



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

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Gwent and Monmouthshire Vice County 35*

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Identifying Micro Moths in Gwent

Sooner or later, most moth recorders become tempted to move on from Macros into the world of Micro Moths. Despite their small size, many Micros are reasonably easy to identify, so long as care and the right books are used. This note looks at some of the available books and suggests which should and shouldn't be used to guide one into Micro identification.

As far as care goes, the basic rules that apply to Macro ID also go for the micros:

- Read the text as well as matching pictures
- Always consider food plants – Micros seldom wander far from their food
- Don't use incomplete guides
- Take photographs or specimens to back up your records
- Abandon worn specimens
- Use genitalia determination for critical groups

Things are made a bit trickier by Micros' small sizes: some need to be examined through a hand lens (use x10 rather than x20 as the depth of field tends to be much greater) or under a binocular microscope. They also tend to be very active, so refrigerating them is often necessary.

Having said all that, a large proportion of Micros are strikingly patterned, very brightly coloured and easy to identify, and it isn't just the familiar Pyralidae (Pyralids) that includes beautiful and distinctive species. They also tend not to vary much from individual to individual, so photos of larger species are often identifiable. I regularly identify batches of photos from certain Gwent recorders and am happy to do more (if they are well-labelled and sent in small batches). Remember, though, that a named photo of a particular Tortricid won't mean that every slightly similar moth is going to be that one species.

The first stage is working out which family a Micro belongs to. This really requires time and a good set of books, but surfing www.ukmoths.org.uk will give an impression of what Coleophorids, Tortricids and Yponomids etc look like. The four available volumes of MBGBI (Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland) are indispensable, and there really is relatively little point in trying to get further into Micros than the Pyralids without buying them. Paperback versions are available for all volumes if the price of the hardbacks is too off-putting.

Pyralids (Pyralidae) are almost honorary Macros, and are as far as many people go into Micro ID. The complete guide by Goater (1986) is similar to Skinner in layout. Most Pyralids are reasonably easy, and Small Magpie (*Eurrhpara hortulata*), Rush Veneer (*Nomophila noctuella*), Gold Triangle (*Hypsopygia costalis*) and others are illustrated in beginners' books. However, some are very difficult,

and identifying species of *Scoparia* and *Eudonia* without some genitalia checking is inadvisable. Various rare adventives and vagrants have been added to the British list since Goater was published, most of which have appeared in *Atropos* magazine, but none are yet of relevance to Gwent.



Gold Triangle (Hypsopygia costalis)
is a familiar and easily
recognised Pyralid.

Plumes (Pterophoridae) are extremely distinctive at the family level, as is the unique Many-plumed Moth (*Alucita hexadactyla*). It is easy to know that you are looking at a plume, but unfortunately going further than that is difficult. Beirne (1952), which is available in pdf format on a CD ROM from Pisces Publications, is now very out of date and its identification information is pretty scant, whilst the European guide (Gielis, 1996) includes many non-British species and is very expensive. An up to date book on British Plumes is sorely needed.

Emmelina monodactyla is one
of the most regularly-encountered
Plumes, especially in the autumn.



Size-wise (and taxonomically), Tortricids (Tortricidae) come next after Pyralids and so are a tempting next step. The trouble is, the MBGBI volume on them is not yet published, and the excellent, complete, 2-volume British guide (Bradley, Tremewan & Smith, 1973 & 1979) is out of print and sells second-hand for around £100 a volume (snap up a copy if you see one for less!!); it is also available in CD ROM form if you can cope with that format. The European guides (Razowski, 2002 & 2003) are good but expensive, and their plates illustrate every species at the same size, thus losing a vital ID character. www.ukmoths.org.uk has relatively good coverage of Tortricids, but there are many gaps and it really isn't acceptable to identify them from on-line photos alone (especially in the case of the black-and-white Olethreutinae).

MBGBI Volumes 4.1 and 4.2 cover some of the best-looking Micros and some of the worst of them. The lovely Oecophorids (Oecophoridae) (including *Oecophora bractella* and *Alabonia geoffrella*) and Momphids (Momphidae) are mostly brightly coloured and easily identifiable with the naked eye. They are in Volume 4.1, along with the Blastobasidae (*Blastobasis lignea*, with a cream-coloured X on its dorsum, is one of the commonest Micros in suburban gardens) and a couple of other minor families. In contrast, most of the Gelechids (Gelechiidae) in volume 4.2 are dull, brown and need genitalia determination.



