

Micro-moths (*a rather obscure topic I'm afraid and no room for pictures!*)

As the name implies, micro-moths are small moths. In particular they are a set of moth families where most of the members are small, being mostly less than 10mm in length (nose to wingtip). Some are very small – the tiniest of them all is 3.5 mm long – but quite a few are a decent size, for example like a small butterfly.

You will probably only be familiar with these moths if you have come across the larvae as pests – think Pea Moth, Plum Fruit Moth, Codling Moth, and dare I say it – Clothes Moth, though the latter is becoming quite rare as its larva's favourite food – perhaps an old, grubby, woollen gardening jumper left in the bottom of a wardrobe, is becoming quite rare. More man-made fibres, and cleaner more insect-proof houses are taking their toll. There are also some micro moths that you may be aware of which are not pests – Many-plumed Moth and Common Plume (T shaped) come to lighted windows and China-mark moths hover around ponds in the evening laying their eggs, as their offspring feed on pond plants under water.

Although these species familiar to humans have English names, most micro-moths are known by their two-part Latin names which can be very long and hard to pronounce. And quite a lot of the moths are rather brown and hard to identify. What is more there are 896 species out there for ardent moth-ers to try and identify. All these things are felt to be rather daunting to a novice moth enthusiast so the latest version of the Micro-moth ID book includes English names for all the moths. It does not replace names which are already in common use but dreams up new ones, mostly quite sensible, for all the others.

So just picking some of the longest Latin names I could find, from the moths I have seen, as examples:

a moth previously known as *Phyllonorycter quercifoliella* was an easy name for experienced moth folk – the phyllonorycters are a big family of leaf miners with pretty little adults, and this one, as the Latin name implies, feeds on oak. So it is now Common Oak leaf-miner – fair enough I suppose.

Oidaematophorus lithodactyla is a tricky one – however fond you are of long Latin names it is difficult to know how to pronounce it! Maybe Dusky Plume is easier.

Semioscopis steinkellneriana is now known as Black-marked Diviner. Easier to remember maybe, but Mr Steinkellner is now committed to oblivion!

And lastly *Endothenia quadrimaculana* is now known as Marsh Marble – a reasonable name actually, as the larva feeds on Marsh Woundwort, but the Latin reference to the 4 blotches is lost – in fact probably just as well as it really has two big blotches and several smaller ones!

The jury is out on the new names. Died in the wool older moth-ers who are thoroughly familiar with the Latin names, and who probably learnt Latin at school, like the Latin names and find the new names confusing. New moth-ers automatically use the new English names without any qualms. I think I fall somewhere in the first camp!

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