

SOMERSET MOTH GROUP

Set up in early 1990, the Somerset Moth Group currently has nearly 40 members. Its main aims are to record and assess the distributions of moth species in the county, and to provide information on species distributions, frequencies and habitat requirements for nature reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and other sites of nature conservation importance. Conservation management recommendations, especially for rare or local moths, can also be given to reserve managers. Effort will be concentrated in the first few years in collating post-1980 records of macromoths (for which records are currently held of 556 macro species resident in Somerset), with the eventual aim of producing an *Atlas of Somerset Macromoths*.

Field meetings during the 1991 season concentrated on under-recorded parts of the county, to help ensure widespread and comprehensive coverage, and species totals for many 10 km squares have increased substantially. Records are now held for most areas and habitat types in the county.

Various recording methods are used, including light-trapping, 'sugaring' and larvae searches. The Group holds regular field meetings, mostly light-trapping evenings from April to September, to record nature reserves or under-recorded 10 km squares. Co-ordination and consistency in recording methods are achieved by the use of a standard recording form which includes a county species list and information on habitat type. During 1991, eleven field meetings were held, in which a total of 240 macromoth species

were recorded. The Somerset Moth Group also contributed to a local planning enquiry into the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester Improvement Scheme, by light-trapping in an ancient wood threatened by one of the proposed new routes. Several nationally notable moths were recorded, but the results of the enquiry are still awaited.

A first county record was the Sloe Pug *Chloroclystis chloerata* (Mabille), found as larvae on Blackthorn flowers in April at Crook Peak (ST 35/45), by David Agassiz, Ian Bolt and Kim Leaver, and later bred. A number of recorders found the nationally-rare Dotted Chestnut *Conistra rubiginea* ([Denis & Schiff.]), during the early spring, and it was also seen at Great Breach Wood (ST 53), Haselbury Plucknett (ST 41) and North Cheriton (ST 62). The Lunar Hornet Moth *Sesia bembeciformis* Hübner, was detected at Crewkerne (ST 41) and Shapwick Heath (ST44), at the latter site with galleries of Red-tipped Clearwing *Synanthedon formicaeformis* (Esper).

The autumn of 1991 will be remembered for the huge immigration of the Silver Y *Autographa gamma* (L.), which was everywhere in large numbers. Associated with this influx were numbers of migrant Sphingidae, including the Humming-bird Hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum* (L.), and Convolvulus Hawk-moth *Agrius convolvuli* (L.). More spectacularly, an imago Death's-head Hawk-moth *Acherontia atropos* (L.) occurred at Crewkerne (ST 40), where it featured in the local press. Another migrant, The Delicate *Mythimna vitellina* (Hübner) was recorded at Porlock (SS 84) and at Brean Down (ST 25).

If you are interested in moths and are not already a member of the Somerset Moth Group, and especially if you have moth records which have not been submitted to the Group, please write to Somerset Moth Group, c/o Somerset Environmental Records Centre, Pickney, Kingston St Mary, Taunton TA2 8AS.

The late IAN BOLT and ANDREW DUFF