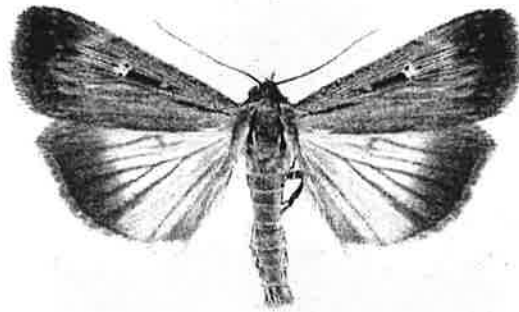


# Dorset Moth Group

ask Phil of Nat AQUOS

Newsletter Number 12



October 2004

*Levant Blackneck*

## Off to a Good Start

Who could have predicted that we would have had a rude awakening from our winter lethargy by the events of February 2004? Most of our moth traps would have still been under wraps and (like the garden lawnmower) will have been put away without having the much needed autumn maintenance and repair work following the previous summer season. We should have been warned of what was to come by the small but unusual numbers of migrant moths and butterflies which appeared in the south of England in early January, although Dorset was not well represented in the records at this time. Any further migration in the latter half of January was curtailed by a period of arctic winds as a depression crossed Britain and then the North Sea to Scandinavia. Then at the beginning of February another Atlantic depression working in partnership with an enormous anticyclone over Iberia and North Africa paved the way for large numbers of lepidoptera being swept up from Africa and deposited in north-west Europe.

The mass immigration was effectively in two parts, 3<sup>rd</sup>.- 6<sup>th</sup>. February followed by another immigration from 10<sup>th</sup>. - 13<sup>th</sup>. February, with some noticeable differences in the species content of each period. The latter period produced far more rarities, with 11<sup>th</sup>. February being probably the most astounding night producing 164 **Small Mottled Willows** *Spodoptera exigua* at Portland and 384 **Rush Veneers** *Nomophilla noctuella* at Puddletown. Several examples of the **Nutmeg** *Discestra trifolii* were caught in the County exhibiting much paler colouration than those usually seen in Britain (much later in the year), suggesting a southern origin. Pride of place must go to eight **Levant Blacknecks** *Tathorhynchus exsiccata* in only four nights (with only two others being recorded from other parts of the south at this time).

The list of interesting species goes on and on, but for those who wish to read further a detailed analysis, written by Peter Davey, has been published in Atropos number 22. It makes mouthwatering reading.

*Perhaps the lesson to be learnt is that our trapping activities should be triggered by keeping a watchful eye on the weather charts and not by the calendar.*

Gordon R. Hopkins  
Editor.

## SUMMARY OF MOTH SURVEY WORK AT LYDLINCH COMMON

Lydlinch Common is an interesting area of semi-natural vegetation, perhaps best known to Lepidopterists for its colony of the **Marsh Fritillary** *Euphydryas aurinia* butterfly. The privately owned area has been managed for some time by volunteers from the Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation, largely involving scrub clearance to safeguard the Marsh Fritillary habitat and to open up areas for **Grizzled Skipper** *Pyrgus malvae* which has been recorded again after a gap of some years. The open grass/herb-rich meadows are interspersed with large areas of Blackthorn scrub, some of which has harboured the **Small Eggar** *Lasiocampa lanestris*, quite a lot of Buckthorn and a very mixed tree flora including Oak, Brown Birch, Elm, Aspen, various Salix species and Ash in the wetter parts.

The diversity of flora and the rural location would lead one to assume that the site would hold a number of scarce moth species. To ascertain the actual moth fauna a series of light trapping events have been held during 2003 and 2004 using several Skinner styled mercury vapour traps. Some torchlight "dusking" was also carried out, sometimes securing species not observed in the traps.

To get a spread of trapping times, events were run on 26<sup>th</sup> May, 21<sup>st</sup> June and 5<sup>th</sup> July in 2003, and on 19<sup>th</sup> March, 16<sup>th</sup> April, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 30<sup>th</sup> July and 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2004.

