

Moths in the Anglesea Area... Marilyn Hewish and Peter Marriott

Moths are much more numerous and species-diverse than butterflies, but because they're mostly nocturnal, they are less well known and appreciated. They're sometimes assumed to be "brown and boring", but in fact, their range of sizes, shapes and colours can be surprising.

Between 1991 and 2012, we conducted night surveys, with moth-attracting lights in the Anglesea and Aireys Inlet areas. We've also walked the heathlands and woodlands to search for day-flying species. The localities covered were Bald Hills, Anglesea Scout Camp, private property on Hurst Road near Eumeralla, and Distillery Creek Picnic Ground.

We recorded a total of 420 moth species in 34 families. The moths found included some beautiful examples, such as the *Chlorocoma* subsp. Green Emeralds, the *Chrysolarentia* subsp., Carpets with intricate wing patterns resembling tapestry, and the Bark Moths, family Geometridae, which vanish, when they flatten their brown wings against tree bark.

Anglesea moths come in a range of sizes, the largest with a wingspan of 15–16 cm, down to a few mms. The *Chelepteryx collesi* Batwing Moth, found along the Otway coast, is one of the largest moths in Victoria. In May 2009, one male came to our light at Distillery Creek. The wings were so large we could hear them flapping in flight. The glossy colours of black, red-brown and pearly grey shone like rich velvet. At Bald Hills on the next night, five males draped themselves over low heath, around the light.



Batwing Moth



Forked Footman

Day-flying moths are common in the heathlands. *Dichromodes ainaria* Common Heath Moth flashes its bright yellow hindwings, as it flies around the shrubs on sunny spring days. The *Phaeophlebosia furcifera* Forked Footman has forewings with bold, branching, dark brown stripes.

The Hepialidae Ghost Moths flutter at lighted windows after rain in autumn. There are several large local species. *Abantiades hyalinatus* (no common name) is strikingly coloured, with mustard coloured forewings, and rich purple hindwings. *Abantiades magnificus* is among the largest of the Victorian Ghost Moths. Both have been found at the Scout Camp.



Ghost Moth

The Otway Ranges is one of the westernmost examples of wet forest in the state. Moths that are more typical of eastern Victoria and Tasmania are found there. Some are at the western

limits of their ranges. Rare moths found near Anglesea include an undescribed *Dinophalus* species (Bald Hills) and *Earias vittella* Single-barred Earias (Eumeralla Scout Camp). These are

the only records from Victoria.



Rare *Dinophalus* species undescribed

Moths have important roles in ecology. Many day-flying moths pollinate flowers. Moths are important links in the food chain, providing rich sources of protein and fat for birds, reptiles and small mammals, especially bats. Caterpillars of many species, especially the Oecophoridae, feed in the litter layer. A healthy caterpillar population recycles nutrients, prevents excessive build-up of litter and assists in fire mitigation.

The Anglesea district is a fine hunting ground for lovers of moths. We enjoy spreading the word on their beauty, their diversity and their important roles in our natural ecosystems.

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