

MothsIreland

Newsletter no.3

March 2007

Edited by Angus Tyner

This is the third Newsletter from the MothsIreland branch of the Irish Moth & Butterfly Group.

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The good summer of 2006 seems to be carrying through to the Spring of 2007. Common Quaker *Orthosia cerasi* have already been recorded in record numbers and the numbers of other species are looking promising. Hopefully this will be replicated throughout the year.

Competition reminder

There's still time to get your entries to Michael. Details are in Newsletter no.2. Closing date 31st March 2007. Good use can be made of the species mentioned in the appendix...

Focus on Micro Moth

This should be a regular feature in future newsletter. Most moth'ers run moth traps. Most of the time, there are so called micro-moths in the trap, perhaps outnumbering the so called macro-moths. They are all moths, so surely they shouldn't all be ignored. Many of them are larger than some macro-moths and are easy to identify. This feature will highlight some of these micro species that may be found in most recorder's traps. Hopefully it will save the endless search through Waring et al and/or Skinner.

This newsletter features *Diurnea fagella*. It is on the wing from mid March till end of April.

MothsIreland Database

At the time of the last newsletter at the end of January there were c.48,000 records, of about 240,000 individual Macro-moths in the database. This was the full data of 5 recorders plus the 26 county data from 2 Northern Ireland based recorders and one overseas.

The database has grown considerably since and now has c.90,000 of c.450,000 individuals. This is comprised of the full data of 13 recorders, plus most of Ken Bond's records plus the 26 county data from 2 Northern Ireland based recorders and one overseas.

The validation process is not complete for the vast bulk of these records, but it is a tiny minority that are queried. It is anticipated that the Macro-moth dataset will exceed 100,000 records during the next couple of months.

Please send any records you have to [Angus](#).

Website

There will be approximately 480 distribution maps uploaded during the next couple of months. These will have flight graphs attached that should prove very useful. I'm waiting for a couple more datasets before the upload. Photos are being compiled and supporting text is being worked on. However as there is a considerable amount of work involved, don't expect many photos or text to be uploaded before next winter!

There will be little else on the website in the short term, but once the atlases are uploaded thoughts can turn towards other aspects of the site. See sample page (<http://www.mothsireland.com/species/sample.htm>).

Notification will be sent out as soon as maps are uploaded

Mapmate

The number of recorders using Mapmate (<http://www.mapmate.co.uk/index.html>) is now 18 and some of these are now syncing with the MothsIreland database ensuring that the database is up to date with their records. As is often the case with new software, it's a steep learning curve for some, but Michael and Angus are sorting out issues quickly.

Free copies of this software with free updates to 30th November 2007 are still available for moth recorders. Please contact Michael@m...

You can have a mothsireland.com e-mail

We are now in a position to offer a your.name at mothsireland.com email address to anyone who would like one. This can be a stand alone e-mail or can be setup to forward to an existing e-mail address of your choice. If you wish to avail of this please contact Angus@m...

Would you like to contribute to future newsletters?

If you'd like to type an article, note or snippet on any aspect of moth recording in Ireland that they would like to include in the next Newsletter please don't be shy. It can be on any subject e.g. My Garden, My Favourite Moth, My Best (or Worst) Day, etc. or even something like 'October records of Hebrew Character in Ireland' (although this one would be quite short)! Please send to one of the committee listed at bottom

The Year Ahead – The Year of the Moth?

As the number of active moth'ers has grown over the last couple of years we have been receiving more and more records. With a thank-you in advance for 2007 we should see a record year for collecting moth data. Please take careful note of the validation criteria as for some species conclusive evidence of a record will be required! We intend the assembled database to be a fully validated scientific record linking records clearly to the evidence – whether it's photographs or specimens. We believe this will for the first time produce a robust dataset for future lepidopterists.

The provisional distribution maps will give you a good idea of recording effort across the country – take a look at the map for Large Yellow Underwing and you will see a map more reflective of recording effort than the true distribution of the species. One of our long term aims is to try and fill in the gaps in coverage – a major undertaking.

Most of us begin our obsessive hobby by catching moths in our own gardens. This enables us to begin the never ending learning curve towards a level of competence! Although this type of recording effort produces a host of useful data the records do not necessarily reflect what the moths of the wider countryside are doing! Once you feel happy to "move out" and you have a portable trap such as a battery operated Heath Trap why not look for potential trapping sites on "good habitat" nearby – perhaps a local nature reserve, a woodland or designated site or just some quality farmland. You may well be very surprised by the change in composition of your catches. Don't forget to get the relevant permissions before setting your traps!