The large Oecophorid (MBGBI 4.1)
Diurnea fagella
puzzles Micro recorders every spring
because of its Tortricid-like shape

MBGBI Volume 3 also includes an easy group: many of the Yponomids (Yponomeutidae) (such as *Ypsolopha dentella*, *Argyresthia brockeella* and *Prays fraxinella*) are distinctively patterned, and their association with particular food-plants makes them reasonably straightforward. In contrast, the Coleophorids (Coleophoridae) are largely dull-coloured and are best identified from their larval cases, and the grass-feeding Elachistids (Elachistidae) are mostly just small and dull. Luckily, Richard Lewington's illustrations are exquisite, making the volume very usable.

The Small Ermines (Yponomeuta spp.,
Yponomeuta cagnagella illustrated)
are strikingly marked but rather
tricky to identify to species



As one goes down the MBGBI numbers, so the size of the moths decreases. Through a hand-lens, species of *Phyllonorycter* and *Caloptilia*, in Volume 2, are very distinctive and not difficult to identify, but it takes a while to get used to recognising them as moths at all (their diagonal posture on straight forelegs is distinctive). Life is made much easier by beating a *Phyllonorycter* from its foodplant, rather than catching it at light, although species sometimes come out of the 'wrong' tree. The Clothes Moths (Tineidae) are also covered by Volume 2, but most are brown and rather featureless. The charming Bagworms (Psychidae) are best sought as larval or pupal cases, and some species never produce winged adults.

As well as the drop in moth size as one works through MBGBI, so the quality of illustration declines from the beautiful Volume 3, through the adequate Volume 2 to the frankly useless Volume 1. Attempting to identify a *Stigmella* (Nepticulidae) by searching through the plates is impossible thanks to the smudgy painting coupled with their lack of variation. In fact it is easier to do *Stigmellas* from their leaf mines, and together MBGBI 1 & 2 cover almost all of our leaf-mining moth species. The Long-horns (Incurvariidae) are larger than most of the other Micros in Volume 1 and are therefore reasonably straightforward (once you have worked out they aren't Caddis-flies). The pollen-eating *Micropterix* species are also good fun and a nice start to the micro season.

A useful accompaniment to the above is MBGBI Volume 7.2, which includes excellent life-history tables and a foodplant index that cover all the British Micros.

Leaf mine identification has been mentioned in *The Silurian* before (see newsletter number 19, September 2004), and is better taught by Norman Lowe or David Slade anyway. There is an excellent website (www.leafmines.co.uk) that includes keys based on food-plants. It is essential to remember that not every leaf mine is made by a moth: many are made by flies, beetles, sawflies and other insects.

As well as the specialist books mentioned above, several general books include a selection of Micros. In some cases these are brightly coloured and distinctive species, and it is probably safe enough to identify Gold Triangle (*Hypsopygia costalis*) from Chinnery (2007) or Novak (1998), but using these generalist books to identify other Micros is totally inadvisable; a follow-up article will cover the 'safe bets' in these two books. For example, the county database included two recent records of the RDB rose-feeding Plume *Cnaemidophorus rhododactyla*, which just happens to be one of the 3 species of Plume picked by Chinnery. Because there are no illustrations of several much commoner and very similar-looking *Platyptilia* species, the specimens were named as *rhododactyla*; there is absolutely no chance that they were actually this species!

Recording Micros also throws in an extra dimension of proactive recording. Rather than just opening an MV trap in the morning, you can do diurnal site visits. Beating trees, sweeping patches of flowers, netting day-flying species and searching for larval mines and cases can produce over 100 species of Micro Moth in a good day, easily rivalling a good night's trapping. The sense of satisfaction of actually hunting out a species is also a real buzz.

Gwent's Microlepidoptera are extremely poorly known in comparison with our Macrolepidoptera, and anyone who devotes time to them can make numerous interesting discoveries. So, please consider taking up Micros, but please don't try to identify them with incomplete books!