The results of this recording effort have been interesting, and a total of 270 species have been recorded of which 82 were so called "micros", including the Pyrales and Plumes. The three visits in 2003 accounted for 35 of the "micros" and 224 of the macromoths noted. The relatively higher percentage of micros recorded in 2004 probably reflects the presence of Peter Davey during some of the 2004 visits, however a few specific records are noteworthy from 2003, such as the **Water Veneer** *Accentria ephemerella* seen on 21.06.2003. This moth is one that, like the Mayfly, is only a flying adult for a day or two and is often seen in large numbers on very warm, muggy nights when conditions are right. The larvae feed underwater on pondweeds, and there is one moderate sized pond on the site. Other "micros" only recorded in the first year's recording include the common migrant, the **Rush Veneer** *Nomophila noctuella*. This was also the case with several macro species, in that 2003 was the only year **Pearly Underwing** *Peridroma saucia*, **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** *Macroglossom stellaratum*, and **Bordered Straw** *Heliothis peltigera* were seen.

Other "micros" of note during the survey include *Acleris holmiana*, on Blackthorn, *Acleris cristana*, which both feeds and hibernates in dense scrub, and *Euzophora pinguis* which is associated with Ash where the larvae feed under the bark.

For highlighting species of interest I refer to species that are regarded as regionally Local in the Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland (Waring and Townsend 2003). It has been interesting to track the coming and going of the various flight periods throughout the year, and the first Local species were recorded on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2004 when both **Blossom Underwing** *Orthosia miniosa* and **Lead Coloured Drab** *Orthosia populeti* were seen. The latter was a particularly welcome record of an Aspen feeder uncommon in Dorset, whilst *miniosa* is typically found in oak / scrub habitat that defines much of Lynlinch. The other spring Local moth was the **Frosted Green** *Polyplocari ridens* seen on the April trip.

Next in the seasonal emergence were **Scorched Carpet** *Ligdia adustata*, **Chocolate Tip** *Clostera curtula*, and **Great Prominent** *Notodonta anceps*, a Spindle feeder, a Salix feeder, and an Oak feeder respectively and all trees that are well represented on the common.

June typically brings out a great many species and the two June evenings produced high numbers of species. **Blotched Emerald** *Comibaena bajularia* was only seen in 2003 as was the **Lilac Beauty** *Apeira syringaria*, **Poplar Kitten** *Furcula bifida*, and **Buff Footman** *Eilema depressa* and then only as singletons. The Blotched Emerald is one of the prettiest Emeralds and is an Oak wood species seldom seen in any numbers. The Poplar Kitten, like the Lead Coloured Drab is a good Aspen feeding species unusual in Dorset.

Both years produced numbers of **Brussels Lace** *Cleorodes lichenaria*, **Beautiful Hooktip** *Laspeyria flexula* and **Four Dotted Footman** *Cybosia mesomella* which add to the list of lichen feeders, indicating a good air quality for lichen growth. **Blackneck** *Lygephila pastinum* is a moth typical of damp herb rich meadows and woodland edges, where it feeds on Tufted Vetch. Like many such species, it is not as common as formerly as much of this kind of habitat has been lost to agriculture and development. The only June species recorded only in 2004 was the **Sharp Angled Peacock** *Macaria alternata* which is fairly typical of shrubby habitats.

By July things are in full swing and the three July events added several more Local species to the list. Both **Rosy Footman** *Miltochrista miniata* and **Scarce Footman** *Eilema complana* add yet more lichen feeding species to the Lydlinch list. The Elm feeding **Lunar spotted Pinion** *Cosmia pyralina* was seen in numbers both years and the site is obviously a good one for this moth. All the remaining Local moths found in July were only recorded in 2004 and were namely the **Small Scallop** *Idaea emarginata* which seemed to have a good year everywhere, the **Dark Umber** *Philereme transversata ssp. britannica* which is making use of the plentiful Buckthorn, **Triple spotted Pug** *Eupithecia trisignaria* on Hogweed, the **Small Seraphim** *Pterapherapteryx sexalata* on Salix and **Black Arches** *Lymantria monacha* on Oak.

