

### 3 Privets, 4 Poplars and 8 Elephants

Such was my report to Peter after inspecting the moth trap one day in June.

He is familiar with this sort of thing by now so he knew what I meant – they are all Hawk-moths and reflect the largest visitors to the trap on a typical good night. The three most common are all very different so I thought I would pen a few notes about them.

I am used to Elephant Hawk-moths as they are actually pretty common, but a fresh one resplendent in olive green and dark pink is still a very special creature. On a warm morning they can give you a bit of a fright



as they sometimes decided to take to the wing. They are quite noisy fliers and to have one zoom out of the box into your face as you are inspecting some small and difficult moth is quite a surprise! The caterpillar is large and starts off bright green before turning brown and feeds on



willowherbs and fuchsias. It is quite fearsome-looking having false eye spots on its head and despite my catching about 100 adults during the year I have never seen

the caterpillar in the garden. Apart, that is, from three that were happily feeding on Bogbean in the pond but would have nowhere to go to pupate (they burrow into the soil) so I donned my wellies and rescued them, moving them to a fuchsia bush.

Poplar Hawk-moths are also quite common and look very different. They perch with their wings arranged to look like a dead leaf and the disguise must work as, if you put one on a tree trunk in the morning, it is still there in the evening, managing to avoid the ever-exploring Great Tits. The larvae feed on poplar, and also on willows.



The most impressive of the lot is the Privet Hawk-moth. It is black and brown with an impressive black head and a pink-striped body. It perches with its wings in a long tent-shape. Its wingspan is about 4.5 inches so it looks very large when flying - not something you often see though, as it only flies at night. Or, on a warm morning, one can decide it wants to escape the moth trap as I am inspecting it – the experience is just like having a hummingbird whizz past your ear! The caterpillar is lime green with hook at the tail-end and diagonal bars on the side which are white and purple – it is very attractive but I have only ever seen one. It was on an apple tree in the garden when I was 13! They do feed



on privet, as expected, but also on Ash and Lilac.

*Rosemary Royle*