

UNUSUAL FOODPLANTS OF SVENSSON'S
COPPER UNDERWING (*AMPHIPYRA BERBERA*
SVENSSONI FLETCHER) AND THE MOUSE
(*AMPHIPYRA TRAGOPOGINIS* [CLERCK]),
LEPIDOPTERA: NOCTUIDAE

By E. G. HANCOCK * and I. D. WALLACE **

Since the separation of *Amphipyra berbera svenssoni* from *A. pyramidea* (L.) (Fletcher, 1968), the possible list of foodplants remains small. According to Bretherton *et al.*, (1983) only 'oak (*Quercus* spp.)' is recorded with certainty.

On several occasions recently we have found larvae of *A. berbera svenssoni* in circumstances which appear to indicate a wider range of possible foodplants. On 16 June, 1983 one of us (E.G.H.) found a larva in the panicle of a white cultivar of the lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*). The camouflage was extremely effective amongst the loose flowers and the resemblance to a sphingid larva was noticeable. In the opinion that this was an accidental association, other foodplants were offered, birch (*Betula pendula* Roth), which overhangs the lilac shrub and *Rosa* spp. which grow nearby in the same garden in Bolton, Lancashire (grid ref. SD712118). These were all rejected in favour of the flowers of lilac which were consumed for seven days before pupation. The mature larva matched exactly the description given in Bretherton, *et al.* (1983) and the adult emerged on 6 July, 1983.

On discussion, it was discovered that similar experiences had occurred to the other author (I.D.W.). A larva which reared out as *A. berbera svenssoni* was found on 14 June 1978 eating young rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum* Linn.) leaves at Cole Mere, Shropshire (grid ref. SJ43-33-). The plant was growing at the base of a bare-trunked sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus* Linn.) in the middle of a trampled area. It seems likely that the larva had fallen from the sycamore and not finding any other leaves had turned to rhododendron.

In captivity it ate both sycamore and rhododendron. (A november moth larva, *Epirrita dilutata* (D. & S.) found at the same place only ate rhododendron when offered a choice and also successfully emerged.) Two larvae of *A.b. svenssoni* were found also eating the leaves of rhododendron forming the shrub layer under tall trees (species not recorded) by the Nant Felin Blwm, Fynnongroyw, Clwyd (grid ref. SJ138888), on 1 June 1982. These larvae were particularly fond of rhododendron flowers. Quaker larvae (*Orthosia* sp.) found at the same time starved rather than eat the alien plant.

* Glasgow Museums and Galleries, Kelvingrove, Glasgow, G3 8AG.

** Merseyside County Museums, William Brown Street, Liverpool, L3 8EN.

Once again it seems likely that all the caterpillars had fallen from the deciduous trees above .

At least one other species of this genus shows a predeliction for flowers as a food source. To quote Barrett (1899), *Amphipyra tragopoginis* (Clerck) is "very fond of the blossoms of garden flowers and apparently of yellow flowers whether cultivated or wild . . . I have noticed its liking for the handsome yellow blossoms of *Eschscholzia californica* (California poppy) in the hollow of which it will lie through the day and eat the petals at night". In confirmation of this a larva of this species was found (I.D.W.) feeding on the flowers of monkey-flower (*Mimulus guttatus* DC) at Bettisfield, Clwyd (grid ref. SJ466356). It would only eat the flowers and was the only insect found feeding on an extensive stand of the plant. The adult emerged successfully.

The small number of insect species which have managed to colonise rhododendron and other established alien plants indicates the potential interest in relatively large lepidopterans feeding on such plants. Further observations on this genus of moths might be of value in making any deductions concerning the biological implications of this behaviour.

References

- Barrett, C. G. (1899) *The Lepidoptera of the British Islands*, 5:254.
Bretherton, R. F., Goater, B. and Lorimer, R. I. (1983) in Heath, J. (Ed.) *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*, 10: 153-158.
Fletcher, D. S., (1968) *Amphipyra pyramidea* (Linn.) and *A. berbera* Rungs (Lep., Noctuidae), two species confused *Ent. Gazette*, 19: 91-106.
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THE BLOXWORTH SNOOT HYPENA OBSITALIS HBN. IN KENT — On 18th August 1985 I found a specimen of this rare moth in my m.v. trap, which I operate in my garden. This appears to be the ninth recorded British specimen and the first for Kent. On referring to J. M. Chalmers-Hunt's note (*Ent. Rec.* **95** (1983) p.126) I find that recent records — Scilly (1962) Dorset (1965) Sussex (1983) and now Kent (1985) indicate a spread eastwards. Does this mean a migration in each of these years, each in a more easterly direction or is the species established and spreading eastwards? If the latter it is surprising that it survived last winter. The food plant is given as nettle which is plentiful in various parts of the garden. The species hibernates in the perfect state and in Malta where the moth is very common, it is said to occur all the year round. (*Ent. Rec.* **95** (1983) p.74) G. H. YODEN, 18 Castle Avenue, Dover.



Hancock, E G and Wallace, I. D. 1986. "Unusual foodplants of Svensson's copper underwing (*Amphipyra berbera svenssoni* Fletcher) and the mouse (*Amphipyra tragopoginis* (Clerck)), Lepidoptera: Noctuidae." *The entomologist's record and journal of variation* 98, 7–8.

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