Merulempista turturella (Zeller, 1848) new to the Maltese Islands (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae, Phycitinae)

Jonathan Agius

Abstract

The genus Merulempista Roesler, 1967 and the species Merulempista turturella (Zeller, 1848) are reported for the first time from the Maltese Islands. Distribution and habits of the larvae and adult are included. A Maltese name is proposed for this new record.

Keywords: Lepidoptera, Pyralidae, Phycitinae, Merulempista turturella, new record, Malta Islands.

Introduction

Merulempista Roesler, 1967 is a small genus of fifteen described species distributed in the Palaearctic, Indomalayan and the Australasian ecozones with 10 species found within Europe (Slamka, 2019). Merulempista turturella (Zeller, 1848) is known from the Canary Islands, Spain, Mallorca, France, mainland Italy, Sicily, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Israel. The genus is characterized by the male gnathos distally hooked, the sclerotized costa often produced to a distal process, and the female antrum deeply concave at middle and greatly extending backward posterolaterally (Yingdang, 2011).

Material


Discussion

In the Canary Islands, the larvae of M. turturella (Zeller, 1848) have been observed feeding on the
flower buds and the delicate flower parts of *Tamarix canariensis* Willd (Slamka, 2019). They typically inhabit saline open environments and similar biotopes where their host plants grow. Interestingly, all the specimens found in both Malta and Gozo were in such habitats. While, so far, there is no documented evidence of these larvae in Malta, it’s important to highlight that *Tamarix africana* Poir, is one of the most prevalent tree species in the areas where these specimens were discovered. However, it is worth mentioning that even though they are less common, *Tamarix gallica* L. and *Tamarix parviflora* DC., can be found on the Maltese Islands. *T. gallica* L. is present in all the three nature reserves maintained by BirdLife Malta, albeit in much smaller numbers that *T. africana* Poir. Consequently, it is highly probable that *Tamarix africana* Poir, serves as the primary food source for the larvae of *Merulempista turturrella* (Zeller, 1848).

**Figure 1.** *Merulempista turturrella* (Zeller, 1848) and its habitat - MALTA, Ghadira Nature Reserve, 1♂, 10-X-2023, J. Agius leg.

### Conclusion

The species is new to the Maltese lepidopterofauna. I propose the Maltese name “Merulempista tal-faxxi skuri”, after the ante-medial vertical lines crossing the forewings.

### Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to Dr. Antonio Vives for providing the Spanish abstract, to Mr. František Slamka from Bratislava, Slovenia, for confirming the species, and to Mr. Mark Gauci and Ms. Vera Tokmakova from BirdLife Malta for reviewing this work. Special appreciation is extended to BirdLife Malta for their dedication to researching Maltese moths within the three nature reserves under their jurisdiction.

### References


MERULEMPISTA TURTURELLA (ZELLER, 1848) NEW TO THE MALTESE ISLANDS

Jonathan Agius
166 ‘Infinity’
Vjal ix-Xarolla
MT-Zurrieq, ZRQ1617
MALTA / MALTA
E-mail: jonagius@msn.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4875-0524

(Recibido para publicación / Received for publication 29-X-2023)
(Revisado y aceptado / Revised and accepted 26-XII-2023)
(Publicado / Published 30-VI-2024)

Derechos de autor: El autor(es). Este es un artículo de acceso abierto distribuido bajo los términos de la Licencia de Reconocimiento 4.0 Internacional de Creative Commons (CC BY 4.0), que permite el uso, distribución y reproducción sin restricciones en cualquier medio, siempre que se cite al autor original y la fuente. / Copyright: The author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.