



BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS OF HUNGARY: SOME FAMILIAR AND LESS FAMILIAR SPECIES

by Rob de Jong & Szabolcs Safián

INTRODUCTION

After seven years of running a field centre (Farm Lator) in Bükk National Park in the north-east of Hungary, I would like to report my experiences with visiting lepidopterists from Britain. The second author is the local specialist, occasionally leading the moth-trapping initiatives. In 2003, when I hosted a small group of English visitors, I started to look more closely at moths, having previously concentrated upon butterflies. The group brought some mobile light-traps and opened up a new world to me. In one week they recorded more than 400 species of macro-moth. I would like to recount some of the various species that have amazed our British guests over the years, many of them being rarities in Britain, extinct residents or immigrants.

MOTHS

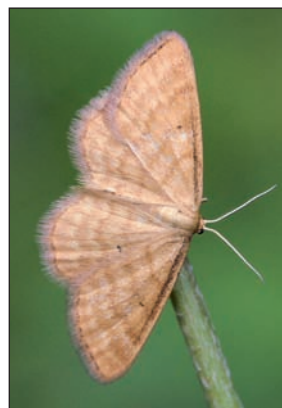
Most of the moth-trapping takes place at our farm, which is surrounded by broadleaved woodland, interspersed with meadows, old orchards and unimproved farmland. The dominant trees are oak *Quercus* spp. and Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*.

2003, as in other parts of Europe, was an exceptional year with some species being extremely abundant. In the first week of June I hosted an English group of lepidopterists. The traps produced 200 species on average each night. My personal amazement was rivaled by our visitors'.

Lewes Wave *Scopula immorata*, **Isle of Wight Wave** *Idaea humiliata*, **Many-lined** *Costaconvexa polygrammata*, **Spotted Sulphur** *Emmelia trabealis* and **Lesser Belle** *Colobochyla salicalis* are extinct in Britain, but each morning they were present in the traps. Others like **Scarce Hook-tip** *Sabra harpagula*, **Bright Wave** *Idaea ochrata*, **Silky Wave** *I. dilutaria*, **Scarce Vapourer** *Orgyia recens*, **White Spot** *Hadena albimaculata*, **Silurian** *Eriopygodes imbecilla*, **Scarce Blackneck** *Lygephila cracca*, **Four-spotted** *Tyta luctuosa* and **Silver Barred** *Deltote bankiana* are scarce species in Britain. Rare British immigrants are represented by species such as **Jersey Mocha** *Cyclophora ruficiliaria*, **Three-humped Prominent** *Notodonta tritophus*, **Black V Moth** *Arctornis l-nigrum*, **Scarce Black Arches** *Nola aerugula*, **Tree-lichen Beauty** *Cryphia algae*, **Orache Moth** *Trachea atriplicis*, **Purple Cloud** *Actinotia polyodon*, **Pretty Marbled** *Deltote deceptor*, **Dewick's Plusia** *Macdunnoughia confusa*, **Alchymist** *Catephia alchymista* and



Isle of Wight Wave *Idaea humiliata*. Bükk Hills, Hungary, 9 July 2006 (Photo: D. Green).



Ochraceous Wave *Idaea serpentata*. Aggtelek, Hungary, 10 June 2005 (Photo: D. Green).

Jubilee Fan-foot *Zanglognatha lunalis*. Other species include **Ochraceous Wave** *Idaea serpentata* and **Guernsey Underwing** *Polyphaenis sericata*.

If time was left, we made day-trips to localities in the surrounding hills. I was happy to offer something in exchange for the moth lectures I received in the morning, but I was again outclassed by the members of that party. They found one moth after another. **Black-veined Moth** *Siona lineata* was flying in any suitable grassland. Sightings of spectacular larvae were regular, including the **Spurge Hawk-moth** *Hyles euphorbiae*, which occurs only as a rare immigrant to Britain. Eventually I was able to switch the subject to butterflies and I could share some of my knowledge about them and their habitats with the group.



