



# Dorset Moths

June 2020

A celebration of the moths of Dorset...

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## Welcome to our first ever Dorset Moths e-newsletter!

We are now right in the middle of summer and what a year it's been so far! Lockdown has seen many people discover moth recording and it's been wonderful seeing pictures and posts of people's catches from all over Dorset and beyond.

Each month we'll aim to include some articles and contributions from recorders trapping in Dorset about their exciting discoveries or anything interesting to keep an eye out for over the coming weeks. We also want to provide you with a snapshot of interesting sightings which have been posted on our various online ventures such as the [Dorset Moth Group](#) website and the '[Dorset Moths](#)' Facebook page. We've also been kindly granted permission from [Portland Bird Observatory](#) to republish sightings and photos from their wonderful daily update, plus we'll include any exciting recent discoveries from the Dorset verification panel and records submitted to [Living Record](#).

**Luke Phillips**



Luke Phillips 2020

*Poplar Kitten*

## The Return of the Speckled Footman



© Durwyn Lily

At Footprint Ecology we are lucky to be based in Wareham Forest and we occasionally run a moth trap nearby. With covid restrictions just starting to ease, there was an opportunity to put a trap on. On the 24<sup>th</sup> June, a scorching day and a warm night meant that conditions were great. The following morning, before work, Chris Panter, Phil Saunders, Zoe Caals and I socially distanced ourselves around the trap. I couldn't quite work out the first moth I saw - Speckled Footman instantly came to mind but it didn't seem right. Very black and white, it was sitting on top of the egg trays, with wings flat, not tucked around the body. It was larger than expected and didn't fit at all with the search image I had, of a greyer moth with wings wrapped to the body giving a pinched appearance.

Back-track a few years and an old friend, James Lowen was plotting a book about moths and nothing<sup>1</sup>. He was planning to tour the country looking for moth stories and moths - I casually suggested he come to Purbeck and try for Speckled Footman. I'd known there were records from the Wareham Forest area and around Cold Harbour. Roll on to July 2019 and the year of James working on the book. Over the winter we had contacted Butterfly Conservation folk, worked out where to put traps, talked to people that had caught it in the past, arranged access with Forestry England and we had a large group of moth-ers keen to help. With traps dotted across the Forest there were over 200 moths caught, it was a great evening, but no Speckled Footman. James and I also tried trapping at some other heathland sites, including Slepe Heath, where Bryan Pickess caught Speckled Footman in the 1980s, before it was planted with conifers. For James it was the one moth that he searched for and failed to see that year, perhaps an ambitious subject for his book.

Roll on 2020 and it's taken us completely by surprise. Coaxed into a pot, we emailed a picture to Butterfly Conservation and to James while going through the rest of the trap. They confirmed the identity and the following night, with James and a small group of moth folk we put 5 traps out in the hope there might be more. Over 240 species this time, but no more Speckled Footman. It must be

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<sup>1</sup> Much Ado About Nothing, to be published by Bloomsbury in May 2021

just hanging on and at very low density. James got to write a coda for his book, just as it went to the publishers, but let's hope it's not the last record.

Formerly restricted to Dorset and Hampshire, as far as I am aware, this was the first record of the native subspecies (migrants do also occur) since 2014, and prior to that the previous records were in 2010. The only records this century are from the Wareham Forest area and Canford Heath area. There was a count of 9 from Canford in 2000 and Mark Parsons and Dave Green found a small number of larvae there in 2001 and 2002. Going back 30-40 years from now and there were records from Arne, across Hartland, Slepe and Stoborough. The last records in Hampshire were in the 1960s.

Background on the Speckled Footman in Dorset, its decline and what is known about its ecology are summarised by Peter Davey on the Dorset Moths website<sup>2</sup> and in an article by Mark Parsons in the Dorset Moth Group Newsletter<sup>3</sup>. Fine-leaved grasses, particularly Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii* are the critical food plant and are widespread across many heaths. The larvae found at Canford were in an area that had been previously burnt. Early successional, open, dry and sandy habitat is perhaps key. Is it the lack of appropriate management, climate or nutrient enrichment that have contributed to its downfall? Are there other sites where it is still hanging on?

