

area for many years and have run a M.V. lamp at Willen on most suitable nights since 1967 but this is the first specimen of this species to be taken. The late Sir Eric Ansorge in his *The Macrolepidoptera of Buckinghamshire* states that "the insect is evidently very scarce in the County". — G. E. HIGGS, The Cottage, Willen, Milton Keynes.

A DWARF *ACRONICTA RUMICUS* L.: KNOTGRASS. — An unusually small *A. rumicis* was among a number of examples of this moth of normal size which came to light near Beaconsfield on 13th August 1979. The mounted specimen measures 25 mm (approximately 1 in.) wing-tip to wing-tip with a body length of 12 mm (approximately 1 in.). Although slightly worn, all the typical markings are present in miniature, including the distinctive white spots near the hind margin of the forewings. *Hydracecia micacea* Esp. springs to mind as perhaps the most frequent of several species in which I have met extreme variations in size, but this is the first time I have encountered such deviation in the genus *Acronicta*. — P. Q. WINTER, West End Farm, Mustin, Filey, North Yorkshire.

## Practical Hints — April

Searching hedgerows by day, preferably in warm sunshine, will yield young larvae of several different species freshly out of hibernation. The garden tiger *Arctia caja* larvae rest on small nettle or deadnettle plants — full grown larvae of the cream spot tiger *Arctia villica* L. may be found at the same time. Drinker *Philudoria potatoria* L. larvae may be found on grass whilst larvae of the oak eggar *Lasiocampa quercus* L. lie sunning themselves on low stems of bramble or blackthorn. The camouflaged larvae of the lappet *Gastropacha quercifolia* L. may also be found on this latter plant, usually on stems as thick as a finger. All these larvae are more easy to find in mid-April than at other times because at this time the hedges are still largely devoid of leaves (WATKINSON).

In most years, the willows are over before *Orthosia populi* F. (Lead-coloured Drab) and especially *O. gracilis* D. & S. (Powdered Quaker) are on the wing. In a late year, like 1979, however, willows flowering in early April near aspens may produce an abundance of the former insect, and I once took numbers of the red form of *O. gracilis* at late-flowering willows on one of the New Forest bogs (GOATER).

Collecting catkins can produce larvae of several species of willow moth. Freshly fallen catkins of black poplar collected in mid-April may contain small larvae of a local moth, the pale lemon willow *Xanthia ocellaris* Bork. Willow catkins picked at or just after the time of peak flowering will almost always be found to contain larvae of the pink-barred willow *X. togata* Esp. and especially the willow *X. icteritia* Hufn., often in extremely large numbers. I once separated 155 larvae from a bag full of about 250 catkins collected along a roadside in Scotland. The technique I found the most productive was to allow catkins 2-3 days to partially dry in a large paper bag,



Winter, P. Q. 1980. "A dwarf *Acronicta rumicus* L.: knotgrass." *The entomologist's record and journal of variation* 92, 54-54.

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