

Immigrant Moths in Turvey - an exceptional year

We can normally expect two or three immigrant species of moth to reach us in Turvey each year. In 2006 at least ten species arrived and some of the regulars were around for far longer than usual. This may well be an indication that global warming is indeed taking place.

Four of the ten were species which have occurred in Turvey before: the Silver-Y, the Rush Veneer, the Hummingbird Hawkmoth and the Dark Sword-grass. Silver-Ys were present from 17th May until 29th October - the latest date ever. They are readily recognised by their day-flying habits and the tiny silver Y on the forewing. Rush Veneers are not so easy to identify being similar to the many small grass moths which occur and being largely nocturnal. These came to light on more occasions than any previous year, the first on the 18th June and the last also on the 29th October and again the latest date ever. Hummingbird Hawkmoths were also more abundant than in any previous year though some may have been the same long-staying individual. This was seen on many dates hovering and taking nectar from the Geraniums by the chapel.

The six remaining species were all new to me, and possibly new to Turvey. In succession these were a Small Mottled Willow on 24th June, European Corn-borers on 4th July, Scarce Bordered Straws on 5th, 16th and 23rd September, a Vestal on the 16th September, a Convolvulus Hawkmoth on 23rd September and last and almost least a small Gem moth on the 29th October. It's hard to believe but some of these moths may have travelled from as far away as North Africa (the Convolvulus) or the South-east Mediterranean (the Scarce Bordered Straws) - some perhaps by stages, or successive generations, but some possibly in a direct flight borne along by favourable winds. The most spectacular was the Convolvulus Hawkmoth with a wingspan of over twelve centimetres and a proboscis three times the length of its body. The Gem and the Vestal, in contrast, have wingspans of only two or three centimetres, which makes their arrival all the more amazing. Like the Gem, European Corn-borers are dimorphic - males and females differing in appearance, both sexes came to light on the same night. But a word of warning - on the Continent they are a serious pest of maize.

Such a variety and number of immigrant moths is usually the privilege of coastal sites. To have so many so far inland is evidence that things are changing - we may not be moving south in geographical terms but it has been estimated that in climatic terms our gardens are moving south at the rate of several metres a day!

Br. John