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Eremopola lenis magnifica (Rothschild, 1914) a species new for lepidoptero fauna of the Maltese Islands (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae, Xyleninae)

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

Abstract

The genus *Eremopola* Warren, 1911 and *Eremopola lenis magnifica* (Rothschild 1914) are recorded for the first time from the Maltese Islands.

Keywords: Lepidoptera, Noctuidae, Xyleninae, *Eremopola lenis magnifica*, Malta.

Eremopola lenis magnifica (Rothschild, 1914) una especie nueva para la lepidoptero fauna de Malta (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae, Xyleninae)

Resumen

Los géneros *Eremopola* Warren, 1911 y *Eremopola lenis magnifica* (Rothschild, 1914) se citan por la primera vez para Malta.

Palabras clave: Lepidoptera, Noctuidae, Xyleninae, *Eremopola lenis magnifica*, Malta.

Introduction

The genus *Eremopola* Warren, 1911 is a western Palearctic eremic group comprising two subgenera, *Eremopola* and *Eremochlaena* Boursin, 1953 (Ronkay et al. 2001). Both subgenera include two species and are represented in Europe by a single species, *Eremopola* (*Eremopola*) *lenis* (Staudinger, 1892) and *Eremopola* (*Eremochlaena*) *orana* (H. Lucas, 1894). In the past, other taxa have been associated with *Eremopola*, however, they are actually placed into other genera of the subfamily Noctuinae.

Eremopola (*Eremopola*) *lenis* is known to occur in the African Mediterranean from the Atlas region in the Maghreb area to Libya, in the Near East and the Iberian Peninsula. It is polymorphic, the local populations are easily separable from each other by their external appearance while their genitalia show no mentionable distinctive features, therefore they are interpreted as different geographic races. The nominotypical subspecies *lenis* (Staudinger, 1892) is known only from Israel (Ronkay et al. 2001); the subspecies *magnifica* (Rothschild, 1914) is known from the western parts of Mediterranean Africa (the Atlas region in Morocco and Algeria); the subspecies *marmarides* was described from Libya by Turati (1924) while the subspecies *radoti* (Boursin, 1928) has been recorded from Spain, where it is locally frequent.

The early stages have not yet been described but it is presumed that the larval host plants include herbaceous plants. The species is univoltine and the adults are on the wing from September to mid-November (Ronkay et al. 2001).

Both the genus *Eremopola* and the species *lenis* are new to the Lepidoptero fauna of the Maltese Islands. We propose the Maltese name “Harira fina”, after the transliteration of the Latin word “*lenis*”.

In the latest check-list of Maltese Lepidoptera (Sammut, 2020), the genus *Eremopola* Warren, 1911, should be placed after the genus *Episema* Ochsenheimer, 1816 and before the genus *Agrochola* Hübner, [1821].

Material examined: MALTA, 1 ♂, Żebbuġ, 5-XI-2021, at light, leg. A. Catania.



Discussion: The presence of *Eremopola lenis magnifica* (Rothschild, 1914) in the Maltese archipelago is very interesting and may be attributed to the southerly winds blowing from the direction of North Africa. Between November 5 and 11, over the Maltese Islands we experienced warm and fairly strong South and South-easterly winds of variable force between 28 and 35km/hr. Besides *Eremopola lenis magnifica*, other rare Noctuidae, such as *Agrotis haifae* Staudinger, 1897, *Agrotis herzogi* Rebel, 1911, *Agrotis catalaunensis* (Millière, 1873), *Cerocala algeriae* Oberthür, 1876 and *Agrotis lasserrei* (Oberthür, 1881), which normally reach Malta by migration during this period, were recorded in a rather unusually large numbers from Rabat, Żebbuġ, Naxxar, Pembroke and Żurrieq. *Agrotis trux* (Hübner, [1824]), *Autographa gamma* (Linnaeus, 1758), *Noctua pronuba* (Linnaeus, 1758) and *Spodoptera littoralis* (Boisduval, 1833), usually common species, were also recorded in unusually large numbers at light during this period. Whether these have reached the Maltese Islands by normal migration or wind assisted, cannot be established with certainty.

It is worth to note that the only specimen found in Malta differs externally from both subspecies *radoti* and subspecies *magnifica*. It is associated here with this latter subspecies due to its closest occurrence to Malta though it is far not impossible that the moth was driven with the southern wind from the coastal area of Libya to the island of Malta. The comparison of the Maltese specimen with the western Libyan populations will be desirable but authentic material from Tripolitania was actually not available.

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