

SUCH EXQUISITE BEAUTY

"I could not believe a creature of such exquisite beauty could enter my room" Words such as this one would expect at the beginning of a romantic novel, but no, these, or something very similar, were from a bachelor friend of mine who lives in an annex of our home. So, what was he referring to? At first it was a bit of a mystery which after some enquires confirmed as likely a Hawk Moth, although as to what species remains unknown. The creature flew in through an open kitchen window, like a compact drone but with 'glowing eyes' and had to be virtually guided out through the door with a flashlight where upon it disappeared into the warm summer night.

Oncocera semirubella
(mostly found in the south)



Swallow-tailed



Common Emerald



Moths, unlike butterflies, obligingly land and leave their wings outstretched rather like a tent covering their body so one can see the beautiful markings on them, and, also, they are covered with setae, which look like tiny hairs. Remaining in this position enabled him to take a quick photograph from which he was able to identify the moth.

*Moths obligingly land and
leave their wings outstretched*



Elephant Hawk-moth

A START OF A HOBBY

Thus was the beginning of what has now become a really interesting hobby. Having identified the moth he wondered what other moths were out in the garden and I knew for certain there are plenty as I end up going down the garden at dusk to get the washing in, or taking the dogs out before going to bed, and as one who has difficulty in seeing in the dark, I take a torch with me and in different parts of the garden at different times one sees many moths flying and settling on flowers to feed on the nectar. Moths, like bees, butterflies and many other insects are really good pollinators so should be encouraged by planting as many plants as possible to help these insects, who in their turn help us.



This home-made trap has caught over 50 different species

In order to try and find out what moths were present in our large, variable garden, the answer was to try to build a 'moth trap' to catch some moths, photographing them before releasing the moths back into the garden with no harm caused. One can buy readymade traps, but these can be expensive and do not set a challenge of building them oneself using inexpensive goods found around the house, in the attic or garage. The one thing needed but not usually 'lying around' is empty egg trays, but we have plenty of these available from our restaurant who use trays of free-range eggs from The Cracking Egg Company based locally in Mursley.

The trap was an ongoing project over six months with various configurations. A UV torch produced the best results, mounted in a measuring cylinder acting as light diffuser mounted over a 25cm diameter funnel in a 35L plastic box. But what is this against the pleasure it brings? From that initial moth and with the aid of his home-made trap over 50 different species have been roughly identified to live in the garden. This is only a few considering there are 2,500 which can be found in this country, and even in a small, well planted garden about 100 different species will be found.

It is an ongoing learning experience and over the weeks and months one can see the gradual changes in moth species. Weather conditions can have, not surprisingly, an effect on the numbers.

As well as books on the subject there are numerous Facebook groups that can help in identifying moths up and down the country.

If you are interested in making your garden more 'moth friendly', here follows a list of potentially useful plants to have. As food for moth caterpillars (of which about 16,000 will be eaten by a single brood of Blue Tits, so moths are good for birds as well as plants!) :-

Trees include Ash, [Apple](#), [Beech](#), [Birch](#), [Blackthorn](#), [Hawthorn](#) (Quickthorn), [Lime](#), [Oak](#) and [Willow](#).

Shrubs include: [Berberis](#), Brambles, [Dog Rose](#), [Clematis](#), Fuchsias, [Hazel](#), Heathers, [Ivy](#), [Privet](#), [Honeysuckle](#), and [Ribes](#) (currants).

Herbaceous plants include: Comfrey, Foxgloves, Grasses, Mallow, Marjoram, Mint, Mullein and Sweet Williams.

Wild Flowers (sometimes considered weeds): Dandelions, Docks, Nettles, Ox-eye Daisy, Plantain and Red Campion.

Plants which produce scent in the evening and also are a good source of nectar which the adult moths need to give them energy to fly. [Honeysuckle](#), [Jasmine officinale](#) (Common jasmine or summer flowering jasmine), *Oenothera biennis* (Evening primrose), *Hesperis matronalis* (Dame's violet or Sweet rocket), *Mattiola bicomis* (Night scented stock), and *Nicotiana glauca* (Tabacco plant).



Another thing to do to help the moth and insect population is not to mow a section of your lawn in order to change it into a wild flower area. If this is not practical in your garden why not adopt the 'No Mow May' idea? I saw a garden where this had been done and was amazed how many flowers had appeared by the end of the month, and of course the grasses had grown to a good height as well. A good way of being 'lazy' in the cause of nature!

Apart from plants, in order to offer a good home for moths it is important to leave some old plant material as this provides shelter for the moths and a place to overwinter. If you have a tidy looking garden and wish to keep it that way, one can leave such material at the back of beds out of sight.

So, if you are interested in trying to make your garden more moth friendly this is just an outline but more details can be obtained from the local wild life group B.B.O.W.T. who will be more than willing to help. Keep a look on our Facebook page or Website to see when they will be having a presence here at the Garden Centre or contact them by telephone on 01865 775476.

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BATTY

At the beginning of September an amazing event occurred - when the trap was opened one morning there were two brown long eared bats contentedly asleep in the trap and one could see why they were so content. In the base of the trap were the remains of several moths, the edible parts having been consumed. The trap was carefully taken down the garden and the bats slowly awoke, flying off. One returned to the sky over the trap, flew around a few times to get its orientation correct then flew off at a slightly different angle then before. The bats have not been seen in the trap since then, but bats are frequently seen around in the garden in the evening at dusk.



Buckingham

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