

## Seraphims over Turvey

There's an element of competition even in moth-catching. Last year's total was 295 species – the best yet, and I'm determined to beat it this year, but a lot depends on chance and the weather.

The moths are caught in a Robinson light trap which consists of a large round black plastic container with a clear plastic top on which sits a removable ultra-violet lamp wired to a choke and, in my case, then by a lengthy piece of cable to the mains. Rain can stop play so I place it under a porch if possible and turn it on just before dark. The moths enter via a restricted opening just below the lamp and eventually find somewhere to rest and hide in the egg boxes below.

Most moths seem to occur before midnight and numbers vary according to time of year, temperature, cloud cover and strength of wind. On a cloudless night when the moon is up, and particularly when full, one can expect very few because the moon is the greater attraction, but on a cloudy, warm night in high summer, and especially when there is little wind, one can expect several hundred moths of perhaps fifty or so varieties. This includes micros, the ones deemed too small to be 'proper' moths, and all sorts of other little beasties too. Over the years I've had beetles and bugs and flies of all descriptions and even a dragonfly and a Small White butterfly.

Towards autumn one has to be ultra-careful as wasps and hornets join the merry throng. I try to get these out first before they start feasting on the moths. And then there's the problem of releasing the moths without birds and bats joining in the fun. There's a very attentive robin at the moment which will enter the trap if it could, so, once checked and counted, I replace the moths in the trap and cover it until dusk.

Bats are less easy to counter, but placing the trap under a bush can help; the moths then have multiple points of exit. Least possible to guard against are the many webs of spiders which grace our buildings and in one of which I recently found the wing of a Seraphim. This is a tiny moth usually very hard to find and see and named, of course, after the seraphim of Christian tradition. Strictly speaking it should be known as a Seraph in the singular, which is defined in the dictionary as an angelic being associated with 'light, ardour and purity'. Delightfully, when we released this wing in the courtyard instead of dropping to the ground as expected it began to rise and circle and dip and swoop and rise again until eventually it cleared the roof tops and was lost to sight. All due of course to the lightness of the seraphim's wing and sun-generated thermals; perhaps moths should learn to fly by day. Actually, some do – but that's another story.

Br. John

