Hyphantria cunea (Drury, 1773) new for the Maltese Islands (Lepidoptera: Erebidae, Arctiinae, Arctiini)

Anthony Seguna, Aldo Catania, Paul Sammut & John J. Borg

Abstract

The genus Hyphantria Harris, 1841 and the species Hyphantria cunea (Drury, 1773) are recorded for the first time from the Maltese Islands. Notes on the distribution, habits of the adult and larval host plant are included. A Maltese name is proposed for this new record.

Keywords: Lepidoptera, Erebidae, Arctiinae, Arctiini, Hyphantria cunea, new records, Maltese Islands.

Introduction

To date the Subfamily Arctiinae, tribe Arctiini in Malta is represented by four other species, Phragmatobia fuliginosa (Linnaeus, 1758) ssp. melitensis O. Bang-Haas, 1927, Cymbalophora pudica (Esper, 1785), Arctia villica (Linnaeus, 1758) and Utethesia pulchella (Linnaeus, 1758) (Sammut, 2020).

Hyphantria cunea (Drury, 1773) is native to North America, ranging from Canada to Mexico and has been introduced into other continents. The species was introduced to Central Europe (Hungary) in the forties of the last century from where it has rapidly spread into large areas of Europe except the Iberian Peninsula (Witt et al. 2011).

Apart from Europe this species range now extends into Central and Far East Asia from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and southeastern Kazakhstan. Introduced into Japan in 1945 it adjusted its number of generations per year since its arrival (GomiI & Takeda, 1996). It has also found its way into China, southern Mongolia, Korea and southern Russia.

Discussion

The adult moth laying clusters of a few hundred “hair-covered” eggs on the underside of leaves (Douce, 2006). Larvae feed and live inside self-created large webs made of silk until the late instars.
Very young larvae feed only on the upper surfaces of leaves. Later, they consume entire leaves. The larval stage lasts about four to six weeks (Hyche, 1999).

The larvae are polyphagous feeding on a wide variety of deciduous trees, sometimes causing entire defoliation of the host plant. To date the larvae have been recorded on over 600 different species of trees and it is among the most polyphagous of insects (Warren & Tadic, 1970).

In the authors’ opinion this species may have been introduced accidentally through the importation of ornamental and fruit trees by local garden centres.

**Material examined**

MALTA, 1♂ Naxxar. Tas-Sghajtar, 12-V-2022, (35° 54’ 35.3”N, 14° 26’ 29.4”E, Alt. 108 m). Actinic Moth Trap, A. Seguna leg.

The collecting site at Naxxar is a residential area with some mature and fully grown *Quercus ilex* L. trees, planted for landscaping in a public garden opposite the site. A search by the first author on these above-mentioned trees to see if there are larvae on them have resulted in the negative.

We propose the Maltese name “in-Nissieġa”, being the transliteration of the Greek word *Hyphantria* meaning “a female weaver”.

*Hyphantria cunea* (Drury, 1773) male, Naxxar. Underside showing the bright yellow colour of the front legs.

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**References**


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*Anthony Seguna
68 Redeemer, Triq l-Emigrant
MT-Naxxar, NXR3200
MALTA / MALTA
E-mail: seguna@onvol.net
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6264-0690

Aldo Catania
27, Rama-Rama, Triq Mons, Anton Cilia
MT-Żebbug ZBG3140
MALTA / MALTA
E-mail: aldocatania47@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7559-143X

Paul Sammut
137/2, Dingli Road
MT-Rabat, RBT9023
MALTA / MALTA
E-mail: farfett@onvol.net
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2019-9577

John J. Borg
National Museum of Natural History
Pjazza San Publju
MT-L-Imdina, MDN1011
MALTA / MALTA
E-mail: john.j.borg@gov.mt
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0587-3682

*Autor para la correspondencia / Corresponding author

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