

Some Notes on Lepidoptera, 1925.

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THE most marked feature of 1925 was the remarkably fine and dry June, following an exceptionally wet May. The rainfall in May at Repton amounted to 5.49 inches and that for June to .05 inch only. Such a prolonged drought is not as a rule favourable to insect life, and this year was no exception, for although certain species were common, the general impression seems to have been that insects were scarce and certainly sugar was remarkably unproductive.

One interesting occurrence amongst the Butterflies was that of a specimen of *Syrichthus malvae* in the same damp meadow at Willington in which two specimens were seen in 1919. The records of this little butterfly in Derbyshire are curious. It is included in the catalogue of Derbyshire Macro-Lepidoptera published in the Entomologist for 1895, by Mr. F. W. G. Payne. The compiler of the list in the Victoria County History mentions this record in his introduction but excludes it from the text on the ground that "it has undoubtedly been included in error." In 1919 two specimens were netted at Willington and as both proved to be males, both were retained. In the same year a specimen was seen in Repton Shrubs; this proved to be a female and was therefore released after capture, in the hope that a colony might be founded, as the spot in which it occurred abounded in its favourite foodplant, *Potentilla reptans*. This plant is also abundant in the very restricted spot in which the insect was found at Willington, about five miles from the Shrubs.

Then in 1922 it was recorded by Mr. S. Hooke from Holy-moor, near Chesterfield, but so far as I know only a single specimen was observed. Now the spot at Willington is one that I visit constantly every year in search of the larvae of certain Tortrices: it is not more than half an acre in extent and there is no other ground in the immediate vicinity that looks likely as a locality. I have kept a very sharp look-out for the species ever since 1919 and this year is the first in which I have seen another specimen. I did not capture it, but as it had an injury in one wing, I was able to identify it on more than one occasion as the same insect and no second specimen was seen. It seems to be generally supposed that insects will travel some distance under a migratory impulse, if their accustomed haunts get overcrowded and there are localities over the Nottinghamshire border in which this species occurs in some years in fair numbers, but the nearest of these must be well over a dozen miles away and it seems difficult to believe either that migrating insects should have settled in this small spot on two occasions or that a colony can have maintained itself there unobserved for a number of years; it is perhaps worth noting that one of the specimens taken in 1919 was so fresh that it can scarcely be doubted that it was bred where it was found. The larva is not restricted to the Tormentil, but will feed on the allied wild strawberry and also on bramble or wild raspberry; but its extreme scarcity must be conceded from the absence of any other records from a neighbourhood that has been so persistently scoured as that of Repton, where, whatever may be the case with insects of more obscure habits, butterflies and day-flying moths run very little chance of remaining undetected.

I am indebted to Mr. J. B. Williamson of Derby for the information that *Thecla rubi*, after an apparently total absence of two seasons, has again appeared on Breadsall Moor; it is much to be hoped that it may regain its former

numbers there. He also records *Sesia culiciformis* from the same locality. Hitherto this insect has only been reported from Repton Shrubs and Seal Wood, but it is probably widely spread within the county wherever birch is common, for most of this genus are elusive and easily overlooked. He draws attention also to the comparative abundance this year of *Pieris brassicae*, which has quite overshadowed *P. napi* in numbers, reversing the normal proportions between the two species, and he records the occurrence of *Larentia caesiata* in very large numbers about the rocks by the roadside near the Snake Inn between Hathersage and Glossop and of *Bombyx quercus* at Stanton-by-Bridge. The beautiful *Melanippe hastata* has evidently come to stay in Repton Shrubs. First noted there in 1922 it has been seen every year since and this summer more than a dozen specimens were noted in one day.

Turning to the smaller species, on railway banks near Willington Station the larvae of *Platyptilia gonodactyla* were to be found in early May feeding in the seedheads of Coltsfoot and towards the end of the month the dainty little pupae of this species were to be discovered by careful search in the masses of pappus that had in most cases by this time fallen to the ground. In the same spot almost every leaf of many plants of the longleaved plantain was rolled into a tube containing the larva of *Tortrix paleana*, looking curiously unlike the majority of Tortricid larvae, with its jetblack colouring and conspicuous raised white dots. This species seems curiously local. It has not been recorded elsewhere in the county and here I have only found it in this one area, over a length of less than a hundred yards. Here it occurs every year, but seldom in such numbers; the larvae could have been procured in hundreds. Larvae of *Tortrix costana* were numerous close by in a bed of the Greater Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*) and these produced some fine dark forms.

