

SOMERSET MOTH GROUP

1994 was a notable year in several respects. Firstly, it was a very good year for migrants. Most naturalists will have noticed the abundance of the Silver Y *Autographa gamma* Linn. which arrived in April/May and bred in large numbers including a small percentage of the small form ab. *gammina* Staudinger. They may not have noticed the two pyrales *Nomophila noctuella* (D & S) and *Udea ferrugalis* (Hübner) which did the same, the latter being recorded as late as 2 December. There were a number of records, also, of Dark Sword-grass *Agrotis ipsilon* Hufn., Pearly Underwing *Peridroma saucia* Hübner., Bordered Straw *Heliothis peltigera* D & S and Vestal *Rhodometra sacraria* Linn. The record of *Sceliodes laisalis* (Walker) from Curry Rivel – the first for the county – was also originally included in this category although it now seems more likely that it may have been an import with tomatoes.

The year was notable, also, for the addition of three new species of larger moths to our list of post-1980 records. Satin Lutestring *Tetheella fluctuosa* Hübn. was recorded on Exmoor by John Robbins and may be established at low density. The L-album Wainscot *Mythimna l-album* Linn. reached Tony Parsons at Crewkerne from its breeding place along the south coast, particularly that of Devon and Dorset, and the Scarce Tissue *Rheumaptera cervinalis* Scop. was found here at North Cheriton in the east of the county. The first two are nationally notable (Nb) species; the latter is restricted by the distribution of its food plant, Barberry, although in captivity it will accept cultivars.

The Field Meetings programme was successful, especially the series held at Kings Cliff Wood near North Petherton. Less successful were our searches for rare species. Following our discovery of larvae of the Scarce Black *Lygephila craccae* D & S on Wood Vetch on the Exmoor coast in 1993 we tried again for this RDB3 species in 1994. This time a large area of the food plant was searched a few miles east of the previous site but without success. This was almost certainly due to the fact that, here, the food plant was in close competition with many other plants, notably bramble. Finally, numbers of one of the county's star species, Small Eggar *Eriogaster lanestris* Linn. crashed dramatically. This was due to a combination of adverse climatic conditions during the larval stage and the depredations caused by its parasites. Ironically, this was the year in which it was demoted from RDB3 to Nb status!

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