Algarve holiday produces a new moth species for Portugal

David Wilton

25 Burnham Road, Westcott, Aylesbury, HP18 0PL UK. email: wilton@burnhamlodge.plus.com

Abstract

Moths recorded during a family holiday in Algarve included *Eublemma baccatrix* Hacker, 2019, a species new to Portugal.

Introduction

Our family has made fairly regular visits to the Algarve since the 1970s, usually to Cabanas east of Tavira, although due to large-scale building work there since the millennium we have chosen to visit more rural areas to the west of Tavira within the Rio Formosa natural park. At the end of June 2024 we returned to Casa Rosa in Pinheiro near Luz da Tavira for a ten-day stay. This was our second visit to the villa there, which is situated on the slope of a small conifer-covered hill overlooking the coastal marshes to the south. The village is surrounded by farmland dominated by citrus plantations.

In the UK I have run light traps in my own garden almost every night over more than 20 years and have done a lot of additional survey work in my local county (Buckinghamshire) to the north-west of London. I have taken a moth light with me when on holiday abroad several times in the past, including to Portugal, mostly just for fun because it is so interesting to see "something different", especially those resident species which are very rare migrants to the UK. This time I resolved to collect data a little more seriously, having been requested by Peter Hall to help him populate the website www.mothdissection.co.uk with genitalia examples from some of the European species which have yet to be illustrated there. This is a very well-used free on-line resource which Peter runs in conjunction with a handful of other UK moth experts.

In the past I have taken a collapsible Heath-type moth trap abroad using a 15w actinic light, but due to the difficulty of making room for it and its accompanying choke in airline luggage and the fact that the 15w bulb is not all that efficient at attracting moths, I have resorted to operating without a trap as such, relying only on a mains-powered 160w MV bulb screwed in to a ceramic socket with a built-in hook (actually designed for a reptile vivarium). The bulb holder is suspended beneath either a modified music stand or, if I have room in the suitcase, a rather more bulky camera tripod. It was the tripod arrangement which I used in 2024.

Casa Rosa has a patio surrounded by a low wall which looks out over the coastal area to the south and that is where I placed the light each night. A white sheet was laid on the ground with the tripod in the centre surrounded by a few egg trays. The tripod raised the 160w MV bulb high enough so that the wall was not a factor and a small extension cable was all that was needed to reach the closest electricity socket. Of course, this is only a fair-weather arrangement because there's no protection for the electrics so I had to keep an eye on the forecast, but luckily neither rain nor wind was a factor during our visit. There was a fairly stiff breeze one night which resulted in a couple of egg boxes being blown over but that was all. Occasional checks of activity

around the light were made soon after dark but, for the most part, cataloguing of the moths was left until just before dawn when I got up to photograph as many species as possible and put into pots anything which I thought might be of interest or which I couldn't identify. Those moths still on the egg trays and on the sheet were then released into nearby vegetation when the light was turned off in order to try to prevent the local bird population from having a hearty breakfast, although a Little Owl *Athene noctua* soon became a regular night-time visitor and towards the end of our stay a noisy family of Azure-winged Magpies *Cyanopica cyanus* began appearing at dawn to scour the area for left-overs. Not using a trap and not constantly monitoring activity around the light meant that some moths will undoubtedly have come and gone without me seeing them, but those which stayed were certainly enough to keep me occupied.

Light arrangement on the patio at Casa Rosa, looking south towards the coast.
(Photo: © David L. Wilton)

Results

During the first night of our visit (30th June 2024) the light attracted very large numbers of two Crambid moth species: more than five hundred examples of *Uresiphita gilvata* (Fabricius, 1794) and more than one hundred examples of *Palpita vitrealis* (Rossi, 1794). I had thought this might just have been a local mass emergence because I knew that both are very common in the Algarve, but a report on Facebook from another moth-trapper in Cadiz province across the border in Spain mentioned that he got more than 7,000 *U. gilvata* at light over three successive nights at this time and the weather conditions did apparently favour immigration from Morocco or beyond in North Africa. *U. gilvata* and *P. vitrealis* certainly out-numbered everything else brought to the light throughout our stay at *Casa Rosa* but those two species were nowhere near as abundant as on that first night.

