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Agrotis desertorum Boisduval, 1840 new to the Maltese Islands (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae)

J. Agius

Abstract

Agrotis desertorum Boisduval, 1840 is reported for the first time from the Maltese Islands. Distribution and habits of the adult are included. A Maltese name is proposed for this new record.

KEY WORDS: Lepidoptera, Noctuidae, *Agrotis*, *Agrotis desertorum*, Maltese Islands.

Agrotis desertorum Boisduval, 1840 nueva para Malta
(Lepidoptera: Noctuidae)

Resumen

Se registra por primera vez para Malta a *Agrotis desertorum* Boisduval, 1840. Se incluye la distribución hábitos del adulto. Se propone un nombre maltés para este nuevo registro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lepidoptera, Noctuidae, *Agrotis*, *Agrotis desertorum*, Malta.

Introduction

The genus *Agrotis* Ochsenheimer, 1816 is distributed throughout all biogeographical regions with 80 species recorded from the Palearctic region (FIBIGER, 1990), 32 of which being present in Europe (FIBIGER, 1990). Normally *Agrotis* species are characterised by the strongly or moderately bipectinate antenna of the male and the ability to fly long distances. In normal jargon, larvae of *Agrotis* species are referred to as cutworms as some species are major agricultural pests whose larvae hide during the day and emerge at night to feed. The name cutworm refers to the habit of the larvae, of cutting down and partly eating garden and crop plant (SMIT, 1964).

In the Maltese Islands a total of 9 species within the *Agrotis* have been recorded so far: *Agrotis lata* Treischke, 1835, *Agrotis puta* (Hübner, [1803]), *Agrotis herzogi* Rebel, 1911, *Agrotis ipsilon* (Hufnagel, 1766), *Agrotis trux* (Hübner, [1824]), *Agrotis segetum* ([Denis & Schiffermüller], 1775), *Agrotis spinifera* (Hübner, [1808]), *Agrotis haifae* Staudinger, 1897, and *Agrotis syricola* Corti & Draudt, 1933 (FIBIGER *et al.*, 2006). In Maltese literature, *Agrotis obesa* (Boisduval, 1829) and *Agrotis exclamationis* (Linnaeus, 1758) have been mentioned but never recorded (SAMMUT, 2000) so it is being assumed that these were erroneously mixed with *Agrotis lata* and *Agrotis trux* respectively due to their similarity.

Material

MALTA: 1 ♂, Zurrieq, 19-III-2018, at light, leg. J. Agius. (Fig. 1).

Distribution

Due to the very similar *Agrotis ripae* Hübner, [1823] the distribution within and outside Europe is uncertain but its type locality is south Russia. Their similarity is so close and the superficial variability is so high that for classification purposes *A. desertorum* has been grouped with *A. ripae* and *A. alexandrensis* Bethune-Baker, 1894. The so-called *riparae* species group has representatives both in Asia and Africa. (FIBIGER, 1997). However two recent records, one from Germany (GELBRECHT & WEISBACH, 2015) and one from Poland (NOWACKI *et al.*, 1997), confirm that this species is rare but definitely not new to the European fauna.

Agrotis desertorum occurs along the sandy shores of rivers and lakes, by the sea and sandy ground in steppes.

Discussion

From the 17th till the 19th of March 2018, south westerly winds persisted over the Maltese Islands with an average wind speed of around 7.96 km/h and an average gust speed of 8.8km/h. During spring, southern winds are the typical weather over the Maltese islands and as usually happens, these winds bring a variety of North African species. In fact *Autophila rosea* (Staudinger, 1888), *Heliothis nubigera* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1851) and *Hyles livornica* (Esper, 1780) were also recorded during the same 3 days.

The species is new to the Maltese lepidopterofauna. I propose the Maltese name *Agrotis tad-desert*, after a transliteration of the scientific name.



Figure 1.– *Agrotis desertorum* Boisduval, 1840. Top: Upperside. Bottom: Underside.

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