I know others have been searching hard for the moth in recent years and hope that this record provides a glimmer of hope. Earlier this year there was the massive fire at Wareham Forest and while devastating for so many species, there is perhaps a chance that there will be a flush of Bristle Bent in coming years. Colleagues and I are keen to keep looking in the Wareham Forest area and targeted trapping is also being planned at Canford Heath. We are grateful to Forestry England for permission to run the trap and their support and also to Mark Parsons and Phil Sterling (both Butterfly Conservation) for their encouragement.

### Durwyn Liley



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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dorsetmothgroup.info/portal/p/Summary/s/Coscinia+cribraria>

<sup>3</sup> July 2013; pages 2-4

## June Highlights

A snapshot of interesting sightings which have been posted on our various online ventures such as the [Dorset Moth Group](#) website and the '[Dorset Moths](#)' Facebook page. We've also been kindly granted permission from [Portland Bird Observatory](#) to republish sightings plus we'll include any exciting recent discoveries from the Dorset verification panel and records submitted to [Living Record](#). It's important to note that records featuring here are still subject to verification and need to be submitted via [Living Record](#) or by following guidance on our [Dorset moths recording page](#).

Dates highlighted are as posted online and may not reflect the actual date recorded and we've no doubt missed some records which will be captured in our annual report at the end of the year. Enjoy!

- 1<sup>st</sup> June      Crassa tinctella, Freak's Coppice (M Parsons)  
Scarce Merveille de Jour, Merley Park, Wimborne (M Brown)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> June      Dingy Mocha, Spetisbury (A Bell)  
Blair's Mocha, Weymouth (D Foot)  
Buttoned Snout, Tolpuddle (J Francis)  
Scarce Merveille de Jour, Wimborne (M Burton)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> June      Goat Moth, Ridge (R Carpenter)
- 4<sup>th</sup> June      Orange Moth, Leigh (C Fox)
- 5<sup>th</sup> June      Telechrysis tripuncta, Swineham (G&L Mutton)
- 6<sup>th</sup> June      Ancyliis subarcuana, Winfrith Heath, larvae on Creeping Willow (D Foot)
- 8<sup>th</sup> June      Cosmopterix scribaiella, Lytchett Minster, (N Hull)  
Adoxophyes orana Summer Fruit Tortrix, Dorchester (J Down)
- 9<sup>th</sup> June      Beautiful Marbled, Swanage (P England)  
White Spot, Swanage (P England)



*Beautiful Marbled.* © P England

- 13<sup>th</sup> June      *Metalampra italica*, Hardown Hill (M Parsons & A Foster)  
                    *Celypha aurofasciana*, Leigh (C Fox)
- 14<sup>th</sup> June      *Telechrysis tripuncta*, Whitchurch Canonicorum (L Phillips & A Martin)
- 15<sup>th</sup> June      *Perittia obscurepunctella*, mine found in honeysuckle on Portland (W  
                    Langdon)
- 16<sup>th</sup> June      Shaded Pug, Preston, Weymouth (G Lightfoot)
- 17<sup>th</sup> June      Forester, Portland (R Carpenter); Forester, Charity Bottom (M Parsons)  
                    *Evergestis limbata*, Lytchett Bay (N Hull)
- 18<sup>th</sup> June      Great Oak Beauty, Alderholt (T Morris)



© Tom Morris

19<sup>th</sup> June Cloaked Pug, Portland Bill (M Cade)

20<sup>th</sup> June Spinach, Bournemouth (N Dobbs)

24<sup>th</sup> June *Ocnerosstoma friesei*, Bournemouth (D Evans)

25<sup>th</sup> June *Anania stachydalis*, Whitchurch Canonicorum (L Phillips & A Martin)

*Celypha aurofasciana*, Whitchurch Canonicorum (L Phillips & A Martin)

25<sup>th</sup> June *Anarsia innoxia* (2<sup>nd</sup> Dorset record) Whitchurch Canonicorum (L Phillips & A Martin)



©Luke Phillips

26<sup>th</sup> June *Eucosma parvulana* (2<sup>nd</sup> Dorset record) Whitchurch Canonicorum (L Phillips & A Martin)

Bright Wave, Portland Bill (M Cade)

Catoptria verellus, Portland Bill (M Cade)

Elegia similella, Broadway (P Harris)

Eucosma conterminana, Broadway (P Harris). Also 3 recorded from Portland (M Cade)

Clifden Nonpareil, Eype's Mouth, larva on Aspen branch, photo confirmed by Phil Sterling (R Goff)



©Russell Goff

27<sup>th</sup> June Silver Barred, Portland Bill (M Cade)



© Martin Cade