

Sun-moths

We've touched on day-flying moths before, such as the bright black and red Cinnabar and Burnet moths, but there are many more, especially among the micro-moths – those deemed unworthy enough to belong to the macros, though many exceed them in size, and in beauty too. Indeed, over a third of the 1000 or so micros are partly diurnal and the Sun-moths are particularly striking. These are the small black and yellow moths with immensely long antennae which are to be seen in May and June rising and falling by hedgerows and woods throughout England and Wales. They belong to the family Adelidae, collectively known as Longhorns, of which we have some 15 species in Britain, five of which have so far been identified by me in the parish of Turvey.

The adult Sun-moths (*Nemophora degeerella*) are very distinctive with golden heads and antennae nearly four times longer than the forewing in the males, which makes them up to 4cm in length. The forewings are a metallic golden-brown crossed with a yellow band edged blackish-blue. When at rest these are held tent-like over the backs of all the Adelinae. The females have shorter antennae but are no less brightly coloured and are to be found waiting patiently for a partner on the nearby vegetation while the males dance up and down. Once seen the sight is unforgettable but beware – there is a smaller relative, *Adela croesella*, which also occurs locally but the antennae of which in the male are only twice the length of the forewing (which makes them about 13mm long).

The other local longhorns are duller but no less striking because of their long antennae. *Cauchus rufimitrella* can be found where the Cuckoo- flower occurs, on which it lays its eggs. The antennae in the male are twice the length of the forewing (and so about 12mm long). This is a metallic golden-green in colour. Very similar, and seemingly more numerous, is *Adela reaumurella*, which is slightly larger, with antennae three times the length of the dark or bluish green forewing (and so up to 18mm in length). It's often to be found swarming around the outer branches of Oak and Hazel.

The last of the Longhorns so far identified locally has the splendid Latin name *Nematopogon metaxella*. This is far harder to be sure of as its forewing is a greyish- yellow with only a blurred dark spot on this to give it away. But it has antennae three times the length of the forewing making them some 24mm in length and looking absurdly fragile. There was one in the light-trap last week. This is where a digital camera with macro-zoom comes in handy, and a steady hand. This, with the superb new guide to micro-moths by Sterling and Parsons, opens up a whole new world to be explored in the comfort of one's armchair at home. Oh, and, of course, you will need a ruler.

Br. John