The last Local species of the year was the **Oak Lutestring** *Cymatophorima diluta* recorded on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2004 and another species more associated with Oak woodland. It seems the old Oaks on Lydlinch Common provide a suitable habitat for several more woodland species.

It seems slightly odd that no more nationally Notable species were recorded but the habitat is perhaps better for its diversity than its rarities. With 93 species on the best night (30<sup>th</sup> July) it is certainly a good moth locality, but it is the old Oaks that harbour the one rare moth found during the survey. On 25<sup>th</sup> June 2004 a single **Small Black Arches** *Meganola strigula* was trapped under one of the Oaks giving us our only Notable A moth. This is an excellent Dorset record being the fifth site currently known in the county and as it does not occur in Devon or Cornwall may be the most westerly record to date.



Oak Lutestring

I would like to thank all those who helped in this survey either by operating traps or giving encouragement on some of the wetter nights, Gordon Hopkins, Peter Davey, Steve Barrett, Lawrie de Whalley, Jack Astley and Arthur Briant.

*Paul Butter.*

## *News in Brief.*

### *Badbury Rings Moth and Butterfly Survey*

The National Trust is keen to increase the conservation value of the seventy-seven hectares of Set-aside land adjacent to Badbury Rings to the west of Wimborne so that it may once again be termed unimproved chalk grassland. The land was farmed previously under an intensive arable system, but in 1998 was entered into a twenty year, non-rotational Set-aside programme. Badbury Rings contains sympathetically grazed and largely unimproved chalk grassland; this site is species-rich and has the potential to disseminate many of its flora and fauna species to the Set-aside land next to it as the necessary niche microhabitats become available.

There is a long history of recording at Badbury Rings, and old records suggest that a wide range of local species were resident here and on many other unimproved chalk grassland sites prior to the Second World War. During the second half of the twentieth century, changes in farming methods and the introduction of intensive arable systems ultimately caused the loss of 98 per cent of Dorset's unimproved chalk grassland. Inevitably, many of the flora and fauna species that depended on this habitat type died out or became very rare.

Various recording initiatives have been undertaken by the National Trust to research and assess the wildlife value of this land, although moths and butterflies have not fallen within the scope of their work to date. My survey will span 2005 and will include literature searches plus fieldwork, culminating in a set of survey findings plus associated recommendations. This will provide a baseline for the National Trust and give them the opportunity to develop habitat management plans that cater for and promote key moth and butterfly species across Badbury Rings and the adjacent Set-aside region.

*Peter Davey*

### *Butterfly Conservation – Dorset Branch AGM.....*

Will be held on 30<sup>th</sup>. October 2004 at St. George's Hall, Dorchester.

Apart from the usual (obligatory) AGM activities, the programme will include a review of 2004 field trips and a Moth Report by Paul Butter. Richard Belding, the Branch's new Conservation Officer and Defra's West Wessex Downs Advisor will give a talk on "The New Environmental Stewardship Scheme: what will it mean for butterflies and moths?"

*.....and looking forward to*

### *Butterfly Conservation National AGM 2005*

The Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation has been asked by Council, and the Branch has agreed, to host the National AGM in 2005. No details are yet fixed but usual practice would expect it to be held somewhere like Bournemouth University in November 2005. It will be a good opportunity to hear nationally important figures talking to members about the conservation of the habitats of our moths and butterflies. There will also be poster contributions and information stalls from other Branches together with traders. Further details, when available, will be posted on the Group and Branch ([www.dorsetbutterflies.com](http://www.dorsetbutterflies.com)) websites.

