

**LEICESTERSHIRE ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

*THE HAWKMOTHS (LEPIDOPTERA, SPHINGIDAE)  
OF THE HINCKLEY DISTRICT*

*by*

*Ray Morris*

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**THE HAWKMOTHS (LEPIDOPTERA: SPHINGIDAE) OF THE HINCKLEY DISTRICT.**

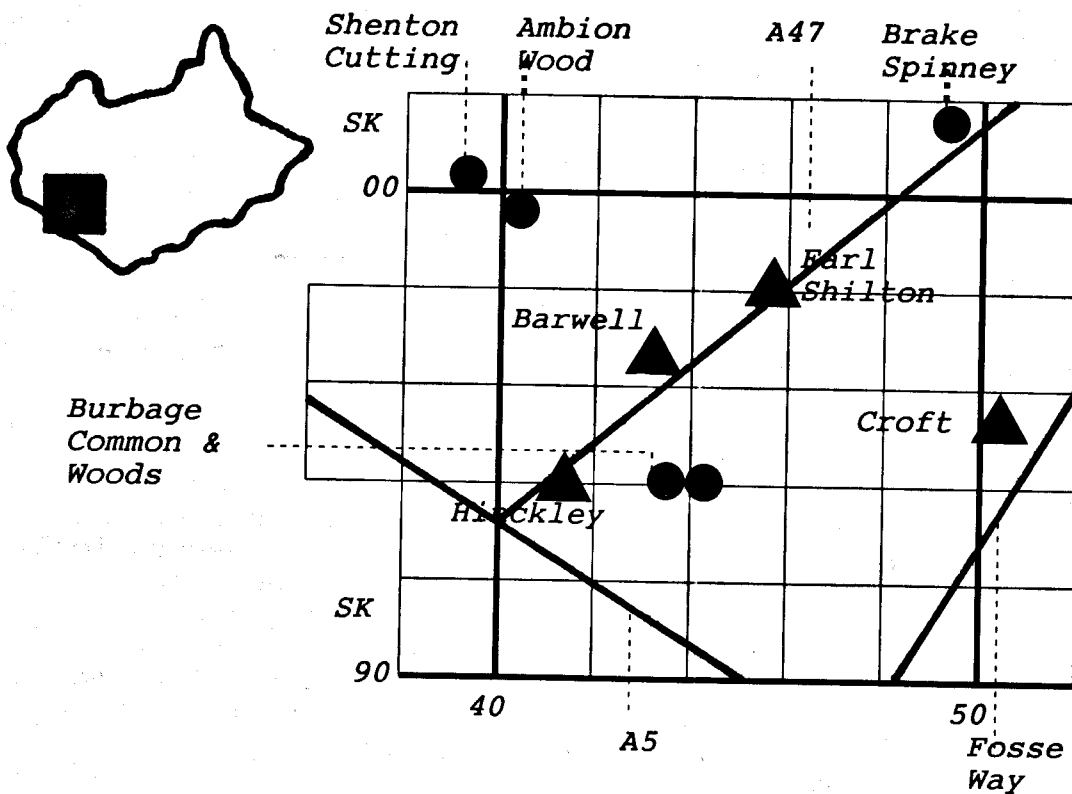
Ray Morris, 142 Hinckley Road, Barwell, Leics., LE9 8DN

**INTRODUCTION**

The hawkmoths (Lepidoptera: Sphingidae) are, perhaps, the most well-known of the British moths probably because of their reputation of being large insects. Indeed, the convolvulus hawk (*Agrius convolvuli* L.) can attain a wing span of as much as six inches. However, the hummingbird hawk (*Macroglossum stellatarum* L.) is no more than two inches across the wings.

Nine species of hawkmoths are normally regarded as being resident in the British Isles with eight more being treated as migratory (Skinner, 1984). Other species of hawkmoth can only be regarded as being vagrant. All fly at night, with the exception of hummingbird and bee hawks, usually feeding at flowers which need a long proboscis to reach the nectar e.g. tobacco and honeysuckle. The larvae of the hawkmoths tend to be quite large and possess a horn-like projection on the twelfth segment. Warning devices, such as prominent eye spots, are found in the larvae of many species while an eye spot pattern is also present in the adult of the eyed hawk (*Smerinthus ocellata* L.).

**Figure 1. The Hinckley District Study Area.**



## SURVEY AREA AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

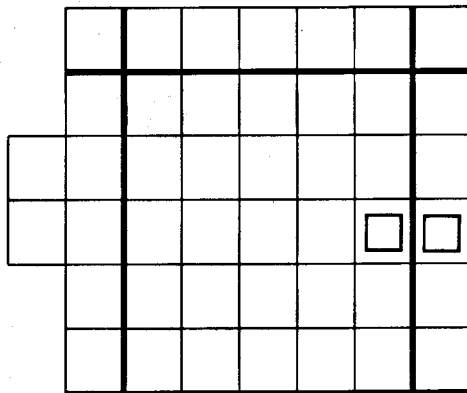
All records are depicted using the tetrad system (2x2 km) with the survey area covering the 10 km square SP 49 together with a few adjoining tetrads (Figure 1). Much of the historical data presented in this report has been gleaned from records held by the Leicestershire Museums Service and the Hinckley & District Natural History Society. More recent records have been obtained by light trapping at a number of sites in the area e.g. Burbage Wood, Shenton Cutting and Croft reserve as well as on-going trapping at the author's garden at Barwell.

