

ENGLISH NAMES FOR KENYA MOTHS

By A. L. H. TOWNSEND.

In the number of this Journal for April 1953, Col. Stockley makes the suggestion that someone should invent English names for the Kenya moths. This wholly admirable suggestion has been made more than once; but it does not appear to have been taken up. "Admirable", because there can be little doubt that many potential entomologists, particularly among the younger generation, are scared off a study where they find such mouthfuls as *Sphingaeniopsis*, *Odontocheilopteryx*, and *Thaumetopoea apologetica* to be common and necessary currency. It has often been noticed how few and how small the insect collections are that appear among the Schools' exhibits at the Agricultural Shows: a fact which seems to show lack of interest in entomology among the young people of the Colony. Why does this difference exist between the children of Kenya and those of England, who are at present showing more interest than ever before in the study of insect life? There must be some reason, in a country where insects are so numerous, interesting, and beautiful. Is it partly because of this matter of the names? If so, cannot simple English names be introduced to supplement those monstrosities (necessary to the scientist, but not, at first anyhow, to the ordinary person) mentioned above? This article has been written in the hope that it may start the ball rolling. It is purely tentative, and deals with the Moths only; my knowledge of the Butterflies is too slight for me to venture on any suggestion of names for them. There are many people far more competent than myself to undertake that.

There are difficulties, not the least of which is that many of our Kenya Moths may already have acquired names elsewhere — in South Africa, for instance — and to name them here might lead to confusion. But this would be straightened out in time, and does not seem to be a sufficient reason for postponing an initial effort. To invent an individual name for each of the enormous number of our moths will be a vast task, and take a very long time. But, again, that does not seem to provide a valid argument against making a beginning.

Certain principles may be suggested, to begin with.

1. Species with names already well-established in England will, of course, retain them. There are more of these in Kenya than may be generally known.

2. The use of "Kenya" — or of any Kenya locality — as a prefix, should be avoided, since it may well prove, later on, to be inappropriate. The species may not be confined to Kenya, or to the particular locality. (Anyone who has studied the African moths will know that there are a very large number with the scientific name "capensis", which occur in many places besides "The Cape").

3. Where the scientific name is clearly descriptive of the moth, or of some individual characteristic or peculiarity, it should be translated and retained. An instance of this is "*hirundo*", the Swallow; surely a most happy name for this delightful little Hawkmoth.

4. Well-established Group-names, such as Hawks, Tigers, Footmen, Pugs, etc., should be used when possible; that is, when their use does not make the name unwieldy.

5. Some Group-names however, such as Carpets, Rustics, Arches, have been stretched almost to absurdity in the English list. These should not be further extended.

6. "Proprietary" names; *Wahlbergi*, *Platti*, *Jacksoni*; should only be retained in English if no more elegant or appropriate name can be found.

7. Names should be easily intelligible, and not grotesque or absurd. (How many English entomologists can say what is meant by "The Engrailed Clay", "The Cousin German", or "The Setaceous Hebrew Character"? Or what could be more grotesque than "The Beautiful Snout"!)

Here are a few suggestions, made with great diffidence, and covering only a few species from a small number of Moth-families.

SPHINGIDAE (Hawkmoths).

There are five of these in Kenya with well-known English names, the Death's head, *Convolvulus*, *Oleander*, *Striped*, and *Silver-striped Hawks*. These need no new names.

Suggestions :—

<i>H.osiris</i>	Greater Silver-stripe.	<i>H.eson</i>	Olive-striped Hawk.
<i>H.balsaminae</i>	Clay-striped Hawk.	<i>L.hirundo</i>	Swallow or Swallow hawk.
<i>M.trochilus</i>	Lesser Hummingbird.	<i>B.medea</i>	Green Jewel.
<i>B.charis</i>	Rose-and-silver.	<i>P.grayi</i>	Brown-tipped Hawk.
<i>P.falcatus</i>	Hook-tipped Hawk.	<i>Ps.postica</i>	Black-based Hawk.

SATURNIIDAE.

Since the only English species is the well-known "Emperor", it seems that it may be well to keep this name with appropriate prefix, at least for those species with "target" markings on the wings. It may be necessary to keep the many "proprietary" names in this family: e.g. *Nudaurelia rothschildi*, Rothschild's Emperor.

ARCTIIDAE.

The "Footmen" lend themselves to descriptive names. *D.pulchella* is already known as the *Crimson-speckled*.

<i>E.peperita</i>	Dusty footman.	<i>E.sanguicosta</i>	Red-edged footman.
<i>E.distigmata</i>	Colon footman.	<i>E.discifera</i>	Cloudy footman.
<i>L.bipunctigera</i>	Twin-spot footman.	<i>M.chalybeata</i>	Steely footman, etc.

SYNTOMIDE.

A few well-known species :—

<i>A.chrysozona</i>	Gold Belt.	<i>Th. negus (phasma)</i>	Phantom.
<i>M.lateritia</i> .	Vermilion.	<i>M.flavivena</i> .	Yellow-veined.

NOCTUIDAE.

There are a number named in England; *C.loreyi*, Cosmopolitan: *Eux.segetis*, Turnip moth: *Eux.spinifera*, Hubner's Rustic: *H.peltigera*, Bordered Straw; and several others. I will suggest names for species of two Genera only out of this immense family.

Plusia.

<i>P.limbirena</i>	Broken Y.	<i>P. orichalcea</i>	Brass-wing.
<i>P.indicator</i>	Pointer.	<i>P.sestertia</i>	Plutocrat.

Othreis.

<i>O.materna</i>	Chequered Orange-wing.	<i>O.fullonica</i>	Comma Orange-wing.
<i>O.divitiosa</i>	Broad-bordered Orange-wing.		

Those few will suffice to show the idea I have in mind.

To bring this project into being will require co-operation — much co-operation. It is possible, even probable, that in the Kenya Schools or elsewhere, there are names already current of which I am ignorant. If anyone interested cares to send me these, or suggestions for others, I will do my best to proceed with the next step, which is to secure the adoption and publication of the names. One stipulation however is necessary. The name, or suggested one, *must* be accompanied by the scientific name of the moth. (This can easily be obtained from the Museum) The reason is clear. A communication saying "A good name for that common moth, white with red blotches on the wings, would be 'Nettle-rash'" will not be very helpful. It is almost impossible to recognise a moth from a casual description.

In this matter of adoption and publication, the help of the Natural History Society, and of the Coryndon Museum, will clearly be necessary, and I feel sure that it will be forthcoming. Both these institutions are keen to increase the number of Naturalists in the country, and realise that one way of doing so is that now suggested — the provision of "easy" names for the insects. Perhaps a small committee might be set up to accept or reject suggestions, and to choose between alternative ones. Perhaps the Editor of this Journal would agree to publish occasional lists and the Museum authority to incorporate the new names in the label-system of the collection. At any rate, the first thing is to get a list of names. Let us get on with it.