of the city he is close to the Severn and some very varied habitats.

Neil Woodward records in several places at WWT Slimbridge and is often called upon to help less experienced recorders with their identifications.

Then there are several people who are so busy recording moths that they don't have time to send me their records!

In addition I would like to thank the many other recorders who contribute records. Being scattered over many parts of this large county they help to give a picture of how the commoner moths are faring even if they only report the occasional scarcer moth.

It is nearly 5 years since I published 'Gloucestershire Moths – An Account'. It is now rather out-of-date and I am hoping to revise it with some improvements ready to publish in May.

Roger Gaunt, St Briavels, February 2005.