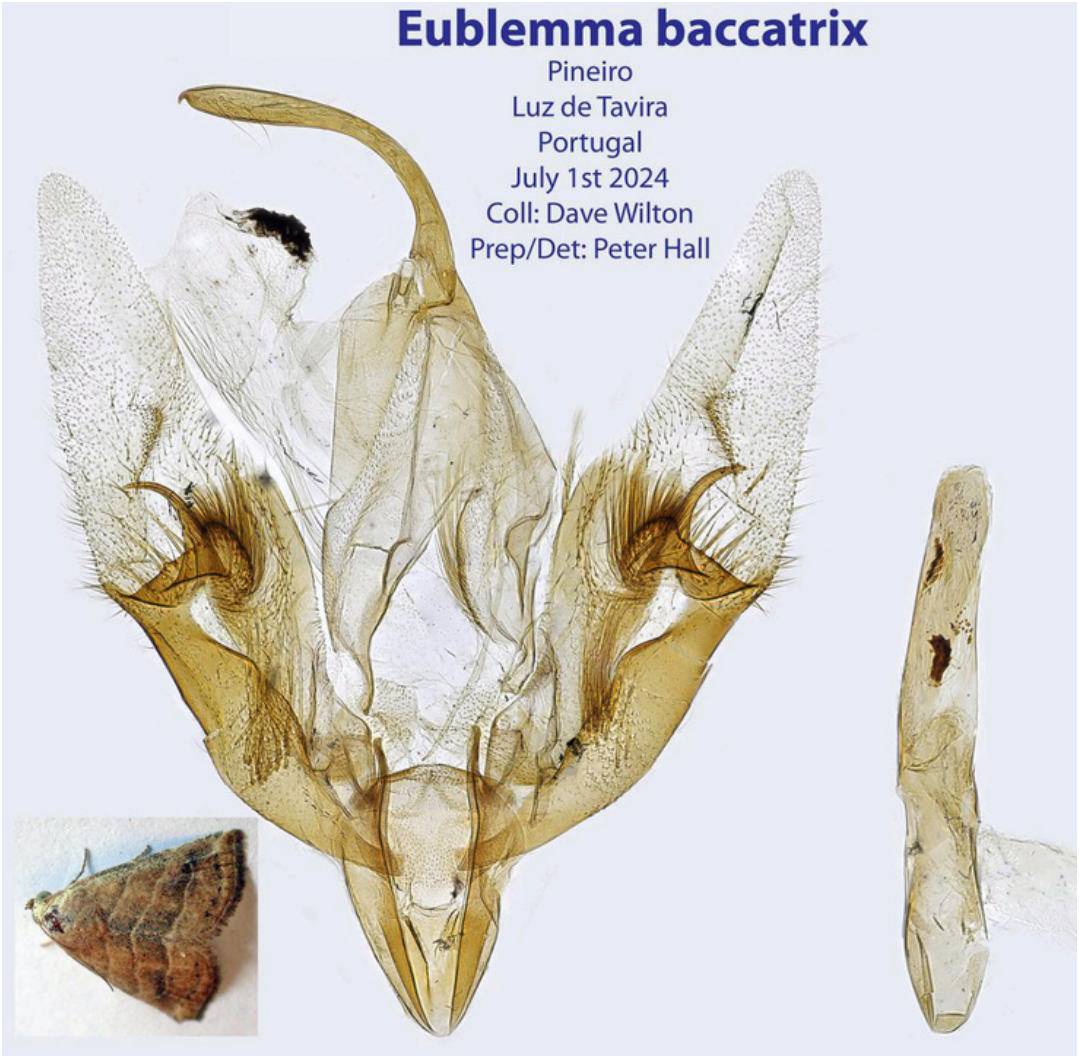
It was the second night (1st July 2024) when the most interesting moth of this visit turned up. Looking rather worn, a fairly dark but well-marked brown *Eublemma* species which I didn't recognise appeared on one of the egg-boxes and it was potted up to await a closer inspection in

daylight. Even then I couldn't place it so after photography it was consigned to the freezer to be brought home to the UK for genitalia dissection. A few weeks later, at around the same time that Peter Hall carried out the dissection, I became aware of a short note (Knapp et al., 2024) which detailed the discovery of *Eublemma baccatrix* Hacker, 2019 in southern Spain during the Autumn of 2022, the first record for Europe. The images there were a very good match to my specimens (of which two more had come to light before the holiday ended, one on 3rd July and another on 8th July) and the dissection by Peter confirmed the identification as that species. All three of the moths which came to light at *Casa Rosa* proved to be male and were confirmed as the first for Portugal. Whether they were also a part of the mass immigration experienced on 30th June or had already taken up residence in the area is anyone's guess, but it is worth mentioning that another specimen was caught and photographed by Ana Valadares at Sargaçal near Lagos in western Algarve on 7th December 2024 (M. Corley, pers. comm). *Eublemma baccatrix* is an African species known from many countries on that continent. While the closest records to Portugal are from the Canary Islands and Mauritania, it could well be resident but as yet unrecorded from the coastal areas of Western Sahara, Morocco and Algeria. I can find no reference on-line to its larval food-plant.