*Brian Dicker*

### National Moth Night (and day) 2004.....

Took place on 22<sup>nd</sup>. May, when the success of the daytime and nighttime events was a reflection on the extreme weather conditions. The day produced fine sunny weather, which suited the target species, **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk Moth** *Hemaris tityus* and **Netted Mountain Moth** *Macaria carbonaria*, although only the former was likely to be found as a Dorset species. Predictably the clear skies of the daytime continued into the night, with the result that temperatures dropped to near freezing – not good moth trapping weather. Ryewater Nursery, near Sherborne, was invaded by a Dorset contingent (thanks to the hospitality of Clive Farrell) but eleven traps could produce only 22 species. The targetted nocturnal species was **False Mocha** *Cyclophora porata*.

### .....and 2005

Will hopefully be better blessed by the weather as it will be held on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup>. July. Once again both day and night flying moths will be targetted. This time there are two rare species of Clearwing on the list, the **Dusky Clearwing** *Paranthrene tabaniformis* (not seen in Britain since 1924 (A.D.!!)) and the **Welsh Clearwing** *Synanthedon scoliaeformis*, which is believed to be confined to Wales and Scotland. Of some consolation to Dorset Daytime Mothers is the **Chalk Carpet** *Scotopteryx bipunctaria* which was recorded from a dozen sites in the south of the County last year.

The nocturnal target species are **Northern Dart** *Xestia alpicola* (another northern species) and **Double Line** *Mithimna turca* (which does occur in Dorset).

It must be emphasised that National Moth Night is not just an invitation to go all out for the target species, as clearly it is impossible for many of us to go to suitable locations. It is, however, an incentive to encourage many more people to become involved in what we all agree is a very absorbing and fascinating hobby. More information can be found on [www.nationalmothnight.info](http://www.nationalmothnight.info).

### National Macromoth Recording Scheme

Many of our readers will be aware of the proposed National Macromoth Recording Scheme which is being set up under the wing of Butterfly Conservation with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Nature, the RSPB and the British Entomological and Natural History Society. The planning phase has now been completed and a newsletter has been produced outlining the results so far.

In common with other natural history recording schemes, the network of county and regional recorders will remain and be responsible for collecting records annually. The work of the Scheme will be aimed at;

- Making moth records available to all, both for research and general interest (unless conservation or security are threatened).
- Training moth recorders
- Encouraging new recorders
- Formalising the vetting and verification process for moth records
- Working towards the production of a National Atlas of Macromoths.

There was a large and positive response to the scheme from moth recorders throughout the country, and it is hoped that Dorset will be well represented in running this very worthwhile venture.

Progress with the scheme, including access to the Newsletter for those who do not have a copy, is available on the NMRS website, [www.mothrecording.org.uk](http://www.mothrecording.org.uk).

### *“Moths Of Dorset” – An Update*

As most of you will be aware, the Moths of Dorset book is in the process of being drafted. The core of the publication comprises the species accounts with research behind each account relying on historical data stretching as far back as the nineteenth century and, more importantly, on the records submitted by the Dorset moth network since 1993.

Peter Davey took a year's sabbatical in 2003 to draft the nine hundred or so macro, pyrale and plume accounts and these await review by Phil Sterling and Mark Parsons from Butterfly Conservation. It is interesting to note that an equivalent number of macro, pyrale and plume species have been recorded across Hampshire plus the Isle of Wight, even though Dorset is just sixty per cent the size of Hampshire. This underlines the tremendous recording effort put in by the recorders over the years plus the wealth of diverse habitats contained within the county of Dorset.

Phil Sterling has drafted just fewer than two hundred accounts within the remaining micromoths, concentrating on the leafminers. This probably leaves somewhere in the region of seven hundred accounts to be completed, although the exact number is unknown, and keeps rising at about one percent each year as recorders find yet more species that have not been recorded previously in the county. In the past two seasons a number of micromoth recorders have been helping to fill in the woeful gaps in recent data in some groups of species, particularly the Coleophoridae. Many of the adults taken at light require dissection and Phil and Stephen Palmer have been hard at work dealing with these.