- Beirne, B.P. (1952; CD ROM 2008), *British Pyralid and Plume Moths*. Warne Books.
- Bradley, J.D., Tremewan, W.G. & Smith, A. (1973), *British Tortricoid Moths Cochylidae and Tortricidae: Tortricinae*. Ray Society, London.
- Bradley, J.D., Tremewan, W.G. & Smith, A. (1979), *British Tortricoid Moths Tortricidae: Olethreutinae*. Ray Society, London.
- Chinnery, M. (2007), *Insects of Britain and Western Europe, revised edition*. Domino Guides.
- Gieles, C. (1996), *Microlepidoptera of Europe Volume 1: Pterophoridae*. Apollo Books, Stenstrup.
- Goater, B. (1986), *British Pyralid Moths – A guide to their identification*. Harley Books, Colchester.
- MBGBI 1 – Heath, J. & Emmet, A.M. (eds.), *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland Volume 1: Micropterigidae – Heliozelidae*. Harley Books, Colchester)
- MBGBI 2 – Heath, J. & Emmet, A.M. (eds.), *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland Volume 2: Cossidae – Heliodinidae*. Harley Books, Colchester)
- MBGBI 3 – Emmet, A.M. (ed.), *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland Volume 3: Yponomeutidae – Elachistidae*. Harley Books, Colchester)
- MBGBI 4.1 – Emmet, A.M. & Langmaid, J.R. (eds.), *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland Volume 4 part 1: Oecophoridae – Scythrididae, excluding Gelechiidae*. Harley Books, Colchester)

MBGBI 4.2 – Emmet, A.M. & Langmaid, J.R. (eds.), *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland Volume 4 part 2: Gelechiidae*. Harley Books, Colchester)

MBGBI 7.2 – Emmet, A.M. & Heath, J. (eds.), *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland Volume 7 part 2: Lasiocampidae – Thyatiridae*. Harley Books, Colchester)

Novak, I. (1998), *A Field Guide in Colour to Butterflies and Moths*. Blitz Editions.

Razowski, J. (2002), *Tortricidae of Europe Volume 1: Tortricinae and Chlidinotinae*. F. Slamka, Bratislava.

Razowski, J. (2003), *Tortricidae of Europe Volume 2: Olethreutinae*. F. Slamka, Bratislava.

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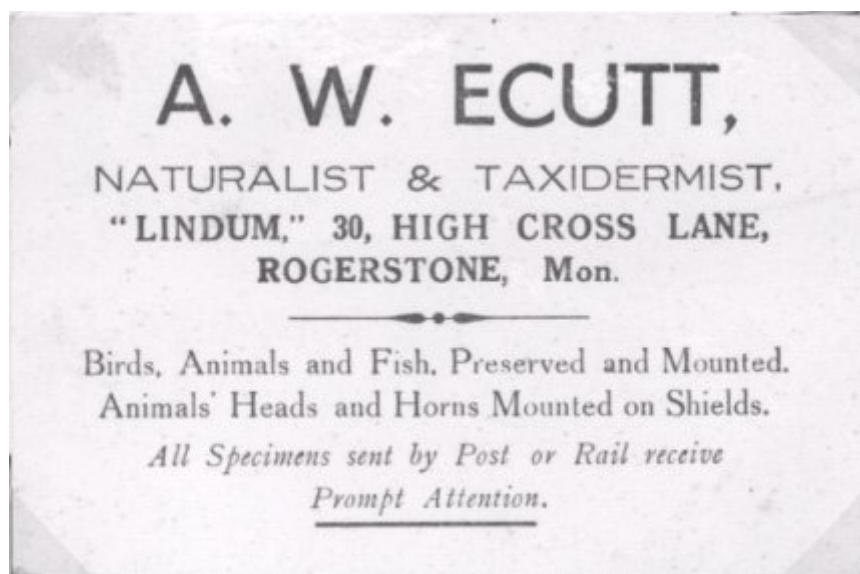
Alfred William Ecutt

In this occasional series on significant figures in the history of Gwent Lepidoptera, the following is based on a handwritten note found in the papers of the late Neil Horton. As well as giving details of Ecutt, it provides an insight into Neil Horton's early days – how many 11-year-olds go out to purchase an insect setting-board?

“A. W. Ecutt was a naturalist and professional taxidermist who ran a business in Commercial Street, Newport for many years. I recall, as a small boy, buying several birds' eggs from him. Also, about 1926 at age 11, I bought my first insect setting-boards from him. An early partner of his [Griffin], whom he trained, became chief taxidermist at Roland Ward's in Piccadilly. He did a good deal of work for Mr Percy Laybourne, a local bird-collector, but as he informed me in 1958 he was fairly certain that some of

the rarer species brought to him for mounting had not been taken locally but had been sold to Laybourne by unscrupulous dealers and were probably continental specimens.

A. W. Ecutt was a keen and well-informed naturalist who hailed from Tonbridge or Tunbridge Wells. He recalled how once, in his youth, he had watched a pair of Large Tortoiseshell butterflies alighting on a garden gate in his home town. As a young man he recalled seeing Pied Flycatchers nesting near Henllys, Gwent.”



