

More Turvey Insects

Three moths also feature in the Turvey Abbey Scrapbook (compiled in the early nineteenth century): the Leopard Moth, the Emperor Moth and, what I take to be, the Oak Eggar Moth. The first of these has a very distinctive appearance: bluish-black dots on a white background, and hence presumably its name. Five were recorded by the Higgins family in Turvey, the last two on July 25th 1830, and all being found under the firegrate in the drawing-room of the Abbey. I've so far recorded only three in Turvey, attracted to the moth-trap in July of 1996, 1998 and 1999.

The other two species of moth recorded in the Scrapbook are especially interesting because the females of each species can attract the males over considerable distances by the use of pheromones (chemical or scent released into the atmosphere). The classic account of this was by J.H. Fabre in 1897 when he and his son were startled to find a room full of moths 'as big as birds'. These were Giant Emperor Moths attracted to a freshly emerged female under a wire-gauze bell jar. One of the Higgins family had had a similar experience earlier in the nineteenth century when a female of a large Eggar Moth was 'put into a thin deal box covered with a piece of fine muslin, and taken into the field'. This attracted 'more than a dozen males of the same species', and 'even after the box was removed away, one also settled upon the spot of ground where the box had stood'.

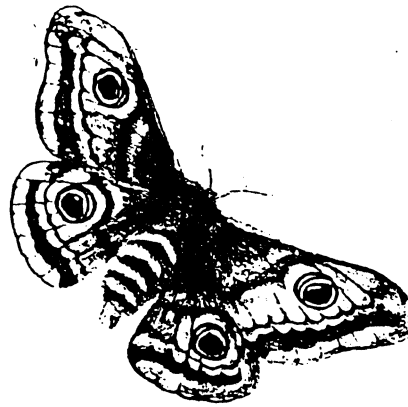
An Emperor Moth was also taken at the Abbey on 20th April 1831. A.J. Martin attracted twelve males to a cage of females on Flitwick Moor in 1979 and then attracted four of these again, now marked, to the same cage removed to Amptill two kilometres away. I've yet to see either species at the Abbey.

One final insect of note is what I take to be the sawfly *Uroceras gigas* or Giant Wood-wasp, said to be introduced into Britain but here recorded at Turvey on 26th July 1841, and so perhaps a native after all. We've had them on several occasions at the Abbey, though not for a few years - one resides on my desk in a plastic tube. They look fierce but are perfectly harmless to human beings.

Br. John



Phalæna Pavonia. minor. fem.
 Emperor Moth, female.
 This beautiful moth was taken
 at Turvey on the 20th April 1831.



Pirex Gigas. This largest
 tailed wasp described in
 Donovan's History of British
 Insects Vol. VI. plate CXC VII
 page 39, was killed at Tinnem-
 abbey on the 26th July 1861:
 part of the body was unfor-
 tunately destroyed, but the
 remainder was quite suf-
 ficient to ascertain the species.