Key to distribution maps:

□ pre-1980s records; ■ post-1980s records; ◆ both periods

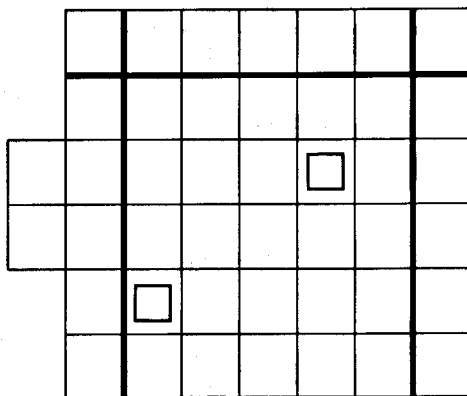
## SYSTEMATIC LISTING

Subfamily: Sphinginae



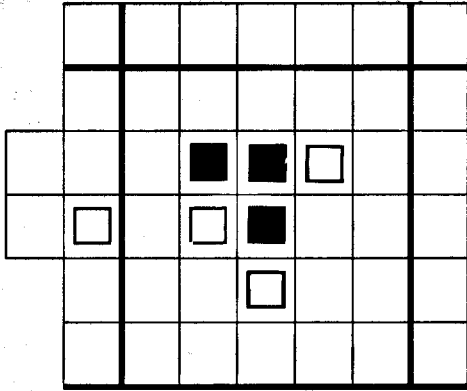
1972 *Agrius convolvuli* L.  
(Convolvulus hawk)

Two records only for this rare migrant both from the east of the area (1970, 1976). Its rarity in Britain is indicated by the "large" numbers reported in 1945 when over 500 were found in the country! (Skinner, 1984)



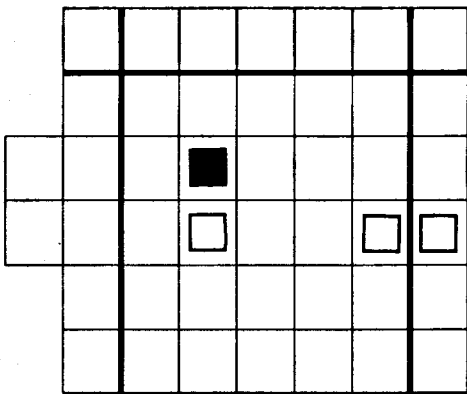
1976 *Sphinx ligustri* L.  
(Privet hawk)

An uncommon species in the study area with only two confirmed records. The first was at Earl Shilton in 1880 (VCH, 1907) while the more recent was from an industrial estate in Hinckley (1976). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the species may occur sporadically in the Aston Flamville area where larvae are reputed to be seen on occasions. However, the author has no evidence to support such observations.



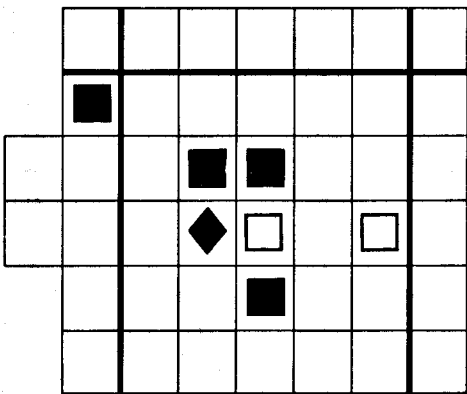
1979 *Mimas tiliæ* L.  
(Lime hawk)

First recorded in the area in 1880 (VCH, 1907), this species occurs in most years at Barwell but never in any great numbers. One was found flying in a Barwell chip shop in July 1987. Almost certainly under-recorded in the district.



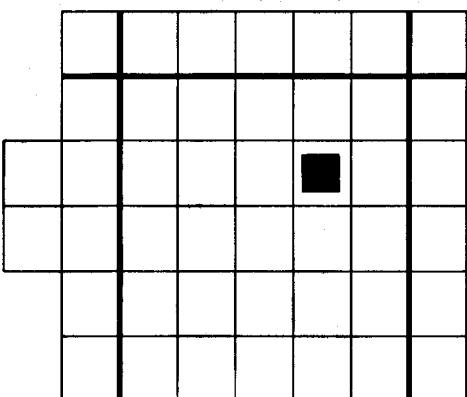
1980 *Smerinthus ocellata* L.  
(Eyed hawk)

VCH (1907) records the species in the Croft area without comment but, until 1984, there had only been two other records! Since then the moth has turned up regularly at the Barwell light but never in any great numbers. Must be under-recorded.