Editor's additional notes:

Ecutt was born in 1879 at Bidborough, near Tunbridge Wells, Kent, the son of a Head Gardener. He ran his Newport taxidermy and naturalists shop from 1901 to 1949 but continued working at home (see card, above) until 1960. It is unclear how much lepidoptera recording Ecutt did himself, but he certainly passed on to Neil Horton valuable records gleaned from his work, such as Queen of Spain Fritillary at Rhiwderin in the 1930s. Laybourne's bird collection referred to in the note was in 1917 loaned, and later donated, to Newport Museum.

Martin Anthoney

Newport Report

Butterflies

On 31st March I led a walk around the Uskmouth end of Newport Wetlands Reserve. Conditions were excellent: dead flat calm and feeling warm. Despite this I saw no butterflies, but Kevin had much better luck: in Farmfield Lane he saw a Peacock and a further four at Goldcliff together with three Small Tortoiseshells. On 3rd April we completed our first transect at Uskmouth, recording 7 Peacock, 4 Small Tortoiseshell, 1 Green-veined White and 1 Orange-tip. On 4th in her garden Sheila had Comma, Large White and the first record for the year of Speckled Wood.

On 16th April the Newport Wetlands Reserve was officially declared a National Nature Reserve. We took a walk around part of the reserve with some of the guests and I managed to divert their attention from the omnipresent birds to two Peacock butterflies which were disputing territory near a small copse. Also present was a Green-veined White and a Speckled Wood. On a sunny day in relatively mild conditions these were the only butterflies we saw. Meanwhile, having assessed the conditions and with one eye on the poor forecast for the rest of the week, Sheila decided to do the transect walk. The whole circuit produced only seventeen butterflies including Orange-tip, Speckled Wood, Large White, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock.

On 22nd April I saw my first Holly Blue inspecting the ivy in my garden. Holly Blue was also present at Newport Wetlands on 23rd when Sheila did the next transect. Numbers were again poor with only 22 individuals of five species sighted.

On 22nd April Kevin found 153 pupae of Large White on the sea wall at Saltmarsh Grasslands but over half had been parasitized. The poor weather continued to the end of the month leaving us with a problem: how much did the poor summer of 2007 affect the butterfly population? Until we have a prolonged period of warm weather we can't begin to answer the question.

Moths

On 30th March Fiona trapped a Muslin Moth on Lodge Hill, Caerleon, whilst I had Pale Pinion at Melbourne Way on 31st. On the same date Kevin trapped three Small Eggar at Redhouse, Goldcliff. I had Brindled Pug on 6th April followed by Lesser Swallow Prominent on 9th. A long gap occurred until a Powdered Quaker appeared at my site on 15th. Sheila had two year firsts on 21st with Pine Beauty and V-Pug at Haisboro Avenue.

On 22nd April Kevin had an interesting find at Redhouse; the larva of a Magpie Moth. This is the first Newport record of this larva over the past ten years. As a boy I can remember that this was the most commonly encountered caterpillar with hundreds on currant bushes and euonymus (spindle) cultivars. On the same day Kevin found three Drinker larvae at Uskmouth.

We ended the month with more promising numbers. On 23rd I recorded Spectacle, Brimstone, Common Pug, Grey Pine Carpet, Lunar Marbled Brown, Sallow Kitten and Flame Shoulder at Melbourne Way. Another good night on 25th produced Chocolate Tip, Shuttle-shaped Dart, Knot Grass, Purple Thorn and Small Phoenix at my site whilst Sheila recorded Red-green Carpet and Least Black Arches at Haisboro Avenue and Kevin saw Brown Silver-line at the Gaer. The last is the earliest record we have for this species in Newport. The recognised flight period for this moth is May-June although Waring states that individuals are recorded from mid-April in the south.

A comparison of year on year statistics shows that the number of new yearly records indicates that this April is just below average. It does highlight the fact that last April was aberrant with 70 new species recorded compared with an average of 27 species for April over the previous eight years.

Roger James

Recent Highlights

April has shown little improvement over the slow month of March. Generally cool weather with a surfeit of April showers. Not surprisingly, fewer than expected reports of new species emerging.

