

The Bloxworth Snout at Heligan Gardens

The Bloxworth Snout (*Hypena obsitalis*) – Hübner 1813 was a very rare migrant, originally observed in Bloxworth, Dorset in 1884. It remained a rare visitor to these shores until a colony was discovered in 1990 on a coastal path in Torbay, Devon. Since then it has spread both eastwards and westwards along the southern coastal counties from Kent to the Isles of Scilly and is probably augmented by migrants from the Continent. The late Frank Smith in his book 'The Moths and Butterflies of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly' has the moth recorded only 7 times during a period stretching from 1943 through to the year 2000. It appears that recently other moth recorders in Cornwall have reported this moth to be increasingly common in some areas.

Below is a distribution map of the moth taken from 'A Provisional Atlas of the UK's Larger Moths' (2010). It does not represent the true picture of its distribution to date but gives an indication of its spread since 1990.

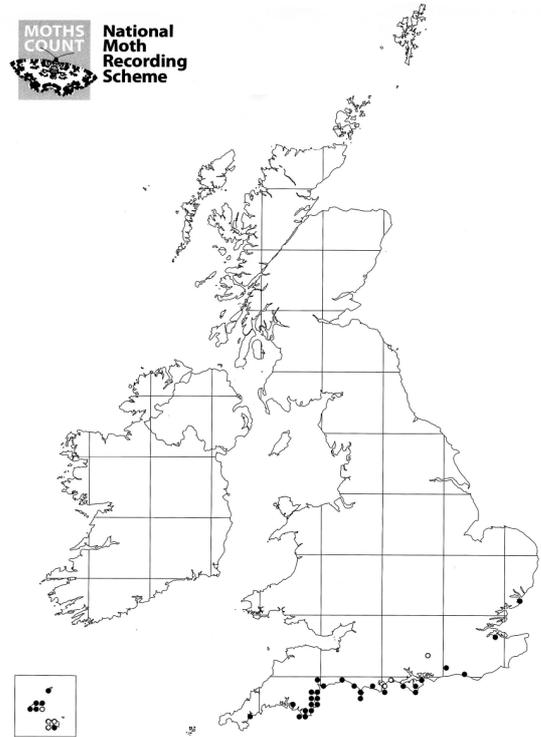
As you can see it is found most frequently in the Torbay area and scattered localities all along the south coast from Kent and Sussex to the Isles of Scilly. It is a Red Data Book species only found in less than 15 10km squares.

The moth is double brooded. The first generation flies in September and October and again after hibernation in May and June and in some favourable years, earlier. The second generation flies from late July to mid August. It is often seen near to, or flying over its food-plant, Pellitory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria judaica*). The moth can be found on south facing cliffs and adjacent footpaths and walls where Pellitory-of-the-wall is growing. It is often stated that Common Nettle is also its food-plant. The first generation hibernates and the moth seems to have a penchant for caves and un-heated out-buildings and sheds where it can easily be disturbed.

My experience of this moth is just such. Indoors it will fly limply around haphazardly seeking a rough wooden beam or lintel to perch on in an upright pose but also preferring to be hidden from view – it can be extremely difficult to find should one be seen indoors flying around and then lost to sight!

My daughter, Abigail presented me with the specimen shown below at Heligan Gardens on the 13th August this year (2021). It was not seen directly at the light trap but a number of yards away, on a path leading to the light. This suggests that the moth is only partially attracted to light and is shy and retiring.

There are a number of moths that exhibit this tendency, most notable of which is *Anania stachydalis*, a moth similar in appearance to The Coronet. To a lesser extent the Scarce Merveille du Jour also exhibits this tendency. It is another Red Data Book species, and in Cornwall can only to be found in south East of the county.



Bloxworth Snout (*Hypena obsitalis*) – Heligan Gardens, 13th August 2021. Photo © P.H. Boggis

In conclusion, it is not surprising that this moth was found at Heligan Gardens very near to outbuildings and sheds. I did not examine nearby walls for the moth's food-plant *Parietaria Judaica*. However, it is possible that the moth larvae are feeding on Common Nettle.

My thanks to Abigail, my daughter for spotting this moth. She often 'hoovers up' from outside the light trap and it is not the first time she has found some rare species otherwise undetected because of a myopic view where we concentrate on the light and not the surrounding area as well!
My thanks also to the staff at Heligan for allowing us to trap there and Dave Gibbon for organising the event.

An excellent article by Steve Ogden about this species and supporting those observations found in this article can be found at: [The-bloxworth-snout-and-caterpillar-hypena-obsitalis](#)

Phil Boggis, 17th August 2021