

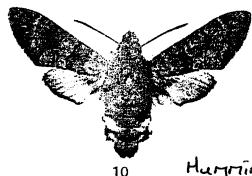
The Hawk-moths of Turvey

Of the eighteen or so hawk-moths which have occurred in Great Britain nine have occurred in Turvey in the past three years, with the best year being 2006 when eight species appeared. June and July are the best months but they can appear from early May until late September. There is always something special about finding one in the trap or seeing one at large. They are all impressive for one reason or another, some because of their size, some because of their colours, some because of their habits and some because of all three. The Privet and the Convolvulus hawk-moths are 'mega' moths – the size of a mouse in the hand or of a bat in the air. The former is relatively common and most years produce half-a-dozen or more. As the name suggests, the larvae feed on Privet. The Convolvulus is a migrant from southern Europe and the largest insect occurring in Britain, with a wingspan of 12.5 cm and a tongue extending to 9 cm, ideal for such tubular flowers as the Tobacco plant. We've had only one so far – on 23rd September 2006, which was an exceptional year for migrant moths. Our other migrant hawk-moth lies at the other end of the size scale being a mere 5.7 cm in wingspan, but still big enough to be confused with a bird: it's the aptly named Humming-bird hawk-moth. A few occur most years and can be found hovering over the flowers of Red Valerian. This too comes to us from southern Europe but may arrive here by stages rather than in one go, successive generations leapfrogging northwards. We've had one so far this year.

Our commonest hawk-moths are the Poplar and the Elephant hawks. As the name suggests, the larvae of the former feed largely on poplars, but also on willows. The adults are a nondescript grey but show a soft red patch on their hindwings when disturbed. The Elephant hawk-moth is, in contrast, a striking mix of pinks and greens, and this has been an exceptionally good year with seventeen recorded. It's the caterpillar which gives it its name; it supposedly resembles an elephant's head when expanded in threat display. The Eyed hawk-moth also has an interesting threat display, a gentle brushing of the wings can cause it to reveal two startling black eyes, edged in white, with a pink surround. We found one trapped inside our fruit cage on 3rd July. Less common are the Pine and Lime hawk-moths – both named after their host tree. The former has increased greatly as pines have become more frequently planted for forestry. We've had none this year but several in the past, with four in 2006. The Lime hawk-moth is not uncommon in towns and parks where lime occurs. We've had one this year on 31st May. It is an attractive mix of greens and browns.

And last, but not quite least, is the Small Elephant hawk-moth, our first occurring this year on 5th July. It tends to be found further south on the chalk. It's a centimetre or so smaller than its namesake but also a beautiful mix of pinks and greens. My great hope remains a Death's Head hawk-moth. This is another big one and distinguished by the impression of a skull on its thorax. It too is a migrant and found somewhere in Britain most years, but not yet by me. It has a predilection for potato fields, so keep planting the potatoes Br.Herbert.

Br.John

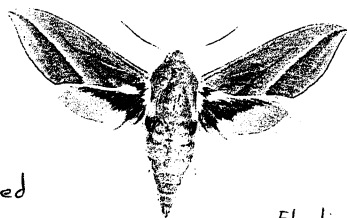


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Humming-bird



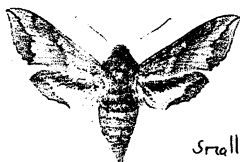
Silver-striped



Elephant



Broad-bordered Bee



Small Elephant

18



Narrow-bordered Bee