Guernsey Underwing *Polyphaenis sericata*. Bükks Hills, Hungary, 14 July 2006 (Photo: D. Green).

BUTTERFLIES

We encounter many British rarities or species that occur in Britain as migrants. 2003 turned out to be the best year for butterflies since I came to Hungary in 1999. In the spring there were high numbers of **Large Blue** *Maculinea arion* on the volcanic plateau near my pension. In the same habitat were strong colonies of **Black-veined White** *Aporia crataegi*, **Queen of Spain Fritillary** *Issoria lathonia* and **Eastern Baton Blue** *Pseudophilotes vicrama*.

Several species emerged much earlier than usual. Already halfway through June, **Silver-washed Fritillary** *Argynnis paphia* was crowding my garden. On tracks, parties of sometimes up to a thousand butterflies were mud-puddling. These included many blues (including hundreds of **Short-tailed Blue** *Everes argiades*) which gathered with **Swallowtail** *Papilio machaon*, **Scarce Swallowtail** *Iphiclydes podalirius*, **Pale Clouded Yellow** *Colias hyale*, **Bergers Clouded Yellow** *C. alfaciensis*, gliders, fritillaries, skippers, emperors, **Map Butterfly** *Araschnia levana* and **Large Tortoiseshell** *Aglais poly-chloros*. In general this last species has small population densities, but in 2003 you could frequently observe several individuals together. The same applied to **Camberwell Beauty** *Nymphalis antiopa*.

Later in the season my buddleia bushes hosted incredible numbers of butterflies. Next to a daily average of approximately 100 Silver-washed Fritillary on three large bushes, my guests and I observed five *Argynnis* species, including the **Cardinal** *A. pandora*, **Dark**



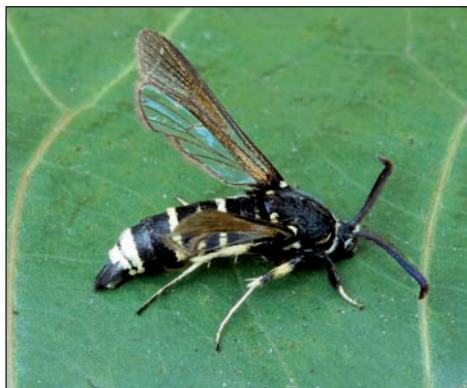
Black-veined White *Aporia crataegi*. Aggtelek Hills, Hungary, May 2005 (Photo: R. de Jong).

Green Fritillary *A. aglaja* **High Brown Fritillary** *A. adippe*, and **Pallas's Fritillary** *A. laodice*.

MICROS AND CLEARWINGS

British tourists have recently discovered Hungary as being a Mecca for micro-moths too. In 2006 we hosted several parties with a primary interest in the 'smaller stuff'. It is easy to understand the attraction when confronted by striking species such as *Bisigna procerella*, *Hypercallia citrinalis*, *Cynaeda dentalis*, *Diasemia reticularis*, *Agrotera nemoralis* and *Cnaemidophorus rhododactyla*.

These species and many more were identified by a bunch of very enthusiastic members of the Hampshire and Dorset Moth Groups. They visited us in June 2005 and returned in July 2006. With the aid of a collection of pheromones they caught several interesting clearwings. Some of them were new data for the National Parks that we visited. Something the group really wanted to see was the **Dusky Clearwing** *Paranthrene tabaniformis*, which is now presumed extinct in Britain but in Hungary is abundant in any small planting of the hybrid Poplar *Populus alba x tremula*. In ten minutes we caught two of them!



Dusky Clearwing *Paranthrene tabaniformis*. Near Saly, Hungary, 13 July 2006 (Photo: D. Green).

