

Moths seen in St Lawrence Churchyard

On 18th May 2007 thirty-five people spent the evening looking for moths in the churchyard. Fluorescent lights with a high ultra-violet component were shone onto a white sheet suspended above the ground to attract the moths.

The following were caught and, all but the last two, positively identified:

- 1) **Common Swift moth**, *Hepialus lupulinus*. Flies May-August in gardens and open land. The caterpillars feed underground on the roots of many plant species.
- 2) **Common Marbled Carpet moth**, *Chloroclysta truncata*. Flies May-June in woods and hedgerows. The caterpillars feed on many trees and shrubs. Extremely variable in colour. This specimen was almost dead!
- 3) **Brimstone moth**, *Opisthograptis luteolata*. Flies April-October in hedgerows and scrubby places. The caterpillars feed on hawthorn and other shrubs.
- 4) **Heart and Dart moth**, *Agrostis exclamatoris*. Flies May-September in open habitats, especially cultivated land. The caterpillars feed on a wide range of herbaceous plants.
- 5) **Flame Shouldered moth**, *Ochropleura plecta*. Flies May-September almost everywhere. The caterpillars feed on a wide range of herbaceous plants.
- 6) **Orange Sallow moth**, *Xanthia citrigo*. This moth normally flies between August-October so this may not be a correct identification, especially as it was not particularly orange in colour. However, the caterpillars feed on lime and there are several of these trees nearby.
- 7) **Marbled Minor moth**, *Oligia strigilis*, which is an extremely variable species that is very abundant everywhere but usually flies June-August, therefore was not positively identified.

At the end of the evening a **May Bug** or Common Cockchafer beetle, *Melolontha melolontha*, arrived on the sheet. This scary-looking but harmless species flies May-June in gardens, woods and hedgerows. Large swarms of them fly around trees in the evening, often crashing into lights and through open windows. The adults chew leaves of deciduous trees and the larvae feed underground on the roots of many plants. They are much less common nowadays.

You'll be pleased to know that all the insects caught were released in the churchyard at the end of the evening.

P.S. The following week, a **Lime Hawk moth** *Mimas tiliae*, which flies during daylight hours, was spotted in the churchyard and photographed.