Eublemma baccatrix, Pinheiro, Luz de Tavira, Algarve 1st July 2024 (first for Portugal).
(*Photo: © David L. Wilton*)

Eublemma baccatrix, Pinheiro, Luz de Tavira, Algarve 3rd July 2024.
(*Photo: © David L. Wilton*)

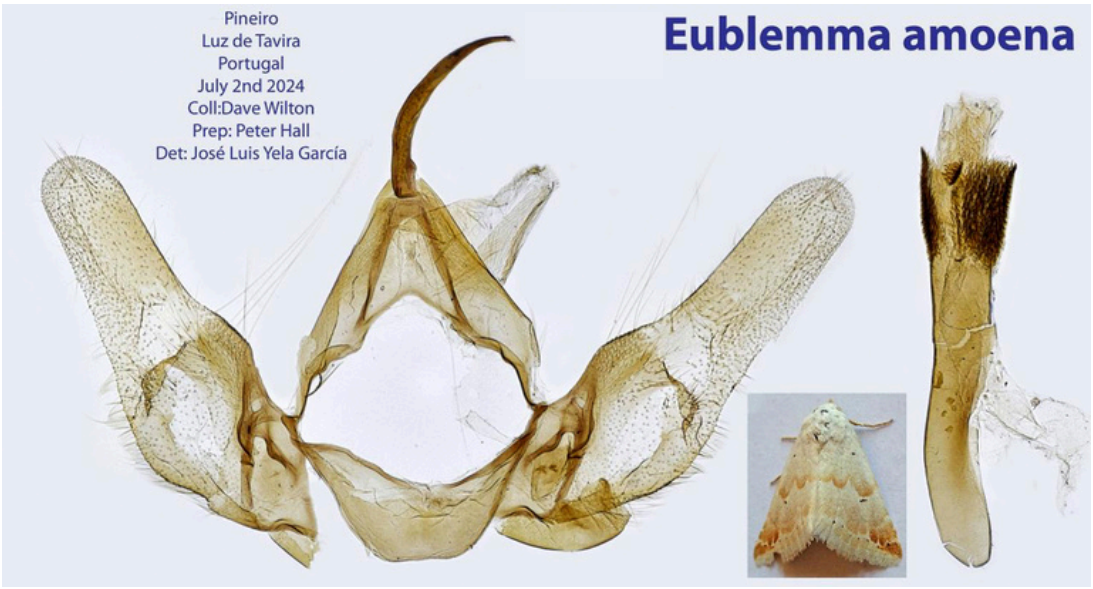
Eublemma baccatrix, Pinheiro, Luz de Tavira, Algarve 8th July 2024.
(*Photo: © David L. Wilton*)



(Image: © Peter R. Hall)

There were two other particularly noteworthy moths seen during our stay at *Casa Rosa*. The first of these was another *Eublemma* species, this time *Eublemma amoena* (Hűbner, 1803) on 2nd July which was new for the Algarve. Already known from Spain, this species was finally confirmed from Portugal in May 2019 (Nunes *et al*., 2021) although two older records are mentioned in Corley (2015) which were rejected due to lack of evidence. Marabuto (2022) included an earlier record which predates the Nunes (loc. cit.) record.

