MICROLEPIDOPTERA IN WESTER ROSS

By REV. DAVID AGASSIZ*

At the end of May 1983 my wife and I stayed for a few days at Kinlochewe, West Ross. The principle objective was to learn something of the life history of *Plutella hassi* Staud. recently added to the British list by Kyrki & Jalava. It became clear, as expected, that the larvae of that species were not to be found so early in the year as no Cruciferae were yet in evidence on Beinn Eighe. Knud Larsen, who has collected the species in Norway, had suggested (pers. comm.) that the larva probably occurs later in the summer than the moth and I feel sure he is right. However our journey was not entirely fruitless.

Swammerdamia compunctella Herr.-Schäff.

This species has been little understood in Britain since its discovery by Metcalfe in 1933, even though there have been a number of recent records. Metcalfe's suggestion that birch is the foodplant has never been substantiated and the chief source of information on its life history was an article by Schutze written in 1931, where he describes it as spinning the shoots of rowan *(Sorbus aucuparia)* preferring small bushes in the shade. I had resolved to look for this larva and the very first day we were rewarded.

In the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve on the foothills close to Loch Maree is a fine forest of native Scots Pine. It forms open woodland quite unlike the Forestry Commission's plantations of that species where little light penetrates the branches between rows of trees. Amongst the heather and *Vaccinium* beneath the pines are small rowan seedlings, and on these the larvae were found, usually in the topmost shoot. The loose spinnings were quite conspicuous sometimes being visible from several metres away; there were often two larvae per web, sometimes just one, but I never found more than two. All spinnings found were within a metre of ground level, sometimes only about 15 cm above the ground. A more extensive search of the area over the next few days showed these larvae to be quite common, sometimes the seedings were growing in the open, but still near the pine forest. None was found on a mature tree of *Sorbus aucuparia* . On the same seedling rowans drooping shoots were common which contained the larvae of *Argyresthia semifusca* Haw., but these will also attack larger trees.

The full grown larva of *S. compunctella* is of typical *Swammerdamia* spindle-shape, it varies from rich deep red to dark brown, the dorsum is paler or whitish with a dark central line, the sides are

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white sometimes interrupted or nearly interrupted by a reddish patch on each segment; beneath it is dark brown, the legs are dark brown or black. The head and plate of the second segment are blackish, divided by a pale central line.

The larva is stated to overwinter when young in a dense white cocoon, it then feeds up quickly as soon as the leaves appear. The pupa is contained in a semi-opaque white cocoon which in turn is slung in a light spinning on or near the ground. The adult emerges after about two weeks, mine all appeared between 13th and 17th June.

The adults were rather constant in markings and size, having a wingspan of 14-15 mm.

Aethes rutilana (Hübn.)

At around 550m. (1800 ft) on the north easterly slopes of Beinn Eighe grows the prostrate juniper *Juniperus communis nana*; on the rather bare mountain side it is hardly any higher than the *Calluna, Vaccinium* and *Empetrum* which surround it. Amongst it I noticed a tight spinning and further searching revealed more; although a cold north easterly wind did not make searching an enjoyable task we collected a bag of spinnings in two short visits withtout much difficulty. I wondered whether they might be *Dichomeris juniperella* (Linn.) but when a pupa was examined it was found to be too small. I was, however, surprised and delighted when six specimens of *A. rutilana* emerged between 20th and 25th June, two further pupae had died.

Hitherto the species has been known only from the chalk downs in southern England where Bradley and Tremewan describe it as rare and may now be extinct in some localities. This then is a remarkable extension in the known range of this species in the British Isles.

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