First 2008 dates

2008 first date	species and location	2007 first date	2006 first date	2005 first date
31 st March	Muslin at Caerleon (Fiona Illing)	15 th April	29 th April	31 st March
2 nd April	2 Speckled Wood butterflies at Chepstow (Shelley Cross)	15 th March	3 rd May	16 th April
3 rd April	Shoulder Stripe to light at Risca (Martin Anthoney)	16 th March	25 th March	15 th March
	Holly Blue butterfly at Mill Bank, Penallt (Ian Rabjohns)	30 th March	26 th April	19 th April
	Comma butterfly at Mill Bank, Penallt (Ian Rabjohns)	26 th March	4 th April	23 rd March
	Streamer to light at Hendre Wood (Martin Anthoney & Roger James)	6 th April	16 th April	20 th March
	Water Carpet to light at Hendre Wood (Martin Anthoney & Roger James)	13 th March	31 st March	22 nd March
	Purple Thorn to light at Hendre Wood (Martin Anthoney & Roger James)	17 th April	16 th April	1 st May
	Orange-tip butterfly at Newport Wetlands Reserve (Roger James)	5 th April	16 th April	28 th March
	Green-veined White butterfly at Newport Wetlands Reserve (Roger James)	19 th April	3 rd May	24 th April
4 th April	Early Tooth-striped to light at Risca (Martin Anthoney)	17 th March	2 nd April	23 rd March
	Large White at Haisboro Ae, Newport (Sheila Dupé)	12 th April	9 th April	1 st May
9 th April	Lesser Swallow Prominent at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	8 th April	22 nd April	30 th April
13 th April	Brindled Beauty to light at Risca (Martin Anthoney)	15 th April	26 th March	27 th March
15 th April	Powdered Quaker at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	13 th April	22 nd April	31 st March
21 st April	Pine Beauty at Beacon Farm, Trellech. (Ray Armstrong) and a second specimen at Haisboro Ave, Newport (Sheila Dupé)	13 th April	21 st April	31 st March
	V-Pug at Haisboro Ave, Newport (Sheila Dupé)	15 th April	26 th May	11 th April
23 rd April	Female Emperor to light at Risca (Martin Anthoney)	20 th April	30 th April	11 th May
	Spectacle at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	20 th April	25 th May	6 th May

	Common Pug at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	22 nd May	26 th May	22 nd May
	Grey Pine Carpet at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	21 st April	21 st May	30 th April
	Lunar Marbled Brown at both Risca (Martin Anthoney) and Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	8 th April	25 th April	29 th April
	Sallow Kitten to light at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	20 th April	28 th May	27 th May
	Flame Shoulder to light at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	18 th April	14 th May	25 th April
25 th April	Chocolate Tip to light at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	25 th July	17 th May	21 st July
	Knot Grass at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	11 th June	8 th June	6 th April
	Small Phoenix at Melbourne Way, Newport (Roger James)	28 th April	21 st May	30 th April
	Red-green Carpet at Haisboro Ave, Newport (Sheila Dupé)	27 th April	15 th April	1 st April
	Least Black Arches at Haisboro Ave, Newport (Sheila Dupé)	21 st April	6 th June	22 nd April
	Brown Silver-line at the Gaer, Newport (Kevin Dupé)	27 th April	13 th May	2 nd May
26 th April	Following last month's article, Chris Owen reports 2 Wall Brown butterflies flying at Aberbargoed Grasslands	28 th July	31 st July	27 th May
	2 Scarce Prominent at Beacon Farm, Trellech. (Ray Armstrong)	21 st April	13 th May	27 th April
	Pale Tussock at Beacon Farm, Trellech. (Ray Armstrong)	23 rd April	14 th May	30 th April

Dates for your Diary 2008

- Sunday 11th May Moth trapping at Waunfawr Park, Crosskeys, together with Greenpark Visual Arts Festival. Details from Caerphilly CBC.
- Saturday 31st May Roger James & I will be doing a butterfly identification and recording course at Parc Cwm Darran and Aberbargoed Grasslands. Details from Gwent Wildlife Trust (phone 01600 740600).
- Saturday 7th June National Moth Night. Target species this year are *Anania funebris* (a pretty day-flying micro which does occur in our county), Bordered Gothic, Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk and Orchards as a new UK BAP priority habitat.
- Saturday 14th June "Go Wild" show, this year in Blaenau Gwent at Bryn Bach Park, Tredegar.
- Wednesday 23rd July In cooperation with Newport CC, a bat and moth watch at Allt-yr-yn LNR from 8pm until late. Further information from Roger James (see details below)
- Saturday 25th October Butterfly Conservation (South Wales Branch) annual members' day of talks etc. Details to follow.

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