

MOTH REPORT

Moth trapping using light traps is by its very nature a nocturnal activity and in the summer months this generally means that activity does not start until around 10 pm. Generally, if it is intended to stay and observe, the trap used is a white sheet illuminated by a mercury vapour lamp, typically 125W. This arrangement permits a group of people to sit around the light and note each new arrival, a very social and educational activity. The moths usually make a few circuits of the lamp before alighting on the sheet. In high summer the number of moths arriving at the sheet can be in the hundreds and a sense of excitement fills the observers, as there is always the possibility of a new species for the site, recorder, or even the county.

Such was the situation in 2002 when a group of experts from the local moth recording group identified the first county specimen of *Phlyctaenia perlucidalis*, a small moth of the Pyralid group. It is generally whitish brown with an iridescent hue – a rather attractive moth, but quite small, having a wingspan of around 2 cm. The insect was first noted in the UK in 1957 and has been seen at a relatively few, but increasing, number of locations in the country. It is a moth of fenland and although literature states that its known larval foodplant is cabbage thistle (*Cirsium oleraceum*), it is generally agreed that it survives on other species in the UK.

The discovery of the moth at Woolston immediately prompted the question, “Was it an immigrant or was it breeding on the Eyes?”, so a major effort was made to investigate this species.

The use of a sheet trap requires the presence of an observer, however, light traps resembling lobster pots can be used to hold a night's catch and permit investigation the following morning. A trap was designed specifically with use on the Eyes in mind; tough, waterproof and relatively inexpensive, that could run for a few nights on battery power. The trap was placed on the South Meadow, near to the site of the original trapping of the moth.

Exactly one year to the day since the first specimen was found (14th July) a second moth was caught. It very nearly got away, flying from the trap when it was opened, but, after an excited chase across the meadow, was finally netted. Although the presence of the second specimen does not prove breeding, it is a very encouraging sign.

The more frequent trapping (and increasing education of the observer!) during 2003 also led to an increase in the total number species recorded. None of the new species are particularly rare (and one wonders how some -like Poplar Hawk Moth- failed to be recorded in previous years). Most had been observed in the moth trapping sessions of a decade ago and so are not new to the site. Of particular note are that some more micro-moth and pug species have been recorded, these providing greatest challenge for identification.

Moth recording has concentrated heavily on light trapping towards the centre of No.3 bed, mainly because of the ease of access, security and diversity of flora. However, it is very clear from the species lists that a major group of moths, the diurnal ones, are under recorded. This situation is not confined to Woolston but is mirrored throughout

the country. Similarly, there are a number of moth species that do not come readily to light. Many can be observed feeding on natural blooms in the late evening, or on artificial lures, such as ropes soaked in sugar and wine. It is hoped that some observations can be made using these methods during 2004.

The group would welcome records of any day flying moths seen on the Reserve and invites anyone interested in lepidoptera to join us for an evening's mothing (contact B. Martin the Group recorder).

The following list is of those species new to the recent site list (since 2001) in 2003.

Taxon	Vernacular
<i>Hepialus humuli humuli</i>	Ghost Moth
<i>Agapeta hamana</i>	
<i>Acleris forsskaleana</i>	
<i>Agriphila tristella</i>	
<i>Evergestis forficalis</i>	Garden Pebble
<i>Numonia advenella</i>	
<i>Idaea aversata ab. remutata</i>	Riband Wave [non-banded form]
<i>Xanthorhoe ferrugata</i>	Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet
<i>Eulithis pyraliata</i>	Barred Straw
<i>Perizoma flavofasciata</i>	Sandy Carpet
<i>Eupithecia tenuiata</i>	Slender Pug
<i>Selenia dentaria</i>	Early Thorn
<i>Laothoe populi</i>	Poplar Hawk-moth
<i>Notodonta ziczac</i>	Pebble Prominent
<i>Phragmatobia fuliginosa fuliginosa</i>	Ruby Tiger
<i>Agrotis ipsilon</i>	Dark Sword-grass
<i>Noctua fimbriata</i>	Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing
<i>Noctua interjecta caliginosa</i>	Least Yellow Underwing
<i>Mythimna ferrago</i>	Clay
<i>Thalophila matura</i>	Straw Underwing
<i>Cosmia trapezina</i>	Dun-bar

Graham Cooke