

# Dorset Moth Group

Newsletter Number 14

November 2005



**Clifden Nonpareil (*Catocala fraxini*)**

At rest on garage wall. Lyons Gate, 25<sup>th</sup>. September 2005

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## Editorial

This will be the fifth Dorset Moth Group Newsletter which has been produced since I took over production from Peter Davey and Phil Sterling in 2003. Apart from the first issue where I received some very welcome assistance from Paul Butter (who had just moved to Dorset) it has been largely a one man effort. Recently Terry Box and Jim Fradgley have stepped in to produce a splendid new website, and have also given me considerable assistance. Also the spring newsletter has been made up largely of the macromoth and micromoth annual reports from Peter Davey and Phil Sterling, respectively.

However, the considerable task of producing the newsletter alone has meant that production deadlines have invariably been missed, and so I would like to request any of our members with editorial, literary or publishing skills to come forward with offers of help for the next issue, due out (I hope) in April 2006.

I will also re-iterate my request from the last issue for any of you budding artists (and photographers for that matter) to come up with some appropriate illustrations to be distributed liberally about the newsletter in future issues. It may not have escaped your notice that most of the text produced here is in my own literary style (no Booker Prize is anticipated), so as well as editing the newsletter, I appear to be writing it all as well. Contributions in the form of short articles about your local moth trapping activities, or any memorable days or nights would be very much appreciated.

I may be contacted through the website, or by post (You know my address – I'm the treasurer as well!).

I await your response with eager anticipation.

**Gordon R. Hopkins - Editor**

## Alners Gorse

You have no doubt all heard of the latest acquisition of the reserve Alners Gorse by Butterfly Conservation, and its importance for the Brown Hairstreak and Marsh Fritillary (butterflies to all you mothers). Before all the hype over the opening ceremony on 12<sup>th</sup>. July carried out by Alan Titchmarsh, a very worthwhile night's trapping was carried out by several members of the DMG, and the results presented in the marquee erected at the entrance to the reserve for the occasion.



Paul Butter, Neil Croton and the Editor (assisted by Nigel Spring) each ran two MV traps for a marathon session throughout the night at various points on the reserve, managing to snatch a few hours shut-eye (inside the marquee in the case of GH), and amassed a staggering 772 moths of 182 species, an admirable total for a very worthwhile night's work. Some of the more interesting ones were displayed in specimen pots and in a small keep-net inside the marquee, and these were eagerly admired by the assembled guests during the opening ceremony.

To pick out highlights is a daunting task as the wealth of common species showed that there was an enormous variety of food plants on the site. Some of the more interesting, and particularly local, ones were;

Little Emerald  
Brown Scallop  
Sharp angled Carpet  
Ruddy Carpet  
Olive  
Dingy Shears  
Lunar Spotted Pinion  
Scarce Silver Lines  
Blackneck  
Dark Sword Grass  
Silver Y  
*Agonopterix purpurea*  
*Anacamptis populella*  
*Ancylis obtusana*

Notable B

Immigrant  
Immigrant



*Log on to*

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

Thanks to the splendid efforts of Terry Box and Jim Fradgley the DMG website is once again up and running, under a slightly different name from that used previously.

There is a wealth of information about mothing in Dorset, both for the expert and the beginner in this fascinating hobby. The website is continually being updated, and Terry will welcome any contributions from DMG members, on events, identification, best days, unusual species, surveys, or anything else that may be of interest to other mothers. In addition, any records of unusual resident or migrant species, including photographs, would be especially welcome for the latest news section.

### *Moth Workshops 2005*

This year we have chosen a new target site, Duncliffe Woods in the north of the county, and it has proved to be a very worthwhile site with lots of potential. The wood is owned and managed by the Woodland Trust and is centred on two hills, close together, the higher of which reaches an altitude of 210 m. and covers an area of 86 hectares. Although it was originally deciduous ancient woodland, most of it was felled and replanted with conifers in the 1950s. Since its purchase by the Woodland Trust in 1984 there has been a steady programme of removing the conifers and returning it to its former native state. Much of this work is carried out by a small group of volunteers (The Friends of Duncliffe) during the winter months.