It is difficult to give a date when the publication is likely to be available since there is still much work to do in drafting and editing but we will keep you in touch with progress through these newsletters.

*Peter Davey and Phil Sterling*

### Active Butterfly And Moth Conservation Across Dorset In 2003

The Dorset Butterfly Conservation Group spent more than forty days last year actively creating additional habitat for local, rare or endangered butterfly and moth species. Their work was primarily concerned with the clearance of scrub and coppicing. Much of the work is undertaken through the late autumn, winter and early spring months, and the events are advertised in the **The Blackmore Vale Magazine** as well as events lists circulated by the Dorset Wildlife Trust, Butterfly Conservation and the Dorset Countryside Volunteers. The following sites were some of those visited last year. Anyone who would like to assist with the work at any of the scheduled events this year should contact the relevant work party leader for details.

Lydlinch Common in the Blackmore Vale is an unimproved grassland site on ill-drained clay soil supporting large quantities of blackthorn. It is intersected by two busy main roads, but has managed to remain largely unspoilt. Two local species, the **Brown Hairstreak** *Thecla betulae* butterfly and the **Small Eggar** *Eriogaster lanestris* occur in the area, and both tend to flourish where blackthorn is allowed to grow unchecked. Unfortunately, both have declined nationally due perhaps to estates, farmers and councils decimating hedgerows each year, windborne pesticide spray from adjacent arable land, or the loss of old blackthorn-rich damp grassland from drainage. The work at Lydlinch Common is designed to keep in check the invasive nature of the scrub by periodically clearing back to ground level, and maintain sunny, nectar-rich gallery habitat between the islands of blackthorn. Common fleabane carpets the damper regions of the open grassland, and provides a valuable nectar source for many of the invertebrates species at the site. Last September, the fleabane flowers provided a spectacular sight in the strong sunshine, and late generation **Small Copper** *Lycaena phaeas* butterflies were very much in evidence. The **Marsh Fritillary** *Euphydryas aurinia* is a second notable butterfly species at the site and benefits from the large quantities of devil's-bit scabious growing amongst the old grassland.

Deadmoor Common also lies in the Blackmore Vale, but it is very much larger in area than Lydlinch Common. The site comprises compartments of unimproved grassland on poorly-drained clay soils, and blocks of old oak woodland bound these. In addition to the Brown Hairstreak and Marsh Fritillary, a third butterfly species, the **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** *Clossiana selene* occurs at the site. The work at Deadmoor Common has broadly the same aim as that undertaken at Lydlinch Common as the open compartments are at the mercy of invasive scrub, particularly blackthorn. However, the additional requirement of grazing may need to be considered to increase numbers of violet plants to directly benefit the Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. The rare **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk Moth** *Hemaris tityus* is another devil's-bit scabious feeder that might benefit from increased stocks of host plants, although this bumble bee mimic seems to prefer small rosette plants resulting from a well-grazed regime, rather than tall plants growing in rank grassland. The oak trees at the site are important for the very local **Blossom Underwing** *Orthosia miniosa* and **Marbled Pug** *Eupithecia irriguata*, the caterpillar of the former thriving on a ready supply of tender young oak leaves, and coppicing of oak or the grazing of oak saplings would certainly benefit this species. The presence of aspen groves within the oak woodland provides an additional rich resource for many moth species.