This species here attains a size at least double in expanse of wing of the small race found in Wicken Fen and larger than I have seen from any other locality. The stems of thistles of various species, here and in Repton Shrubs, yielded a number of pupae of *Epiblema pflugiana*, from which a particularly fine series was bred. The allied *E. cirsiiana* occurs on the same ground but does not here apparently feed in thistlestems; it is reported also to feed in the roots of knapweed, but a number of roots of this plant collected in the early spring and planted in boxes in a greenhouse produced none of this species, but only *Xanthosetia zoegana*, in itself an interesting species to breed. The pretty little *Stigmonota perlepidana* was found commonly in osier beds in the middle of May; hitherto I had always regarded this as a scarce species here. In late June the alders in a small spinney at Willington were found to be crowded with a Tortricid larva, similar to that of *Astasia solandriana* or *A. semifuscana*. Many were collected in the hopes of breeding *A. sordidana* and they proved to be this species, but seemed difficult to rear in captivity, only a few being bred and these rather undersized.

The most interesting Tortrices obtained this year were two specimens of a very striking form of *Astasia sinuana*, with a dark humped dorsal blotch parallel to the type form of *A. solandriana*. The form appears to be very rare. Mr. W. G. Sheldon, in his very extensive collection, has a couple of old specimens which came from the Farn Collection and some years ago I saw some very similar specimens that had been bred by Lancashire collectors as a supposed variety of *A. solandriana*. I have little doubt that these should have been referred to *sinuana*, which had not at that time been established as a separate species. *Olindia ulmana* was again taken in Repton Shrubs and this year in rather larger numbers. *Scoparia ulmella* was scarce and occurred, as usual, only on its three chosen trees.

The very remarkable collection of Lepidoptera formed by the late Sir V. H. Crewe and recently dispersed at Stevens' contained some rare insects taken in Derbyshire. Noteworthy among these were a specimen of *Chaerocampa nerii*, the Oleander Hawk Moth, taken by a workman upon a railway bank at Weston-on-Trent, on August 22, 1902, and one of *Deilephila galii* taken at Breadsall on August 6. 1870.

The Derbyshire Entomological Society is contemplating the publication of a new County List of Lepidoptera and it may not be out of place here to mention a few of the more striking additions to the latest list, that published in the Victoria County History in 1905. The additions number in all 88 species, and of these 47 are among the TINEAE and 20 among the TORTRICES and almost all of these are from the Repton area. There are two additions among the Butterflies, one of which, *S. malvae* has already been discussed in these notes; the other, a single specimen of *Limenitis sibylla*, taken in 1910 in Repton Shrubs, is scarcely to be explained except on the theory of accidental introduction or the release locally of a bred specimen. Amongst the NOCTUAE *Plusia moneta*, now widely spread and common, is an example of the extension of range of a species due to the cultivation of its foodplant, Delphinium, whilst *Hecatera serena*, which has been reported from a number of localities would also seem to be extending its range. A specimen of *Helotropha leucostigma* taken at Repton in 1912 may be regarded as a survival of the earlier fen fauna of the Trent Valley; but the strangest of all is the occurrence of a specimen of *Epunda lichenea* in Mill Dale in 1922, a remarkable locality for this coast species. Amongst the GEOMETRAE a specimen of *Boarmia abietaria*, taken in a garden at Repton in July, 1911, may possibly be accounted for by the survival of a small colony from larvae introduced upon the yew trees amongst which it was taken, trees

planted many years previously, whilst *Eupithecia pusillata*, now abundant in Repton Shrubs, may have been similarly introduced amongst young spruce. Most of the new records of TORTRICES and TINEAE, some of which are common enough, are no doubt due to lack of previous observation, though it is significant of the unexplored possibilities of other portions of the county that these additions should mostly have been made in the one area in the county in which a very considerable amount of work amongst the smaller species had previously been done by such competent collectors, amongst others, as the late Rev. F. Spilsbury and the late Dr. Mason of Burton-on-Trent.
