

## MOTHS IN SOMERSET 2009

The Somerset Moth Group (SMG) was formed in 1989 by a band of local enthusiasts, the aim of the group being to record and study moths in the county, and to promote an interest in these fascinating creatures. We cater for all levels of expertise, from beginner to expert, running identification workshops and ‘moth nights’, an informative website (<http://www.somersetmothgroup.org.uk/>) and a network of active recorders. New members are always welcome.

The group now has a county recorder for macro moths, Ian Mathieson, who welcomes records from members and non-members alike. He can be contacted at the following address: Ian Mathieson,

It is ten years since the first provisional Atlas of macro moths in Somerset was published. Intensive recording since then, along with habitat loss and probably climate change, will doubtless have changed the maps significantly. We are intending to publish a new Atlas in 2010, and the group wishes to thank all those who have contributed records over the last ten years.

2009 was a busy year for the Somerset Moth Group, and we give below a summary of some of the main activities and highlights of the year.

### Identification of Aggregate Species workshop, 28 March

This was a thoroughly enjoyable day organised by Butterfly Conservation, covering the necessary skills and techniques to enable separation of species within ‘aggregates’ such as the November Moth complex (*Epirrita* spp), and difficult groups like the Ears

(*Amphipoea* spp) and Minors (*Oligia* and *Mesoligia* spp), as well as some very useful advice on the identification of Pugs (*Eupithecia* spp) and micros.

### *Celypha woodiana* workshop, 6 May

Several SMG members attended an excellent workshop at Barrington Court on Mistletoe Marble (*Celypha woodiana*), run by James McGill. This BAP species has since been recorded widely by James and others across the south Somerset Levels, on Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) growing on Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) – we are starting to think that this moth may not be quite as rare as previously thought.

### Public moth nights

Mike Ridge organised a number of moth nights open to the public during the year, which were generally well attended and we are grateful to him for the commitment he gives to these. Details of forthcoming moth nights, with links to location maps, can be found on the SMG website.

### Notable catches in 2009 – resident species

Having seen what was possibly a Light Orange Underwing (*Archiearis notha*) at Merryfield Airfield on 4 April, Bill Urwin returned there with James McGill the next day. Eventually James managed to net a female specimen and it was confirmed as the first modern record of this species for Somerset. While on site Bill and James looked at plants of

Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*) – a species which has declined recently in Somerset – and found several adult *Grapholita lathyra*, a Tortricid which has only one other recorded UK site (at West Bexington in Dorset). There were also larvae of several micros feeding and James bred out one of these, which turned out to be *Agonopterix atomella*, a declining species now only known from about six sites in the UK. Merryfield Airfield is a critically important site, and fortunately the MOD are very cooperative in their management. A few days later Bill Urwin caught a specimen of *Adela cuprella* in the Blackdowns, its identity being subsequently confirmed by John Langmaid – the first record of this micromoth for VC5 (S. Somerset).

Turning to larger species, in 2009 Robin Clatworthy and Mike Ridge took the second county record of Northern Rustic (*Standfussiana lucerna*) and the first of Devonshire Wainscot (*Mythimna putrescens*), and they once again took Black-banded (*Polymixis xanthomista*) at Hurlstone Point, after its first recorded occurrence in Somerset in 2008. On 13 July Pam Campbell trapped what appeared to be a Kent Black Arches (*Meganola albula*) in Holford, a record later confirmed by Bill Urwin; this seems to be a first county record for this non-migrant species, which has its nearest known breeding colonies on the Dorset coast.

## Migrants

Although the migrant moth species in 2009 failed to match the enormous influx of Painted Lady butterflies (*Cynthia cardui*), there were several notable records. Rannoch Looper (*Itame brunneata*) was caught widely across south-west England and two were recorded in Somerset, one of which was taken by Michael Barry on 3 June – this is a species new to the county. Silver Y (*Autographa gamma*) was present in fair numbers but Humming-bird Hawk-moth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) was rarely seen. There were two reports of Striped Hawkmoth (*Hyles livornica*) in 2009: one, in July, nectaring on Red Campion (*Silene dioica*) in my Langport garden, the other taken at light in Curry Rivel by Malcolm Cotterill. John Day took a third county record of Small Marbled (*Eublemma parva*) near Yeovil.

The most exciting moth of the year, however, was undoubtedly a Ringed Border (*Stegania cararia*) taken by Robin Clatworthy at Merriott on 1 July. This is the first mainland British (let alone Somerset) record, although two have been taken in the Channel Islands (Jersey).

JOHN BEBBINGTON  
Chairman/Hon. Sec. Somerset Moth Group