How it all started. My first visit to Portugal in March 1989

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My interest in Lepidoptera began in 1955, when I was 11, and continued throughout my school years. In 1963, I bought my first moth trap – a Robinson trap with a 125 MV bulb. There was a six-year interruption while I studied botany at Oxford, focusing on plants, particularly bryophytes. In 1969, I returned to work full time on the family farm. For two years, my wife Alison and I lived in a nearby village, but in 1971 we moved into our present home, allowing me to resume regular moth trapping on the farm.

During my schooldays, I had attempted to identify some microlepidoptera, but with very little literature available – apart from Beirne (1954) on Pyraloidea and Pterophoridae – identification was difficult. The naming of specimens such as *Agonopterix* had to wait several more years. In 1975, the entomological bookseller E.W. Classey moved his business from West London to my local town, Faringdon. He introduced me to a few books and papers that provided a foothold into microlepidoptera, the most useful being Meyrick (1929), which covered all British Lepidoptera, with illustrations limited to a few drawings of heads and wing venation.

Over the following years, Eric Classey became a close friend, and I acquired many books from him, usually in exchange for firewood rather than cash.

At the start of the 1980s, I began visiting interesting localities in Oxfordshire in search of a wider range of moths than were present on my farm. Once I acquired a generator, I could carry out night work in many places, mostly within about 40 km of home. During these years, my knowledge of microlepidoptera grew considerably. I also managed a little collecting on family holidays in Scotland, including three botanical trips with friends from Edinburgh, which allowed daytime collecting in remote parts of the Highlands, followed by one primarily entomological trip.

By the late 1980s, I wanted to widen my experience with a visit to the European continent. In autumn 1988, my friend from Oxford days, Roy Perry, asked if my family would be interested in sharing a villa in the Algarve the following March. He was organising a visit of the British Bryological Society and had booked a villa for two weeks. The villa, Casa Jack, east of Loulé, was divided into two halves. One half would be empty during the first week – would we like to take it? I jumped at the chance. Before the trip, I contacted the villa's owner, Jack Wilding, to see if he could provide a generator for my use.

Living and working on a farm with cattle and sheep requires careful planning before any holiday. In this case, we delayed the start of lambing by putting the rams out with the ewes two weeks later than usual, in early November rather than late October. In March, there was a rush to finish winter work before the Algarve trip, as the sheep would lamb as soon as we returned.

At the airport departure lounge on 16 March 1989, I recognised a man with a collecting bag just like mine: Gerry Tremewan from the Natural History Museum, London. He was also travelling to Faro to spend a week looking for *Zygaena*, eventually describing *Zygaena rhadamanthus* subspecies *guichardi* Tremewan, 1991.

Arriving at the villa, we learned that daytime temperatures had been in the upper 20s the previous week, but the wind from central Spain made it much cooler when we arrived. My moth light – a 125 W MV bulb on a stand with a few egg boxes – was not very successful on several nights, compounded by a nearly full moon during Easter week. Nevertheless, some of these cool nights produced attractive moths, such as *Neognopharmia stevenaria* (Boisduval, 1840) (fig.1) and *Horisme scorteata* (Staudinger, 1901). Most days were sunny and breezy, sometimes with showers or even hail. When the sun was out, it was warm, and the children (two teenage Corleys, three Perrys) spent much time in and around the swimming pool. In the mornings, Alison and I explored the neighbourhood and tried to identify the flowers. Alison is a keen gardener, and we were both delighted by the richness of the limestone flora of the Algarve Barrocal. Most mornings, I pinned moths from the previous night, as I had decided to keep one specimen of every species, even if it was familiar from Britain (fig.2). On my first night, I recorded 24 species, 12 of which I had never seen in Britain.

Fig. 1. *Neognopharmia stevenaria* (Boisduval, 1840). (Photo: © Ana Valadares)

Fig. 2. The author (Martin) on a track north of Casa Jack during the Algarve trip, March 1989.

Afternoons were spent visiting nearby sites by car. Roy, familiar with the Algarve, guided us to locations with interesting flora, which often yielded moths, butterflies, or larvae I could attempt to rear. Late afternoons were for returning to the villa, setting out the moth light, and then going to dinner. During the week, we visited Lagoa da Nave near Salir, Balaia on the coast east of Albufeira, Quinta do Freixo near Benafim Grande, Serra de Monte Figo near Moncarapacho, and the *Quercus suber* L. woodland between Alportel and Barranco Velho.

The most productive afternoon was at Balaia, where we observed a chameleon, the rare orchid *Gennaria diphylla* (Link) Parl., and numerous micro species, including *Arnia nervosalis* Guenée, 1849 and *Thiodiodes seeboldi* (Rössler, 1877), flying in the late afternoon at the cliff base, sheltered from the north wind. Serra de Monte Figo yielded tiny micros such as *Heliozela sericiella* (Haworth, 1828) and *Micropterix ibericella* Caradja, 1920 (fig. 3) around *Quercus coccifera* L., and a larva of *Marasmarcha oxydactylus* (Staudinger, 1859) on an *Ononis* species – the latter found nowhere else in Portugal. A brief stop in Alportel–Barranco Velho woodland focused on the rare insectivorous plant *Drosophyllum lusitanicum* (L.) Link, though I also collected seed-heads of *Cistus populifolius* L. from the previous year, from which *Coccidiphila danilevskyi* Sinev, 1997 later emerged.