Further east, Stubhampton Bottom is a sheltered wooded chalk valley on the Cranborne Chase cloaked in conifer and beech plantation, but retains pockets of original birch on herb-rich grassland. The site is important for a number of key moth species, and coppicing is undertaken to maintain or increase viable populations of these species. The **Argent and Sable** *Rheumaptera hastata*, a day-flying moth, feeds on birch, and the caterpillars have been found on the leaves on young shoots sprouting from coppiced stumps. The species has

undergone a serious decline nationally, and the cessation of birch coppicing may be a factor behind its demise, so it is hoped that actively coppicing the birch will reverse this trend. A second species, another day flyer and a wasp mimic, is the **Large Red-belted Clearwing** *Synanthedon culiciformis*. The caterpillar feeds internally between the bark and wood of birch, and the species tends to prefer open situations. The **Drab Looper** *Minoa murinata* is another day-flying species, feeding on wood spurge growing in open woodland; it is noticeably absent from wood spurge rich woodland elsewhere in the county where forestry or coppicing has ceased. Stubhampton Bottom is bisected by a broad open ride, and the herb-rich grassland that borders the ride contains some important herbaceous plants vital for a number of other very local moth species. These include the day-flying **Cistus Forester** *Adscita geryon* an iridescent-green moth that feeds on common rock-rose, the **Valerian Pug** *Eupithecia valerianata* that feeds on common valerian, the pyrale micromoth *Phlyctaenia stachydalis* that feeds on hedge woundwort, the **Grass Rivulet** *Perizoma albulata albulata* that feeds on yellow rattle, and the **Lead-coloured Pug** *Eupithecia plumbeolata*, a moth that requires cow-wheat. All five species benefit from the good stocks of host food plant species that throng the ride.

On the western scarp of the Cranborne Chase lies Fontmell Down, a classic chalk downland site with sides too steep to be ploughed. The slopes comprise mainly short-turf unimproved grassland plus scrub, but plantation beech occupies a small portion of the site. Scrub clearance is aimed at maintaining sufficient open space for the local butterfly species that colonise the locality such as the local sheep's-fescue feeding **Silver-spotted Skipper** *Hesperia comma*, the horseshoe vetch feeding **Adonis Blue** *Lysandra bellargus* and the primula feeding **Duke of Burgundy Fritillary** *Hamearis lucina*. Local moth species that frequent the site also benefit from the herb-rich short-turf grassland and include the wild thyme feeding **Light Feathered Rustic** *Agrotis cinerea*, the **Northern Drab** *Orthosia opima*, the day-flying and very striking **Wood Tiger** *Parasemia plantiginis plantiginis* and the pyrale micromoth *Pyrausta nigrata*. The locality also supports a few key moth species that colonise the scrub at the site. These include the wild privet feeding **Barred Tooth-striped** *Trichopteryx polycommata*. This is a nationally scarce species that has disappeared from many of its old haunts due to the destruction of so much chalk grassland and, more importantly, the accompanying wild privet rich scrub. Another local species that benefits from scrub on chalk soils is the **Orange-tailed Clearwing** *Synanthedon andrenaeformis*, a wasp mimic, the caterpillar of which feeds inside the stems of the wayfaring tree.

The Isle of Portland contains very special habitats that host a number of declining moth species. The island provides the last refuge for several species that used to colonise other calcareous localities in mainland Dorset, but have disappeared in the post-war years due to the destruction of their niche habitats. Unfortunately, areas of unimproved grassland even on Portland are declining, so sanctuaries such as Broadcroft Quarry are vital to the survival of these fragile species.

Portland is host to the **Four-spotted moth** *Tyta luctuosa*, a species that is easily disturbed by day from its host foodplant, field bindweed, growing in warm, sunny situations, but that has undergone a dramatic decline nationally. The diminutive but unmistakable **Least Carpet** *Idaea rusticata* requires ivy and traveller's-joy, plants that flourish in quarry and cliff habitat, but again, very little is seen of this species on the island. The **Beech-green Carpet** *Colostygia olivata*, a species that feeds on bedstraw species, but in Dorset is curiously restricted to grassland in cliff and landslip terrain on Portland and at Charmouth. The **Wormwood Shark** *Cucullia absinthii* historically was relatively common on the island, but its host foodplant, Wormwood, a species of waste ground has declined on the island, and the moth has not been seen for several years. The pyrale micromoth *Euzophera cinerosella*, another rare wormwood feeding species still manages to hang on though.



