

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

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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.

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Resumen

El género *Hyphantria* Harris, 1841 y la especie *Hyphantria cunea* (Drury, 1773), se registran por primera vez para Malta. Se incluyen datos sobre su distribución, hábitat del adulto y la planta nutricia de la larva. Se propone un nombre maltés para esta nueva cita.

Palabras clave: Lepidoptera, Erebidae, Arctiinae, Arctiini, *Hyphantria cunea*, nuevo registro, Malta.

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 lays 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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