LOCAL SPECIALITIES

It's always surprising to see how most of our British guests get more excited with British rarities than from local or continental specialties. Nevertheless, I would like to mention at least a few that are regularly seen in my traps or during day-trips: the eggar *Odonestis pruni*, the tigers *Rhyparia purpurata* and *Watsonarctia casta*, the emperors *Saturnia pyri* and *Aglais tau*, the Geometer *Rhodostrophia vibicaria*, the **Oak Hawk-moth** *Marumba quercus* and **Willowherb Hawk-moth** *Proserpinus proserpina*, the prominent *Spatalia argentina*, the yellow underwing *Catacola fulminea* and the beautiful noctuids **Cumberland Gem** *Eucarta amethystina* and **Silvery Gem** *E. virgo* (now recorded in Britain, see pp. 3–5). Butterfly highlights include **Safflower Skipper** *Pyrgus carthami*, **Hungarian Skipper** *Spialia orbifer*, **Tufted Marbled Skipper** *Carcharodus flocciferus*, **Clouded Apollo** *Parnassius mnemosyne*, **Southern Festoon** *Zerynthia polyxena*, **Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow** *Colias erate* and **Lesser Clouded Yellow** *C. chrysotheme*, **Eastern Bath White** *Pontia edusa*, **Nettle-tree Butterfly** *Lybythea celtis*, **Lesser Purple Emperor** *Apatura ilia*, **Common Glider** *Neptis sappho*, **Hungarian Glider** *N. rivularis*, **Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell** *Nymphalis xanthomelas*, **Twin-spot Fritillary** *Brenthis hecate*, **Knapweed Fritillary** *Melitaea phoebe*, **Lesser Spotted Fritillary** *M. trivia*, **Assman's Fritillary** *Mellicta britomartis*, **Scarce Fritillary** *Euphydryas maturna*, **Woodland Brown** *Lopinga achine*, **Woodland Grayling** *Hipparchia fagi* and **Dusky Meadow Brown** *Hyponephele lycaon*. Lycaenid species include **Blue-spot Hairstreak** *Satyrrium spini*, **Lesser Fiery Copper** *Lycaena thersamon*, **Eastern Short-tailed Blue** *Everes decoloratus*, **Osiris Blue** *Cupido osiris*, **Dusky Large Blue**



Rhyparia purpurata. Farm Lator, Hungary, June 2003
(Photo: R. de Jong).



Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis xanthomelas*.
Zemplen Hills, Hungary, June 2006 (Photo: R. de Jong).

Maculinea nausithous, **Scarce Large Blue** *M. telejus* and **Anomalous Blue** *Agrodiaetus admetus*.

SUMMARY

We are trying to put Hungary on the map as a great destination for naturalists, not just for birdwatchers but for lepidopterists too. The discovery of the rare clearwings indicate the potential importance of eco-tourism. With the same group of visitors we found a new population of **Geranium Argus** *Eumedonia eumedon* in Bükk National Park in a depression in a beautiful limestone grassland. There is no historical data of this rare species in the Bükk hills, and we are publishing this finding with management recommendations. Earlier in the season, with another group of eco-tourists we witnessed an invasion of Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell in the Zemplén hills, which may otherwise have gone unnoticed.

The abundance of insects here, including species that are now extinct in Britain or occur only as immigrants, is a result of the natural world being more unspoilt in Hungary. The general decline of diversity in the west pushes eco-tourists to the east, which bears opportunities for Nature Conservation in Hungary. However, now that Hungary is a member of the EU it has rapidly growing problems for butterfly and moth conservation. As elsewhere in Europe the main threat is abandonment of traditional pastures, hayfields and forest steppes. We are trying to increase public awareness of butterflies and moths and associated threats within the borders of the country and abroad. Thereby we emphasize the increasing need for a pan-European approach to butterfly conservation.

Anybody interested in Hungarian moths and butterflies can contact the first author (farmlator@hotmail.com, www.farmlator.hu). Those who want to know more about Hungarian conservation issues can contact the second author (lepkeved@yahoo.co.uk), one of the founders of the Hungarian Butterfly Conservation Society (www.lepidoptera.freeweb.hu).

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