Fig. 3. *Micropterix ibericella* Caradja, 1920. (Photo: © Ana Valadares)

Our longest trip was to Serra de Monchique, where we walked to the top of Picota on a particularly cold day. Although we saw no adult Lepidoptera, I collected larvae of *Parafomoria cistivora* (Peyerimhoff, 1871), *Aproaerema larseniella* (Gozmány, 1957), *Mirificarma mulinella* (Zeller, 1839) (fig.4), and *Clepsis unicolorana* (Duponchel, 1836), all subsequently reared. That evening, five teenagers insisted on eating separately from their parents, as compensation for having been dragged up a mountain in an arctic wind. That night, the moth light produced only two moths.

Fig. 4. *Mirificarma mulinella* (Zeller, 1839). (Photo: © Ana Valadares)

Roy suggested a trip to Cabo de São Vicente, which I declined; Monchique had been far enough. At the time, the A22 motorway did not exist, and east–west travel was along the N125, notorious for accidents. Driving on the "wrong" side and understanding local driving customs – including the unwritten overtaking conventions – was a steep learning curve. We were fortunate to complete the week safely.

On Saturday morning, we visited Loulé's covered market and bought a traditional Easter cake, surprisingly containing a hard-boiled egg still in its shell.

The last two nights brought warmer weather. On the penultimate night, the light at Casa Jack attracted 48 species, 19 entirely new to me, including *Zebeeba falsalis* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1839) (fig.5) and *Toulgoetia cauteriata* (Staudinger, 1859). On the final night, I used the borrowed generator, heavy and designed for construction use, which just fitted into the hire car boot. At Lagoa da Nave, the light produced 60 species, 23 new to me, including *Dyscia distinctaria* (Bang-Haas, 1910), *Nola subchlamydula* Staudinger, 1871, *Recoropha canteneri* (Duponchel, 1833), and *Eutelia adulatrix* (Hübner, 1813). Back at the villa, I ran the light again at 23:00, adding three more species to the week's total.

Fig. 5. *Zebeeba falsalis* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1839). (Photo: © Ana Valadares)

Fueling the hire car was a minor challenge; I later realised I had confused gasóleo and gasolina, explaining the car's poor performance on our return to the airport.

During the week I recorded 128 species of Lepidoptera, 22 butterflies, 48 macros and 58 micros. I also took home a number of larvae, which eventually added another 10 species to the weeks total. Of the final total of 138 species, exactly two-thirds were species entirely new to me. A few of these were species known to be in Britain which I had never seen, such as *Idaea degeneraria* (Hübner, 1799), limited to one small area in Dorset.

Apart from butterflies and moths, we also saw other animals that were new to us, such as Carpenter Bees (*Xylocopa*) which were nesting in the roof of the veranda, and several birds including Bee-eaters (*Merops apiaster*) and Sardinian Warblers (*Curruca melanocephala*).

Following our return to England the problem of identifying moths from a largely unfamiliar fauna with limited literature was challenging. Barry Goater, visiting France and Spain since the early 1980s, assisted with macrolepidoptera and "mesolepidoptera" identifications, but not microlepidoptera. Some early identifications were later corrected; for example, *Heterogynis 'penella*', collected as larvae on Serra de Monte Figo, was described as *H. cynetis* de Freina et al., 2020. I had also found species previously unrecorded in Portugal, such as *Eupithecia dodoneata* Guenée, 1858 (fig.6).

It was a busy and highly enjoyable week, with diverse habitats, fascinating plants, butterflies, and moths, friendly people, and excellent cuisine. We would return.

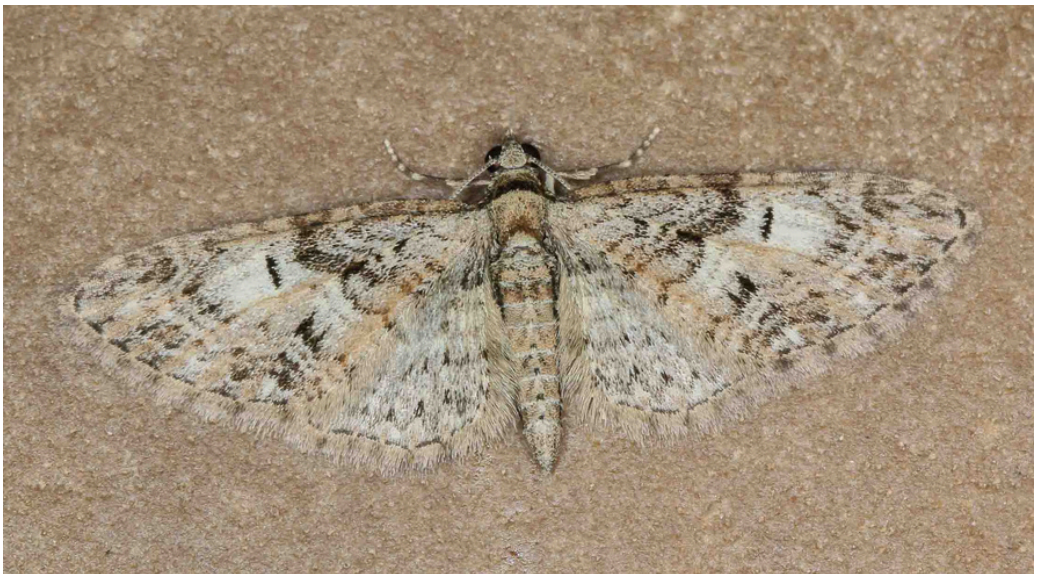

Fig. 6. *Eupithecia dodoneata* Guenée, 1858. (Photo: © Ana Valadares)

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