

Cornwall Moth Group

Yellow-legged Clearwing (*Synanthedon vespiformis*) – Linnaeus.

With the wider use and availability of pheromone lures to attract the males of species, the understanding of the distribution and abundance of this interesting family of moths has greatly increased in recent years. Previously, lepidopterists were restricted to looking for signs of the larval presence rather than observing the adult stage, primarily because most moths of this family are fast fliers and therefore difficult to detect. They do not come to a mercury vapour moth trap, being day flying, and could also be confused with other orders of insect.

The **Yellow-legged Clearwing** is a Notable B species. It occurs in between 31 and 100 10Km squares. All but one of the Cornish SESIIDAE are classified as **Nb**, the exception being the **Lunar Hornet Moth** (*Sesia bembeciformis*). It is personally believed that this classification will be updated in the ensuing years due to our increased understanding of its distribution.

The **Yellow-legged Clearwing**, although an indigenous species, could loosely be described as invasive of a particular altered habitat. This is simply because the species is often found where oaks and other trees such as Birch and Wych Elm have been felled within the previous three years. The moth lays its eggs on recently cut stumps or in wounds and calluses on the trunk. The

eggs are probably also laid between the bark where often the larva may be found feeding during August and through to the next May. The adult stage is found from June till August.

It was with interest that Tom Sleep, who has been instrumental in breeding and introducing the **Heath Fritillary** to Lucket, decided to take his pheromone lure 'VES' to Greenscoombe Wood last June (2006), since there had been substantial felling of sessile oaks to aid the re-introduction



Yellow-legged Clearwing, Greenscoombe Wood, Lucket, 30th June 2006.
Photo © P. H. Boggis.



The above photograph illustrates the site where the Yellow-legged Clearwing was observed. Note the stacked oak branches and the pheromone lure on its stick in the centre of the photograph.

of the **Heath Fritillary**. His hunch was rewarded by the observation of this moth found in the vicinity of the previous year's felling. This immediately excited other members of the Cornwall Moth Group, who upon hearing the news, soon followed in his tracks to 'try their fortunes' as well. It was noted, by me, that several moths appeared at the pheromone lure after 1pm. After a cursory investigation they flew off, never to return. This

behaviour may have been due to the pheromone not being 'quite right' for the male. Perhaps this is because the suppliers recommend using several types of pheromone in any given area thus 'mixing the scent' so to speak. The one illustrated

was attracted to the pheromone at 3pm and quite some distance from the others that were observed earlier in the day. Several hours had been spent investigating the original area, where the moths first appeared, but to no avail. Is there is some significance in this observation? Do the moths remember the scent and then, not being 'interested', not bother again?

Moth enthusiasts across the county who have access to pheromone lures for this species may care, later this year, to visit the new reserve at Carbis Moor. The entrance is at SX 001 603, the reason being that in order to open up a pathway to facilitate easier access for the public, a number of sessile oaks required felling. It is therefore with interest that this June and July we may discover the **Yellow-legged Clearwing** at this new reserve and look forward with interest to the results. Another site that has benefited other species, due to clearance work, has been the Large Blue site on the north coast. There is now a thriving colony of **Graylings** where none, it is believed, existed before. Many 'brown field' sites have been re-colonised with a number of butterfly species but some of these old industrial mine workings are now unfortunately ear-marked for re-development. This has raised concerns that there may be a significant loss to the counties' Lepidoptera fauna.

~ Phil Boggis (Cornwall Butterfly Conservation Moth Officer), January 2007.

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