The wood has considerable quantities of Oak, Ash, Silver Birch and some stands of ancient Lime trees. For nocturnal moth trappers it is a very easy wood to work as there is vehicular access along the main track which runs through the centre of the wood, making the setting of generators and cable runs very easy.



Scalloped Shell © T A Box

Seven workshops were held throughout the year, starting on 12<sup>th</sup> March and the last one being held on 1<sup>st</sup> October, which produced in total a very commendable 158 species of macromoths and 58 species of micro. Naturally the workshops held in mid-season produced the best results. On 1<sup>st</sup> July three hours produced 83 species, notably Peach Blossom, Blue-bordered Carpet, Scalloped Shell, Lilac Beauty, Red-necked Footman (part of the explosion in this species referred to elsewhere) and Small Angle Shades.

However this night was eclipsed on 6<sup>th</sup>. August when 90 species were attracted to six traps in three and a half hours, pride of place going to a Clouded Magpie, found just as the traps were being packed away at midnight. Other species of interest caught that night were Maiden's Blush, Satin Beauty, Dark Sword-grass, Svensson's Copper Underwing, and two more Dorset rarities, The Olive and Small Wainscot.



Clouded Magpie © P N Butter

Like Alners Gorse, this site has considerable unknown potential due to the wide range of foodplants. Trapping so far has been restricted to areas close to the main track through the wood, but who knows what may be found if trapping can be undertaken in some of the more remote parts?

Only one workshop was held at Lydlinch Common this year, on 27<sup>th</sup>. May, and this was switched from Rooksmoor at, literally, the last minute, due to access problems. Apart from a plethora of Hornets, this evening produced Maiden's Blush, Orange Footman, Least Black Arches, Alder Moth and 90 Green Carpets.



Maiden's Blush © A R Pay

Two visits were made to Studland nature reserve in Purbeck. The first, on 21<sup>st</sup>. May was blighted by being a very pleasant but cool night, and only 14 species were caught. A more fruitful evening was held on 3<sup>rd</sup>. September, when notable species were Horse Chestnut, Archer's Dart, Neglected Rustic and Beautiful Yellow Underwing.

Open chalk downland often produces interesting results, and Cashmoor on 17<sup>th</sup>. June was no exception. A total of 114 species were trapped, notably Galium Carpet, Fern, a single Delicate, Red-necked Footman and Grass Rivulet. Perhaps the most unexpected moth was a Pine Hawk Moth, which had obviously wandered from some distant pine woods.

Another site which should have warranted more than one visit in a year with a very full diary is the private wood at Rye Hill, near Wimborne St. Giles. This site produced 95 species with seven traps on 25<sup>th</sup>. May, and while there were no great rarities, species of interest were Great prominent, Oak Nycteoline, Pale Oak Beauty, Pretty Chalk Carpet and Devon Carpet. With the large amounts of bracken in the more open parts of the wood it is no surprise that one of the most abundant species was Brown Silver Lines. Again, this is one location whose true potential has yet to be exploited.



Water Carpet (*Lampropteryx suffumata*) A very attractive species, found at one of the early spring workshops at Duncliffe Wood.

© T A Box

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A programme of workshops has yet to be drawn up for 2006, but this will appear on the DMG website and in the spring newsletter.

## *Taking Moths into Schools*

Whenever there is a hobby or pastime it cannot flourish or continue without generating interest among new generations, and this is particularly important for any research which may make a contribution to protection of the environment. The moth trapping which we carry out for our own enjoyment is part of a much wider range of research activities which make a valuable contribution to the monitoring of trends in the environment, and therefore must continue with an influx of young people to carry on the work.

This year Nigel Spring has started an initiative by collaborating with two Dorset primary schools to hold moth trapping events on their premises, running MV traps at night, and then opening the traps in the morning and showing the catches to the children and staff. The two events held so far have proved to be extremely successful and popular, particularly as they were blessed with good weather and good trapping conditions.

The first was held at Bishops Caundle C of E Primary School on 15<sup>th</sup>. June where three traps were operated for most of the night on the school playing field, and the results were compared with the catch from a single trap at the Kingcombe Centre, 20 kilometres away. Surprisingly, despite the more rural environment of the Kingcombe trap, Bishops Caundle won the day with 32 species against Kingcombe's 30, including a significantly higher score with Noctuids. Naturally the more spectacular moths drew the most interest. These included Poplar and Elephant Hawkmoths, Buff Tip, Lobster Moth and Cream-spot Tiger. Pride of place must, however go to a pristine male Lilac Beauty caught at Bishops Caundle at which Nigel and the Editor displayed suitable excitement, much to the amusement of the school staff.

