

## *Luffia ferchaultella* – the moth in lichen clothing

Keep an eye out for lichens that move! Continuing the theme of lichen-looking and mothing introduced by Vince Giavarini in the Summer 2015 issue of the *Bulletin*.....

On 30 May 2015 my brother drew my attention to some tiny cones, about 6mm long, on his garden seat in Hartpury, West Gloucestershire. In warm conditions they were quite active, moving faster than a snail, when you could see their little dark heads and legs, but clamping down when threatened. They were covered in bits of lichen, obtained, no doubt, from his bench which has a beautiful covering including *Candelariella vitellina*, *Flavoparmelia caperata*, *F. soledians*, *Hypogymnia tubulosa*, *Lecanora expallens*, *L. pulicaris*, *Lepraria incana*, *Melanelixia subaurifera*, *Parmelia sulcata*, *Punctelia jeckeri* and *P. subrudecta*.



Well-camouflaged moths (above and to left of the finger-tip!)

After some time with my books and on the internet, I made the tentative identification of the micro-moth *Luffia ferchaultella*, subsequently supported by Robert Homan, County Recorder for moths in East Gloucestershire and by Guy Meredith the county micro-moth specialist. *L. ferchaultella* is a case-bearing moth. It lives gregariously on suitable lichen-covered trunks, worked timber or occasionally stones,

and the cases, sometimes unoccupied, can be found all year round with old cases fixed to the spot for several years. The case is made of silk and covered with lichen, and immediately makes one think of a caddis fly. The larvae feed on lichen and pupate in early June. When the wingless adult females emerge they immediately start to lay eggs on or in their larval cases.

I searched other suitable places in my brother's garden, but found no more. *Luffia ferchaultella* is a self-fertile species (there are no males), but considered by some to be a parthenogenetic form of *L. lapidella*. A link to the map on the NBN gateway is [https://data.nbn.org.uk/Taxa/MM0001Z100BUSK11/Grid\\_Map](https://data.nbn.org.uk/Taxa/MM0001Z100BUSK11/Grid_Map). In the UK mainland *L. lapidella* as such is only known in the far south west.



Close-up of the moth in its case

I showed an earlier version of this article to Mark Powell, who said “oh yes, Bagworms!”. He comes across them quite regularly in his east Midlands home patch, especially in cracks in ash bark. Armed with a new term – bagworm – I quickly came across an article on *Psychidae* moths in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire. See <http://www.eakringbirds.com/eakringbirds2/mothspsychids.htm>. It would appear that there is more than one of these micro-moths that eat and camouflage themselves with lichens. Indeed some species are probably common and the only reason for the gappy distribution maps is lack of recording.

There's a challenge for us! To make it harder, I wonder if we could work out the species of lichen that decorate the bag. I also wonder if such ambulant creatures provide a mechanism for translocation of lichen propagules and their subsequent fixation to new areas of substrate.

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