

## **IDENTIFICATION FEATURE**

### **EARLY TOOTH-STRIPED/MOTTLED GREY**

The text books suggest there should be no problem separating this pair of moths and when a recorder is familiar with both and encounters them regularly that is probably the case. However for those of us who rarely see either of these species or see them for the first time, they can be problematic.

#### **EARLY TOOTH-STRIPED**



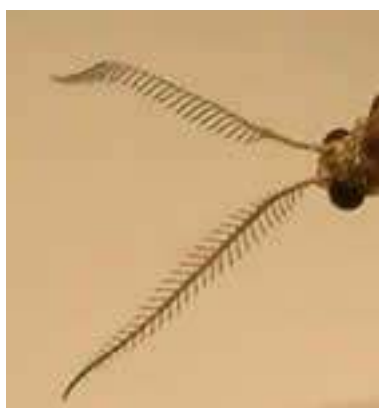
#### **Flight period:**

The national identification guides (Skinner and more recently Waring) give the flight period as April and May. Records in Lancashire in recent years indicate this to be reasonably accurate, although confirmed records from late March are not unknown in lowland areas. Generally, Mottled Greys are beginning to look rather worn by the time Early Tooth-striped

appears. There are very few records of Early Tooth-striped after the first two weeks of May.

## Identification:

The Early Tooth-striped (ETS) is a very variable species, with the forewing background colour ranging from off-whitish to mid-grey, occasionally with a brownish tinge. Fresh specimens can have a lichen green sheen in the greyer coloured moths. By contrast the forewing of Mottled Grey (a definite misnomer) is pale straw coloured with slightly variable darker brownish spots and markings, a colour combination not seen in ETS. MG also has a shiny look to the forewing in fresh specimens. The leading edge of the forewing in ETS is gently rounded (think of the shape of November Moth), whereas in Mottled Grey (MG) it is almost straight giving the moth a more triangular look, particularly in the smaller female. Both male and female ETS have simple antennae whereas in MG, the male's antennae are quite feathery (see below).



**Left:** Mottled Grey (male) antennae

**Right:** Early Tooth-striped (male and female) antennae



Mottled Grey has a very spotted, dotty appearance to the forewing (even on the cross lines) whereas ETS, in all its variable forms, lacks these scattered dots. ETS has either distinct bands of darker colouring, specific blackish thin angled lines or a quite clean pale appearance. The hindwings of male ETS are white with a darker edging and have a distinct small alula (extra flap of membrane) near the base of the wing - this feature cannot easily be seen in live moths. The hindwings of MG are proportionately longer than those in ETS leading them to protrude slightly when at rest on occasions. As this feature is not always obvious, due to differing resting postures, the lack of a protruding hindwing should not be used to identify the moth as ETS. Conversely, it does allow positive identification of MG if present.



Four Early Tooth-striped specimens depicting the range of variation in markings. (Note curved edge to forewings.)

### **Distribution:**

The distribution of the two species in Lancashire is fairly similar although MG is less frequently encountered. Whether this is genuine or due to less trapping taking place in the MGs earlier flight period is not yet known.

There seem to be quite big swathes of the county where both species are absent, particularly in more open lowland areas and in towns. If scrubby or non-amenity planted woodland is nearby however then both moths will usually be found. Both species occur locally or more frequently in the higher more open parts of the county.

**See below for Mottled Grey**

## MOTTLED GREY



### **Flight period:**

The text books give the flight period as March and April but in Lancashire in recent years, occasional records have occurred in mid February. There have also been records into early May at some upland sites so flight period alone should not be used as an indicator of species. Looking back to records from the 1960s, Mottled Grey was regularly encountered well into late April.

### **Identification:**

See under Early Tooth-striped.

### **Distribution:**

See under Early Tooth-striped

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I would like to thank Chris Darbyshire, Kevin McCabe, Bill Aspin, John Girdley and Pete Marsh for comments on the identification of these two species which have been incorporated into the above text. Also thanks are due to Colin Barnes and Eddie Langrish for retaining moths for photography or providing photographs for this article.