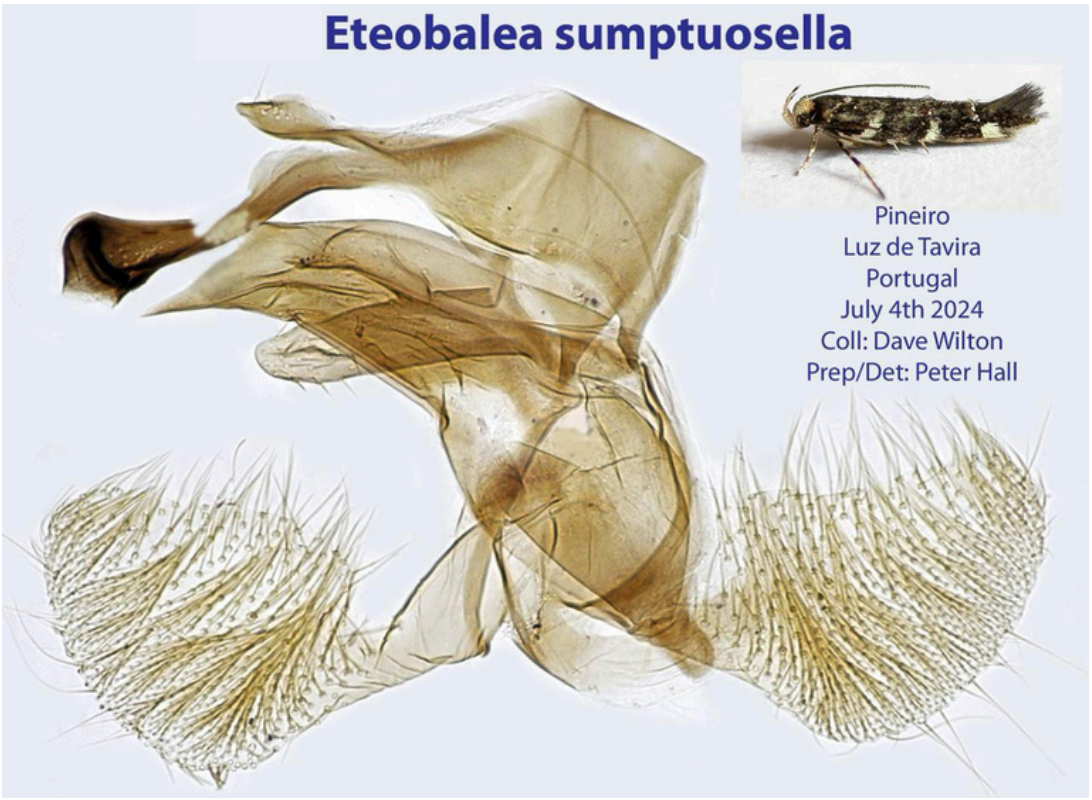
Eublemma amoena, Pinheiro, Luz de Tavira, Algarve 2nd July 2024.
(Photo: © David L. Wilton)



(Image: © Peter R. Hall)

The other interesting sighting was of *Eteobalea sumptuosella* (Lederer, 1855) (Cosmopterigidae: Cosmopteriginae) on 4th July which was another first for the Algarve and only the second for Portugal (Nunes *et al*., 2025).

Eteobalea sumptuosella, Pinheiro, Luz de Tavira, Algarve 4th July 2024.
(Photo: © David L. Wilton)



(Image: © Peter R. Hall)

Just over 120 different moth species were positively identified during the holiday which I thought was quite a good result for the limited amount of effort put in. The only Hawk-moths seen were Striped Hawk-moth *Hyles livornica* (Esper, 1804) and Silver-striped Hawk-moth *Hippotion celerio* (Linnaeus, 1758), which was perhaps a little disappointing as I am a great fan of larger moths! Of those which we do not see at all in the UK I thought that I might at least have expected Oak Hawk-moth *Marumba quercus* (Dennis & Schifferműller, 1775) which I've recorded several times in Andalusia, Spain but not yet found in the Algarve even though it is a known resident in the region (Corley, 2015). However, seeing such striking species as *Heliothis incarnata* Freyer, 1838 and *Ophiusa tirhaca* (Cramer, 1773) as well as a host of others, both large and small, which may be common in Portugal but are very rare migrants to the UK, more than made up for it. It was also good to be able to familiarise myself with Spiny Hook-tip *Watsonalla uncinula* (Borkhausen, 1790) in advance of finding the first in my home garden on 1st November 2024. It has only recently become obvious that this species has been "hiding in plain sight" in the UK alongside Oak Hook-tip *Watsonalla binaria* (Hufnagel, 1767) for the last three or four years, if not for longer.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to Peter Hall for genitalia work on the moths and for providing such high quality images of the dissections. Ana Valadares kindly allowed me to include her record of *E. baccatrix*.

References

Corley, M.F.V. 2015. *Lepidoptera of Continental Portugal, a fully revised list*. 281 pp. Martin Corley, Faringdon.

Knapp, S., Grundy, D., Ortiz, A.S. & Yela, J.L. 2024. *Eublemma baccatrix* Hacker, 2019 (Lepidoptera: Erebidae: Boletobiinae: Eublemmini), new for the Iberian Peninsula and Europe. *Arquivos Entomolóxicos*, **25**: 293-297.

Marabuto, E. (2022). *Spialia rosae* Hernández-Roldán, Dapporto, Dincă, Vicente & Vila, 2016, and 17 moth species new for the fauna of Portugal (Insecta: Lepidoptera). *Arquivos Entomolóxicos*, **25**: 305-322.

Nunes, J., Silva, C. & Jesus, E. 2021. New species of Lepidoptera for mainland Portugal (Insecta: Lepidoptera). *SHILAP Revista de lepidopterología*, **49** (195): 507-511.

Nunes, J., Corley, M.F.V., Grundy, D. & Ferreira, S. 2025. The Heterocera of Mértola (Alentejo, Portugal) (Insecta: Lepidoptera). *SHILAP Revista de lepidopterología*, **53** (209): 101-120. https://doi.org/10.57065/shilap.1028