The following week the solstice was celebrated with three traps set at Hazelbury Bryan School, and one at nearby Alners Gorse, Butterfly Conservation's new nature reserve. This latter trap was only operated for a couple of hours, and then covered and transported to the school to await examination in the morning. Here the lone trap was soundly beaten, 46 species to 16, with, as at Bishops Caundle, an even stronger bias towards Noctuids in the more urban environment. Many of the species seen at Bishops Caundle were also present here, but Alners Gorse produced a fine Blotched Emerald and Four-dotted Footman. A Lime Hawkmoth proved very entertaining showing off its camouflage against the bark of a tree.

At both venues the children and staff showed unflagging interest in the moths and crowded eagerly round the traps to see what was inside. Some revelled in the excitement of having moths sitting on their clothes, while others were terrified at first. Many found the names of some of the species (e.g. Shark, Setaceous Hebrew Character) quite amusing, but it was encouraging to see that there was enough interest and enthusiasm for these activities to maintain interest for a whole morning in each case at two small village schools.

*Our thanks go to the head teachers and their staff for inviting us into their schools, and we look forward to many more events like these at other schools throughout the county in 2006.*



### **National Moth Night**

This year national Moth Night was held on 9<sup>th</sup>. July, with a promise of more favourable weather than at last year's arctic event. This year Dorset did provide some scope for those chasing the target species, with Chalk Carpet and Double Line being distinct possibilities. The likelihood of Dusky Clearwing, Welsh Clearwing and Northern Dart was only for those with either super optimism or vivid imaginations.

Once again Clive Farrell played host to the Group at Ryewater Nursery, near Holnest, both in the afternoon and for the night of full-scale trapping. In the afternoon he gave us a very informative and extensive tour of the site, starting in one of the very rich wild flower meadows, going on to visit one of the lakes where several of the visitors tried their hand at paddling in traditional coracles (without falling in!). Only six common day-flying species were seen on a delightful summer afternoon.

The evening produced 86 species for the many visitors; no great rarities, but a good variety of interesting common species. Those of interest were Oak Nycteoline, Lunar Spotted Pinion, Muslin Footman, Brown Tail (a species which usually frequents coastal habitats but occasionally makes forays inland) and *Nymphula nymphaeata* (Brown China-mark) to be expected in a locality with so many small lakes.

In order to provide a little diversity some members of the group went further afield for the night-time trapping. The Editor travelled almost into Hampshire and operated two traps at Bottlebush Down, near Sixpenny Handley, for just over three hours. Sixty three species were caught, with the emphasis being on *geometridae* including Flame Carpet, Sandy Carpet, Brown Scallop and a rather battered Royal Mantle.

Common, but very enjoyable moths were present in large numbers in the form of Small Elephant Hawk Moth (50) and Garden Tiger Moth (30). Pride of place must however go to a single Kent Black Arches, making it a very worthwhile expedition.

Jim Fradgley stayed at home at Wimborne and notched up an excellent total of 61 species, the highlights being Small Seraphim, Pine Hawk Moth, True Lovers' Knot, Suspected, Small Angle Shades, Birds Wing and The Olive.

## **Liveability Success for the Winterborne Valley**

Readers of our last newsletter will remember reading about the introduction of the Dorset North Winterbournes Project, as a pilot scheme to preserve and manage the wildlife of one of the country's few extensive chalk streams of this type. The Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership is pleased to announce it has been awarded £14,756 from the North Dorset Liveability Fund to take forward work with local communities to celebrate and enhance the rare North Winterborne stream. The Liveability grant will be matched with funds from the AONB Partnership through the Countryside Agency and Environment Agency to take forward priorities identified by local people to improve the management of the stream, its wildlife and heritage.