Another approach is to go in search of a species for which there are no recent records – check the existing texts such as Baynes and identify those species that haven't been seen for years and go and find them...or at least try! Consider choosing sites with good historic assemblages – we took a run to Killarney National Park some seven years ago with only the information in Baynes as guidance, a set of Park keys, nine traps and a lot of enthusiasm! To say we had our minds blown is a serious understatement – Lobster Moth, Orange Moth, Striped Wainscot, Goat Moth and Peacock Moth were some of the highlights. Many of these species had been unrecorded for years.

If you haven't tried why not try daytime netting with a butterfly net – once you've made a few catches you will become less self-conscious! Beat the bushes, sweep the vegetation – it's a good test of hand-eye co-ordination! You could always try larvae but be aware that this can be a much more difficult area of study.

So what about getting on top of the highest mountains to find the Northern Dart, is the White Satin still in west Mayo? Is there a resident population of Red Underwing in County Louth?.....get out there and find out – but don't forget to let us know.

Dave Allen.

Focus on Micro Moth

Diurna fagella

This species accounts for most ID requests during spring. A species of deciduous woodland, it has been recorded across most of Ireland. The main flight season in Wicklow is mid March to mid April.

Usually about 15-17mm long, it is a little smaller than March moth in size, and is quite obvious in the trap, though its pale colour can match egg trays and so it can be overlooked. A melanic form has been recorded a couple times as well. The female has very small wings and is effectively flightless.



© Angus Tyner
Ashford Co. Wicklow



© Angus Tyner
Melanic Form
Ashford Co. Wicklow



© Michael O'Donnell
Gorey Co. Wexford



Diurna fagella (left) and March Moth *Alsophila aescularia* (right)
Ashford Co. Wicklow

© Angus Tyner

Identification Forum: Red Twin-spot Carpet – Starting from scratch

This article originally appeared in Carmarthenshire Moth & Butterfly group Newsletter no.3 July 2006

Jon Baker kindly gave permission for us to reproduce here with slight altering of text. All pictures are copyright of Jon Baker and have been scaled down to be kind to those on dial-up. Higher resolution pictures are available from Angus. Carmarthenshire is in SW Wales.

Red Twin-spot Carpet *Xanthorhoe spadicearia* vs **Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet** *Xanthorhoe ferrugata*.

At any particular time of year, there are always a couple of species which are very similar in appearance and need careful examination to separate. Two of these are Red Twin-spot Carpet and Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet. They will be on the wing from late April onwards.

For many years the separation of these two species has caused great problems for recorders. The problem was caused by a misleading piece of information to be found in fieldguides, which has led observers to believe that the presence of a "notch" in the median band is indicative of *ferrugata*. Both species are very variable, and *ferrugata* has an uncommon form that has a red-band instead of the typical dark band.

The result of the false "notch" theory has been that notched *spadicearia* have routinely been claimed as the red-banded form of *ferrugata*. In Carmarthenshire the red-banded form of *ferrugata* is far from common. We don't know what the situation in Ireland is. There are now only 22 records of *spadicearia* vs nearly 600 records of *ferrugata* in the MothsIreland database. This is as a result of many records of *spadicearia* being scrubbed. Ken Bond mentions "that ALL BUT ONE of my records (7) of RTSC are day obs., and all are from mountain slopes except for one from a raised bog in Offaly (2 are at 400m+)."



X. ferrugata



X. spadicearia

If the moth is kind enough to open its wings and lie flat, there are several things to look for. DBTSC tends to have a broader central band, irrespective of colour, that has a deeper "step" to it (where it suddenly broadens, it does so more noticeably). The area beyond the central bar is much less colourful – though, as with all things, be aware of wear. In a typical RTSC there is usually a clearly defined white line along the edges of the central band. The area near the "twin-spots" is richer than in DBTSC, which usually has more isolated "twin-spots".

So, given that the notch is a **red herring**, how can observers tell these two apart? In 90% of cases it is relatively easy, once one knows what to look for.

So what does the infamous red form of *ferrugata* look like? Well here is one and another *spadicearia*:



X. ferrugata



X. spadicearia

As you can see, it still has the deeper step, the chalkier terminal area, and the isolated spots. The edges of the central band are not so well lined with white as in the *spadicearia* and the general tones are not as warm. Contrary to popular belief, red form *X. ferrugata* in south Wales seems to be quite rare.

Underside:

So, what if the moth is being wholly uncooperative and not opening its wings (which they commonly choose not to do)? Well, fortunately the underside can be as diagnostic as the upper. In DBTSC, the underside is a far more uniform grey, with little contrast. This is true of both the dark form and the red form. However in RTSC, there is a strongly contrasting pattern, with a deep gingery colouration towards the apex of the wing.



X. ferrugata



X. spadicearia

In conclusion:

How many of the records on the database are likely to have been errors, based on the misleading "notch" theory, is impossible to say. But hopefully with clearer understanding in the future, the picture will be clearer. It is certain that DBTSC is the more common of the two but more analysis of accurate records needs to be made to establish how widespread and common RTSC is.

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