



DENIZENS OF THE NIGHT

We haven't yet returned to a completely natural rhythm of getting up with daybreak and going to bed at nightfall, and of adjusting the length of our hours accordingly, but it is true to say that the nuns and monks of the Abbey are largely diurnal in their habits (no pun intended). In other words, you are unlikely to meet one of us much after nine at night and, in my case, certainly not before six in the morning (which gives me about ten minutes to get to the chapel). This means that, ordinarily speaking, it's best not to ask the monks and nuns about the night-life of Turvey - they know very little. But there are, of course, exceptions to every rule and in that ten minute dash to the chapel in the morning a surprising amount can be learnt about the goings-on of the night before, particularly if one is prepared to spend a few minutes staring at the monastery wall.

I hear my twin-brother at this point saying - What's he going on about?

Well, the wall in question is lit at night by two front-door lights and it's amazing how many species of moth, and other insects too, will settle there for the night, and most of the next day too.

This "other-world" first came to my notice not on one of the gloriously warm evenings we have had recently but in the depths of our non-too-warm winter. There were moths flying even on the coldest of nights in December and January. Most of these were males - on the prowl no doubt for their wingless females, an adaptation perhaps to enable the latter to survive the snow and storms of winter. These included Scarce and Mottled Umbers, Dotted Borders and the aptly-named Winter Moth. This discovery whetted my appetite for more, and a regular search around the lights each morning has produced another fifty species, some quite rare, such as the Black Arches, some quite enormous, such as the Large Red Underwing, some very beautiful, such as the Phoenix and the Purple Thorn, and many so well camouflaged as to be almost impossible to see, such as the Sprawler and the Marbled Beauty. It has also introduced me to a whole new vocabulary and a determination to know even more. Hence the acquisition of a moth-trap which does the job even better, indeed, embarrassingly well.

This ultra-violet light attracted over 500 moths on one night in July, and regularly brings in thirty to fifty species. This demands a frantic rush in the morning to rescue the moths from any wasps that may have strayed in and to identify and release the more restless ones before the birds are wise to a free lunch. The majority, however, are perfectly content to remain in the egg boxes provided, and to stay there until released the following night. They will even tolerate being lifted out in their boxes and carefully studied, which is something of a relief as there are some two and a half thousand moths recorded for Britain, of which we can expect some 300+ in and around Turvey.

The tally of species so far is almost 150, many with wonderful names such as the Scarce Tissue, the Flounced Rustic and the Chinese Character. We have had several with an ecclesiastical theme, such as the Gothic and the Powdered Quaker, and both a Bright-line Brown eye and a Brown-line Bright Eye. We have also had our share of migrants, with many Silver-Ys, which are also day-fliers and have been particularly abundant this year, and on one night a Bordered Straw, which likewise hails from southern climes.

To end on a nefarious note. My favourite so far has to be "the Old Lady" found dead by Sr. Paula in a chapel corridor!

Br. John