The bid for funding was put together following two community meetings in February of this year, where local residents, parish councils and landowners met with representatives from the AONB Partnership, Environment Agency, Dorset Countryside Rangers, North Dorset District Council and Dorset's Senior Archaeologist to discuss the management of the stream. Dorset AONB Biodiversity Officer, Alison Turnock, says: "The money will be spent on providing advice on how to manage the stream, some specific projects to protect the stream and improve wildlife habitats, improving access and celebrating the Winterborne and its heritage."

The first of the events to be organised as part of this programme was a series of presentations given by Ben Evans from the Environment Agency and Sarah Williams from the Dorset Wildlife Trust on

### **Wildlife Gardening and Wise Use of Water.**

held on 26<sup>th</sup> October at Winterborne Whitechurch Village Hall.

One aim of the evening was to enable you to find out about ways in which you can conserve water – not only will this benefit local streams and rivers, it can also save you money! It also provided an opportunity to come and learn about gardening along the North Winterborne: how to encourage wildlife, prevent pollution and enjoy your new garden friends. By making simple changes to how you manage the stream edge you can provide habitat for a host of species. Hopefully many DMG members will have heard of this event and gone along to take part.

Please look out for posters or local news items about future events or contact Alison Turnock, Dorset AONB Biodiversity Officer on 01929 557337 or by email, [alisonturnock@purbeck-dc.gov.uk](mailto:alisonturnock@purbeck-dc.gov.uk) to find out more about the project and how you can get involved.

Active DMG members who live in or near the North Winterborne valley may wish to contribute moth records, or select interesting habitats in the valley to carry out trapping expeditions during 2006.



## MOTH WARS!

*Devon*

versus

*Dorset*

I now have two years worth of recording moths in Dorset having spent the previous eight in the neighbouring county of Devon. So I thought it might be interesting to examine the data to see what the differences and similarities are in terms of their moth fauna. Such analysis is not really scientifically robust, as Devon is a far bigger county, the data examined compares three years of Devon records with two years of Dorset records and the number of sites visited is not the same. Nevertheless some fun can be had and perhaps some inferences drawn.

A quick look at the top twenty species in terms of abundance, that is the moths with the highest number of individuals caught, is certainly interesting. Amazingly, 17 of these are the same for both counties, although the exact order differs. The most abundant moths in Devon were Large Yellow Underwing (4,348) Common Rustic/Lesser Common Rustic (3,163), Heart & Dart (3,043) and Lunar Underwing (2,795). One and two in Dorset were Lunar Underwing (2,603), Large Yellow Underwing (2,001) followed by the two "grass moths" *Agriphila culmella* and *A. tristella* with 1,185 and 1,167 moths respectively. The next two macro-moths numbers 5 & 6 on the Dorset list were Square-spot Rustic (969) and Heart & Dart (919).

The six species that were not in the top 20 abundance lists were Straw Dot, Small Quaker and Shuttle-shaped Dart which have been found to be a lot more numerous in Dorset; and The Flame, Buff Ermine and the Pyrale, Mother of Pearl (*P. ruralis*) which were amongst the most numerous Devon moths.

Apart from abundance it is also interesting to look at which species are more widespread in each county, that is which have been recorded from most 10km.squares in each county. Here the lists are quite different. Only seven species occur on both lists, and thus must be considered the most general list of moths in the west country. These are Large Yellow Underwing again, the Brimstone Moth, Flame Shoulder, Heart & Dart again, The Flame, Willow Beauty and the Pyrale *Scoparia ambigualis*.. Several of these were also in the most abundant list so are the really common moths of the study area.

Far more widespread in Devon were the Peppered Moth and Brimstone Moth, Common Marbled Carpet and Silver-ground Carpet. The Mottled Beauty, Spectacle, Light Emerald, Green Carpet, Early Thorn, Double Square-spot, Common White Wave, Elephant Hawkmoth, and Small Fan-footed Wave were also all more widespread in Devon. Many of these species are more woodland moths or like the Elephant Hawk, like damper conditions. Certainly Double Square-spot and Light Emerald would be well down on a Dorset list.

On the other hand the most widespread Dorset moths include Smoky Wainscot, Silver Y, Snout, Riband Wave, Common Carpet and Mother of Pearl. Straw Dot, Dark Arches, Common Footman and Yellow-tail were also found in the top 20. Many of these moths by contrast are grass feeders and hedgerow species, with both Silver Y and Straw Dot being added to by regular immigration from abroad, Dorset generally getting more in the way of migrants than Devon.



