

MOTH MUMBLINGS – SOMETHING FOR THE WEEKEND!

The following three micro-moths are just waiting to be found – NOW. All should be widespread and available to find in most parts of our two counties. Hopefully, you can get out there this weekend and get me some records!

ON YARROW (*Achillea millefolium*) SEEDS HEADS

Look for dead flower-heads of Yarrow. These are evident now, often alongside heads that are still actively flowering. Carefully (without jolting or too much shaking) snip off the dead heads, with a bit of stem, into a plastic bag. When you get home (or in the field if you feel confident) use a hand lens to look at the seed heads for small, well-camouflaged cases of the micro moth *Coleophora argentula*. They are no bigger than most of the seeds that they mimic and are generally the same colour, but are visibly rough-surfaced. If you fail to spot any don't be disheartened as they are very cryptic. They are likely to remain on the seed head, feeding on the seeds, until next year, so transfer them to a plastic sandwich box and keep them out of doors (and out of the sun) until the spring. Very often you may subsequently observe some "seeds" walking around the box – sure proof that you do have some live larval cases after all. I found plenty on a roadside verge at Farnham, just outside Bishops Stortford, on 7th September. May also be found on dead seed heads of Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*. **Image at** <http://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/C.argentula.htm>.

ON GROUND IVY (*Glechoma hederacea*) LEAVES

Check areas below trees and bushes that look as if birds have been roosting above and pooping onto the ground below – careful inspection might reveal that these white blotches are actually mined leaves of Ground Ivy. If that analogy does not appeal to you, look for areas of ground vegetation that appear as if a white paint brush has been shaken out, to leave white patches on the leaves of Ground Ivy. Check that these are actually hollowed out leaves and you can record *Coleophora albitarsella*. The caterpillar feeds, as do other *Coleophora*, from a case. It does not leave the case, but keeps its tail inside whilst stretching its head into the mine. Consequently, there will often be a tell-tale small, round hole in the blotch, on the underside where the case was attached, but spotting this is not compulsory! Finding larvae is hard work; in my experience they drop off the leaves when not feeding and lurk invisibly amongst the ground layer detritus. **Images at** <http://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/C.albitarsella.htm>.

ON HOGWEED (*Heracleum sphondylium*) LEAVES

Look for Hogweed leaves (ground level – not those half way up the stem) with a triangular feeding blotch in a basal angle made by two leaf veins. GENTLY turn the leaf over to find one or more caterpillars resting on the underneath of this blotch. This is not a mine; the caterpillar grazes externally on the outer layer of the leaf, from below, and spins an extremely flimsy silk support, usually some droppings evident. The caterpillar is small and green with hairy black warts. This is *Epermenia chaerophyllella*. Other insects mine Hogweed leaves in this position so you **MUST** either find the caterpillar or confirm that what you have is external feeding (not a true mine) and that there are some silk strands across it. If these conditions are met it is safe to record this species. Images at <http://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/E.chaerophyllella.htm>.

FIND THREE, GET ONE FREE – A BONUS SPECIES

ON DOGWOOD (*Cornus* spp.) LEAVES

Look now for old blotch mines, many of which may have withered and turned brown so inspect leaf damage carefully. These need to be ADJACENT TO an oval-shaped hole in the leaf. The long axis of the "cut out" is around 4 – 6 millimetres (the caterpillar spins the cut section with silk and pupates within – on the ground below). On **Native Dogwood** (*Cornus sanguinea*) this is always *Antispila petryi*. If the plant is **Cornelian Cherry** (*Cornus mas*) then the moth is always *Antispila treitschkiella*. There is no overlap, so if you are not sure what species of *Cornus* you have, cut a short section of stems and leaves and post this to me with the mined/cut-out leaf. I cannot add either species to the database without a positive foodplant identification (in "the wild" the native *sanguinea* is abundant whilst the other species is usually in gardens). **Images at** <http://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/A.petryi.htm> and <http://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/A.treitschkiella.htm>.

Keep me posted on any successes.

Happy mothing,

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