The **Portland Ribbon Wave** *Idaea degeneraria* and the **Bordered Gothic** *Heliophobus reticulata* are two more Portland specialities, but the foodplant for these is unknown; the former species still survives but the latter has not been recorded for several years. Finally, the **Silver-studded Blue** *Plebejus argus*, a butterfly that typically colonises heathland on sandy soil in east Dorset, remarkably manages to flourish on the trefoil-rich calcareous biotype on Portland.

At Perryfields Reserve, with the help of contractors, scrub encroachment was tackled, and a large amount of cotoneaster was removed from a south facing limestone bank, to encourage the Birds-foot Trefoil. At Broadcroft Reserve similar activities have been undertaken, and some of the specialised butterfly food plants have started to return to the cleared areas. A further twelve sites have been identified on Portland where conservation work would be of great benefit to Lepidoptera.

Finally, Cashmoor, near Sixpenny Handley, is a small fragment of unimproved chalk grassland in a part of Dorset that has had virtually every last vestige of prime habitat ploughed into the ground in the post-war years. The only portions that remain tend to be ancient earthworks, but even these stand like islands in a sea of arable. The work at Cashmoor is designed to increase the amount of grassland available to the Adonis Blue and **Small Blue**, butterfly species that require horseshoe vetch and kidney vetch, respectively. Other lepidoptera that may be resident at the site and that would benefit from Butterfly Conservation initiatives, include the trefoil feeding **Chalk Carpet** *Scotopteryx bipunctaria* and the lady's bedstraw feeding **Oblique-striped** *Phibalapteryx virgata*, **Royal Mantle** *Catarhoe cuculata* and **Wood Carpet** *Epirrhoe rivata* moths. The middle two species have declined considerably from the loss of old dry grassland. Buckthorn is a valuable food source for the local **Brown Scallop** *Philereme vetulata* and **Dark Umber** *Philereme transversata* moths, and this host flora should be taken into account during scrub clearance work.

*Peter Davey*

*Pay a visit to the DMG website*

[www.dorsetmothgroup.co.uk](http://www.dorsetmothgroup.co.uk)

Catch up on;  
*All the latest news*  
*What to look out for*  
*Useful links*  
*Identification tips*  
*General interest articles*  
*All previous newsletters*

## Moth Workshops

### Fifehead Wood, 2004.

Fifehead Wood covers an area of about twenty hectares and is situated near the village of Fifehead Magdalen on the edge of the Blackmore Vale. The wood (apart from a small area at the western end) is owned and managed by the Woodland Trust who purchased it in 1980. The wood has a wide variety of trees, predominantly Oak, Ash and Hazel and is notable for the large quantity of Aspen of all ages.

The north-western part of the wood, the wettest part, was once managed as an osier bed, and the remains of the pollarded willows can still be seen. The ancient nature of the eastern and western parts is evidenced by the distribution of banks and ditches, the evidence of ancient coppiced Hazel, and the profusion of Bluebells and Wood Anemones in spring in these parts of the wood; these are plants which take many years to become established. The central part of the wood was planted at about the end of the nineteenth century.

The year got off to a good start before the formal workshops commenced, with sightings of the **Light Orange Underwing** *Archiearis notha* which had been found in Fifehead in 2003, with one being seen on 30<sup>th</sup>. March and new fewer than four sightings on the following day, all in the Aspen rich part of the wood.

The first organised workshop on 3<sup>rd</sup>. April fell foul of the weather and was abandoned before it had started due to heavy rain. Anyone who knows Fifehead Wood will know that the main track into the wood is steep, and can easily become a quagmire, so the prospect of carrying mothing equipment down this track is only eclipsed by the thought of having to bring it back up again at the end of the night's activities.