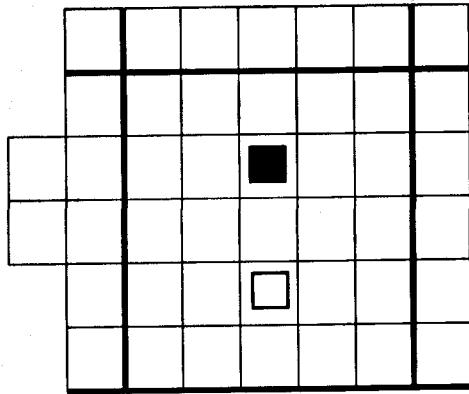
1981 *Laothoe populi* L.  
(Poplar hawk)

Despite only two known records prior to 1980, the species is the second most common hawkmoth in the district. Usually only found as singles with a flight period of May to July although one was seen as late as 22.ix.80.



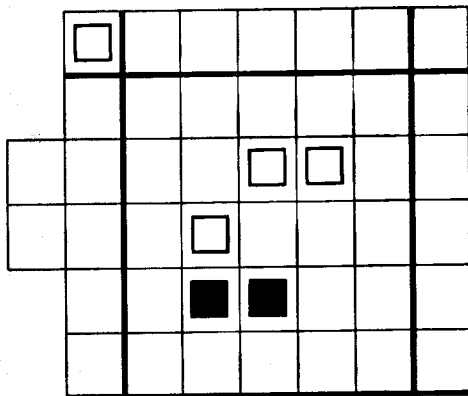
1982 *Hemaris tityus* L.  
(Narrow-bordered bee hawk)

Extremely rare vagrant with only one local record. Buckler (1954) cites an old record from the Earl Shilton area but no further details are known.



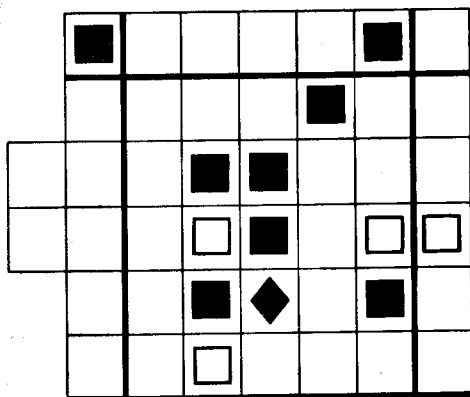
1983 *Hemaris fuciformis* L.  
(Broad-bordered bee hawk)

Another very unusual species for the area with only two records both in the last fifteen years. A single from the Burbage area was the sole county record for the 1970s with one at Barwell on 18.vii.83 is the only county record so far in the 1980s.



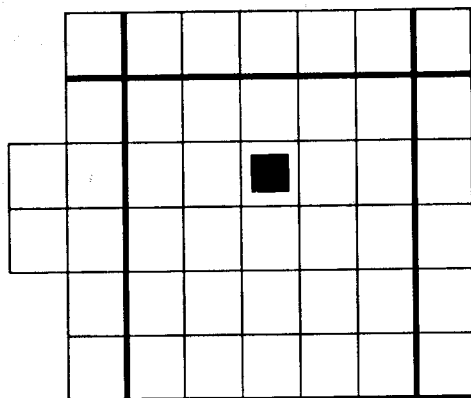
1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum* L.  
(Hummingbird hawk)

A regular migrant to Britain and occasionally seen in the Hinckley district. The earliest record for the area is a single in June 1880 (VCH, 1907) with no others until 1963. Three records have been located for both the 1970s and 1980s. Three were seen in a Burbage garden on 31.vii.83.



1991 *Deilephila elpenor* L.  
(Elephant hawk)

The commonest of the hawks in the study area. Up to four have been recorded at one time have been seen at the Barwell trap and records suggest a wide distribution in the area. Even so, no records prior to 1970 have been located as yet.



1992 *Deilephila porcellus* L.  
(Small elephant hawk)

Despite being apparently quite common in some parts of the county, for example in the Ulverscroft area, this species has only been recorded twice in the Hinckley district on both occasions feeding at the flowers of evening primrose in Barwell (24.ix.85 and 30.ix.85).

## DISCUSSION

Only four of the hawkmoths can be described as being either common or frequent in the Hinckley district. The presence of several others is dependent upon the numbers which reach Britain through migration from the continent. However, some species should be expected to occur more frequently in the area than they do, for example the privet and small elephant hawks. Why they do not is unknown. Certainly there is sufficient foodplants for both species present in the area. As more light trapping is carried out in the district it is to be hoped that records for all species will accumulate to such an extent that the vagaries of the presence or absence of some species can be investigated.

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- VCH (1907). Victoria County History, Leicestershire. Constable, London.