Zootaxa 3760 (4): 599–600
www.mapress.com/zootaxa/

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ISSN 1175-5326 (print edition)
ZOOTAXA
ISSN 1175-5334 (online edition)

http://dx.doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.3760.4.10
http://zoobank.org/urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:987BFCB0-9661-42DA-944B-04478360D342

Review: *Britain's day-flying Moths* by David Newland, Robert Still and Andy Smith

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Britain's Day-flying Moths, a field guide to the day-flying moths of Britain and Ireland
David Newland, Robert Still and Andy Smith, 2013.
Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey
ISBN 978-0-691-15832-7 Paperback

This very attractive field guide belongs to a series that is winning widespread and justified praise for layout, design and overall quality. It covers the 133 'macro-moths' that fly, or are readily disturbed, by day in the British Isles. It also includes a small selection (22 species) of the numerous day-flying 'micro-moths'. First impressions are excellent: as with others in the series, the book is beautifully designed for field use, compact, and comes with a transparent plastic cover to protect it from the elements. Other welcome 'field' features are the life-size photographs of selected species inside the back cover, together with a ruler along the edge of that page. The main species accounts that make up the bulk of the book devote a page to each species and are illustrated by photographs of live moths in their natural habitats. The photographs are almost universally of very fine quality.

The introductory sections are far more extensive than might be expected in a standard field-guide and are written in a clear, accessible style. They cover topics such as biology (including anatomy), naming and identifying moths, habitats, and gardening for moths; a useful glossary of terms is included on pp. 24–25. An illustrated table (pp. 14–15) gives a guide to distinguishing features for the main day-flying groups, and there is even (p. 22) a very welcome table of food-plants for garden moths. The closing sections of the book add extensive information about conservation, legislation, recording and monitoring, and there is also a useful 'Further Reading' section for those who wish to delve into the remainder of the British moth fauna.

The main species accounts in the core of the book are models of their kind: a table in the top right corner of the page summarises status, habitat, flight time, forewing length, host-plants and similar species, while the main text describes the habits and life history in more detail. (All of this information is handily summarised once more in table form on pp. 202–209.) A photograph of each species appears at the bottom of the page; the magnification is given in the top left corner. There are additional photographs of some species in the double page spread that introduces each family.

Criticisms are few and minor. Just two species photographs seem slightly unsatisfactory: the Raspberry Clearwing (*Pennisetia hylaeiformis*) on p. 44 is rather blurred and the Small White Wave (*Asthena albulata*, p. 107) is represented by a worn specimen that has lost its fringes. Only by comparison with the very crisp images of other species do these two stand out: in neither case is identification of the species likely to be compromised. One or two terms in the glossary are defined oddly or misleadingly: for example opposite 'scarce' we find 'the description of a species' abundance', but we are not told what the word says about that abundance. More seriously, 'form' is said to be an 'alternative term used for race or subspecies'; the explanation of these terms on p. 11, which is more correct, contradicts this. The authors once or twice misleadingly imply (e.g. in the introduction to micro-moths on p. 176) that moths with reduced mouthparts are therefore considered more 'primitive': rather, such reduction is a derived feature and some of the most primitive moths have very well developed mouthparts. The

Accepted by Zhi-Qiang Zhang: 22 Jan. 2014; published: 4 Feb. 2014

genus name of the brown house moth (*Hofmannophila*) is misspelt on p. 187, and the foresters belong to subfamily Procridinae, not Procidinae (p. 10).

This book is squarely aimed at the growing ranks of field photographers, who contribute much valuable data to recording schemes and websites via digital images. Therefore, as with most modern British field guides, it contains no mention of the possibility of making a reference collection as an aid to detailed study and accurate recording of insects. Perhaps this is fair enough in a country with a very well-studied Lepidoptera fauna, though serious students of micro-moths will need to collect. Even the idea of carrying a butterfly net to capture moths for closer examination seems to cause mild squeamishness on the part of the authors (p. 13). Their advice, to make sure the species concerned is not legally protected, seems topsy-turvy. What if one needs to net a fast-flying moth *in order to find out* whether it is something rare? The record could be extremely important! Likewise, there is nothing in this book about the rewards of rearing moths in captivity from eggs or larvae. Has this too become controversial? That would be a shame: detailed study is the most rewarding study and the most needed, and should be encouraged.

In a country probably better served by field guides than any other, new offerings must strive for exceptional standards and fresh perspectives. This guide succeeds on both counts: the design is near faultless, and to my knowledge there has been no previous book devoted exclusively to the day-flying moths of Britain. The layout and comprehensiveness of the information provided for each species ensure that this will be a 'must-have' even for those moth enthusiasts already with extensive libraries.