A more successful start was made on 1<sup>st</sup>. May, but still only nine species were recorded, including **Least Black Arches** *Nola confusalis* and **Coxcomb Prominent** *Ptilodon capucina*, typical early spring species. This small number of species reflects that 2004 once again experienced a cool start to the year.

On 16<sup>th</sup>. May we were blessed with better weather and 38 species (including seven micros) which start to show the wide diversity of moths which can be caught in this kind of woodland habitat. Species caught included **Coronet** *Craniophora ligustri*, **Mottled Pug** *Eupithecia exiguata* and **Brindled Pug** *Eupithecia abbreviata*, **Orange Footman** *Eilema sororcula*, **Rivulet** *Perizoma affinitata*, **Small Phoenix** *Ecliptopera silaceata*, and, perhaps the most interesting of all, **Seraphim** *Lobophora halterata*.

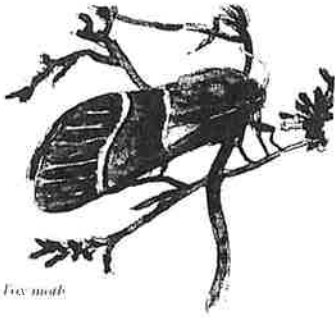
The best workshop of the year was held on 12<sup>th</sup>. June, with a total of 52 species (16 micros) caught. Many of these common woodland species would be red-letter day catches for those of us who only trap in our gardens, beleaguered by light pollution. Very welcome catches were **Blotched Emerald** *Combaena bajularia*, **Common Lutestring** *Ochropacha duplaris*, **Maidens Blush** *Cylcophora punctaria* and the delightful **Peach Blossom** *Thyatira batis*. This latter species seems to have good years and bad years as do many other moth species. To add real flavour to the evening we were lucky enough to catch the immigrant **Dark Sword-grass** *Agrotis ipsilon*, just to prove that inland sites can catch immigrants as well as those near to the coast.

By contrast 10<sup>th</sup>. July was once again hit by bad weather. The forecast was not good, but it was not until the generator and traps had been taken down the muddy track that the rain actually started to fall. Undeterred I ran one trap (alone) for half an hour, resulting in six moths of four species. One of these was, however a pristine dark green **V-pug** *Chloroclystis v-ata*, which made the effort worthwhile.

The 18<sup>th</sup>. September was not much better, although the rain did hold off, with only six common species in just over an hour's trapping.

As we go to press there is one more session scheduled for this year on 16<sup>th</sup>. October, so who knows what this will turn up?

As well as the programme of workshops at Lydlinch Common and Fifehead Wood reviewed in the articles above, several workshops have been undertaken at other sites throughout the County.



One of the most productive sites in previous years has been Stubhampton Bottom, which was visited on 21<sup>st</sup>. May. A total of 35 macromoth and five micromoth species may seem rather meagre at this time of year, included five Nationally local species, viz. **Maidens Blush** *Cylcophora punctaria*, **Clay Triple Lines** *Cylcophora linearia*, **Great Prominent** *Peridea anceps*, **Orange Footman** *Eilema sororcula* and **Light Brocade** *Lacanobia w-latinum*. Other species of interest were **Silver Ground Carpet** *Xanthorhoe montanata*, **Grey Pine Carpet** *Thera obeliscata*, **Cinnabar** *Tyria jacobaeae* and **Foxglove Pug** *Eupithecia pullchellata*, while a **Fox Moth** *Macrothylacia rubi* was found laying eggs in one of the traps.

A report on workshops held at an excellent private woodland site near Wimborne St. Giles will appear in the Spring 2005 Newsletter.

Gordon Hopkins

### Moth Records for 2004

Please remember to send your moth records for 2004 to the appropriate County Recorder.

#### Macromoth Records

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Blandford  
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e.mail [peter@livornica600.freerve.co.uk](mailto:peter@livornica600.freerve.co.uk)  
Tel : 01258 857053

#### Micromoth Records

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28 East Wyld Road,  
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