Riband Wave © T A Box



Straw Dot © T A Box

The moth lists generally point towards woodland and wet loving species being commoner in Devon whilst open grassland, hedgerow species and migrants are commoner in Dorset which broadly reflects the commonest habitats in the two counties.

Paul Butter.

### **On the Migration Front**

*(Many of these records await confirmation by the county recorders, and are reproduced here from [www.migrantmoth.com](http://www.migrantmoth.com) by kind permission of Steve Nash.)*

2005 will be remembered as a relatively poor year for migrant moths in Dorset although a few lucky people had some very memorable moments. A Silver Y at Upwey on 2<sup>nd</sup>. January was a red herring, and certainly no herald of the events of January and February 2004.

It was not until the latter half of March that things started to move with a sprinkling of Dark Sword-grass and Hummingbird Hawkmoths, although these latter were probably overwintering individuals emerging from hibernation. A Red-headed Chestnut at Preston on 31<sup>st</sup>. March would certainly have been an immigrant.

A month passed before the next significant night for immigration, 1<sup>st</sup>. May. Four Delicates were seen at various localities (with a steady sprinkling of this species throughout the rest of May) and two Turnip Moths and a very early Large Yellow Underwing were trapped at Durlston Country Park.

June saw a small flurry of interesting record with a Ni Moth on 1<sup>st</sup>. at Charmouth, Small Marbled on 4<sup>th</sup>. and Clancey's Rustic on 24<sup>th</sup>. at Preston. An Olive Crescent at Brownsea Island on 24<sup>th</sup>, already a very rare species was well west of its usual range and probably an immigrant. Pride of place during this period must, however go to a

Jersey Black Arches at West Bexington on 19<sup>th</sup>. June, only the second record of this species on mainland Britain.

Two Splendid Brocades have been reported so far this year from Dorset, at Preston on 27<sup>th</sup>. June and Charmouth on 11<sup>th</sup>. July, a further nine individuals being reported from other parts of southern England and the Channel Islands. This species was only admitted to the British list following a spate of records in 2003. During this time a large number of Red-necked Footmen were recorded on the east coast, and a few strayed as far west as Dorset.

The first week of September produced a succession of good trapping nights and some outstanding records at coastal sites. The 1<sup>st</sup>. produced a Pale Shoulder and *Antigastra catalaunalis* at Southwell on Portland, and then on 3<sup>rd</sup>. an Eastern Nycteoline at Weymouth, potentially the second British record. The 4<sup>th</sup>. produced a Vine Moth (*Eupoecilia ambiguella*) and an Oleander Hawk-moth at Durlston Country Park, two *Loxostege sticticalis* at Puddletown, and a Passenger at Southwell. Away from the coast a Dotted Footman was caught at Badbury Rings. The end of the month saw three Dorset reports of Clifden Nonpareil, at Lyons Gate, West Bexington, and at the Butterfly Conservation headquarters at East Lulworth.



Passenger © D Walbridge/M Cade

Mid October produced a Tunbridge Wells Gem at West Bexington on 13<sup>th</sup>, *Uresiphita polygonalis* at Shapwick and Puddletown on 14<sup>th</sup> and an Old World Webworm at Puddletown on 16<sup>th</sup>.



Langmaid's Yellow Underwing © S Nash



Dusky-lemon Sallow and Pale-lemon Sallow © S Nash

Durlston Country Park rounded off the year in style with Langmaid's Yellow Underwing, Pale Lemon Sallow and two Dusky Lemon Sallows on 10<sup>th</sup>, two Oak Rustics on 26<sup>th</sup>. and a further 10 of this species by other observers in early November.



Oak Rustics © C Manley

It is inevitable that the coastal sites produce many more immigrant records than do inland localities, but perseverance inland can produce results as will be shown in the annual report in the next newsletter. As we go to press immigrants are still turning up in good numbers (accompanied by many Red Admiral and Painted Lady butterflies).



#### **Newsletter Distribution**

Jack Astley  
Anna Barwick  
Terry Box  
Norman & Barbara Cape  
Dr. Julian Clark  
Ray Cook  
Jonathan Cox  
Peter Davey  
Janet & Tony Dicks  
Roy & Sue Eden  
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