

Moth Quest: Searching for Sloe Carpet *Aleucis distinctata* - Simon Curson

The Sloe Carpet is very local in England, only occurring in Essex, Suffolk, Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire. Essex and Suffolk are the strongholds and it can be frequent here. Hampshire, Sussex and Surrey hold a few colonies.

Where is Sloe Carpet now?

Sloe Carpet has a very restricted distribution in Hampshire with records from the west side of the New Forest and one or two records from north of Basingstoke. The tetrad with the greatest number of records is around Brockenhurst.

Since 1989 most records are from the New Forest with just 1 record elsewhere (from the east side of Pamber Forest, north of Basingstoke). The majority of recent records are from the Brockenhurst area and the Ringwood area of the New Forest. There are only 7 tetrads with records since 1989.

Sloe Carpet could (potentially) persist almost anywhere with Blackthorn bushes growing in the wild. Its ecological requirements are too poorly understood to explain its present distribution. It could simply be that people do not go out and look for it during its early flight season.

Blackthorn grows throughout Hampshire in all habitats except the very wettest and the most densely wooded.



Photo: Keith Tailby

In Hampshire Sloe Carpet appears to be associated with small Blackthorn bushes on dampish heathland. In West Sussex I have found it on fairly recent Blackthorn growing out from a woodland edge. It could (potentially) be anywhere with Blackthorn bushes that are not regularly cut or flailed.

Where to look.

Looking on Blackthorn in any sheltered positions may yield results. Scattered unmanaged bushes with some young, low growth is more likely than managed hedgerows. Perhaps the areas in the north-west of the county where Brown Hairstreak occur would be a good place to try – it is likely that nobody has ever looked.

The most recent records have come from the following tetrads and so these would seem good places to start:

- SU 3103 - New Forest, Balmer Lawn area of Brockenhurst – is there anywhere in this tetrad with scattered Blackthorn bushes that might be suitable for the moth? Where are they breeding?

- SU 1707 - New Forest, Linford Bottom – does the moth still occur here? Where are the Blackthorns that it breeds on?
- SU 1711 - New Forest, North Gorley – are there suitable Blackthorns along the PRow going east from North Gorley? Are there suitable bushes on the heath of Gorley Common? What about the other hedgerows and PRowS going west from North Gorley?
- SU 2705 - New Forest, Blackwater Arboretum. Are there any suitable Blackthorns in open areas in the south east of this tetrad? Or the north east at Brinken Wood?
- SU 2905 - New Forest. Are there suitable Blackthorns at Poundhill Heath, Queen's Meadow? Fletchers Green? Butts Lawn? Hedges at New Park?
- SU 2707 - New Forest. Open areas of White Moor? Warwick Slade? Brinken Wood?
- SU 2901 - New Forest, Brockenhurst. Check suitable Blackthorns around South Weirs. There are a lot of hedgerows around small fields here.

Always obtain the land owners permission to search areas away from public rights of way and remember that for recording or trapping in the New Forest you should obtain a free permit from Forestry Commission England, The Queen's House, Lyndhurst, Hants SO43 7NH.

In addition to the more recent records listed above, there are also records from the following locations (from west to east) –

- SU 1908 – the 1km square containing Linford Brook and part of Red Shoot Wood. A record from **1960** from Linford Brook Valley.
- SU 2103 – the 1km square containing Burley Park and Burley Lawn. A record from **1951** from somewhere in this 1km square.
- SU 2707 – the tetrad containing the Reptile Centre, Knightwood Oak, Millyford Bridge and the Portuguese Fireplace in the New Forest just south west of Lyndhurst. A few records from the **1980s**.
- SU 2911 – the tetrad containing Minstead, Minstead Lodge and Furzy Lawn Inclosure in the New Forest to the north of Lyndhurst. A record from **between 1951 and 1980**.
- SU 2901 – the tetrad containing South Weirs, Brockenhurst Manor Golf Club and Setley Plain in the New Forest just south west of Brockenhurst. A few records from the **1980s**.
- SU 3107 – the tetrad containing Parkhill Hotel, Clayhill and Park Ground Inclosure in the New Forest to the south east of Lyndhurst. A record from **between 1951 and 1980**.
- SZ 3991 – the Isle of Wight tetrad containing the hamlets of Cranmore and Hamstead to the north east of Yarmouth. A few records from **between 1951 and 1970**.
- SZ 3989 – the Isle of Wight tetrad containing the hamlets of Wellow, Ningwood and Ningwood Common to the east of Yarmouth. A record from **before 1970**.
- SU 7355 – the tetrad containing the northern half of Hook and the countryside immediately north of that. This is a little east of Basingstoke. A record from the **1970s**.
- SU 8355 – the tetrad containing the east half of Fleet Pond, Little Beckbury and the MoD land to the east of this. This is just west of Farnborough. A record from the **1980s**.

When to look.

The adults fly during the spring when Blackthorn is in full flower and so the exact time varies from year to year. In Hampshire the records are almost entirely from April. However the best time to search is most likely to be when the Blackthorn bushes are in flower.

How to look.

By torchlight. An excellent way to find the adults is by searching Blackthorn bushes just after dusk and you can see the adults sitting on the tips of branches shimmering in your torch light. You will be able to search a much larger area by torchlight than by using a moth trap. You could also try putting actinic lights down next to likely looking bushes. Or perhaps a search for larvae from mid-May to early July would tempt you out.

I hope this will encourage you to go out and have a wander with a torch – you never know you may come across a hitherto unknown colony of Sloe Carpet.