

In the Depths of Winter.

By Phil Boggis (Cornwall Butterfly Conservation Moth Officer).

During these cold, dank days of winter it is heartening to find signs of life amongst our lepidoptera. **The Herald** (*Scoliopteryx libatrix*), a fairly common species, is one of the few noctuid moths that hibernate and can often be found during the winter months in outhouses, cellars, barns, caves, even holes in the ground such as under manhole covers and are fond of congregating in numbers.

The specimen illustrated on the right fluttered down onto my basement stairs in December just before the really cold weather set in. It can be seen after hibernation from March to June, and again from late July to November in two generations, depending on locality, so the ones you see in March are already 4 or 5 months old! It is a moderately common species but less so in Scotland. It inhabits woodland, marshes, commons, parks and gardens where the larvae feed on a number of trees such as Sallow, Willow, Aspen, Osier and Poplar. The moth, with its scalloped edges, can resemble a dead or dying leaf and can be quite cryptic. In the autumn the adult is often seen at night feeding on Ivy blossom and overripe blackberries. The moth is, not surprisingly, attracted to sugar or a treacle patch, lovingly provided as bait by the lepidopterist. It also comes in small numbers to light traps. I would like to believe that the moth is called the Herald because its appearance in March heralds the coming spring.



The Herald moth,
St. Austell, 15th
December 2009.
Photo © P. H. Boggis

Another moth frequently seen indoors during the winter months, but probably overlooked because of its small size, is **Mompha divisella** (it does not have an English name). The moth



Mompha divisella, St. Austell, 15th January 2010.

Photo © P. H. Boggis

has a wingspan of between 10 and 13mm which, for a micro-moth, is quite large! The moths emerge in August and can be found, after hibernation, till May. The specimen illustrated left was seen flying towards my basement light on the 15th January this year. I have seen this moth a number of times over the past 12 years in my house. The dates are: 15th Oct.1998, 8th Nov. 2002, 25th Feb. 2003. Its distribution is said to be widespread but local in England as far north as Cumbria. There is one generation a year and the larvae feed in the stems of Broad-leaved Willowherb, Marsh Willowherb and other Willowherbs, causing a gall which is generally situated at one of the nodes and is about the size of a large pea. Galls are probably caused by the larvae irritating the plant as they eat away at the pith in the hollow stems. The moth can be found in damp woodland, shaded situations, waste ground and open areas.

Another moth I have found in my basement in the depths of winter is the small case-bearing clothes moth **Tinea dubiella** and as the name implies, the larvae will probably eat your

woollen garments if given half a chance. It is truly one of those 'small brown jobbies' that I have often heard referred to and is very similar to ***Tinea pellionella***. They are so similar that genitalia dissection is advised to separate them, but it is my opinion that those found in Cornwall are mostly ***Tinea dubiella***.

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