

SOME EAST AFRICAN HAWK MOTHS

By Lt.-Colonel C. H. Stockley.

HAWK Moths had a great attraction for most of us as boys, and in later days continue to interest through their distinctive appearance and wide distribution; while their erratic appearances in some years and complete absence in others, whose advantages seem to be similar, give us innumerable minor problems to work out through observation. Thus those of us who carry on collecting outside England find old friends turning up thousands of miles from where we first met with them.

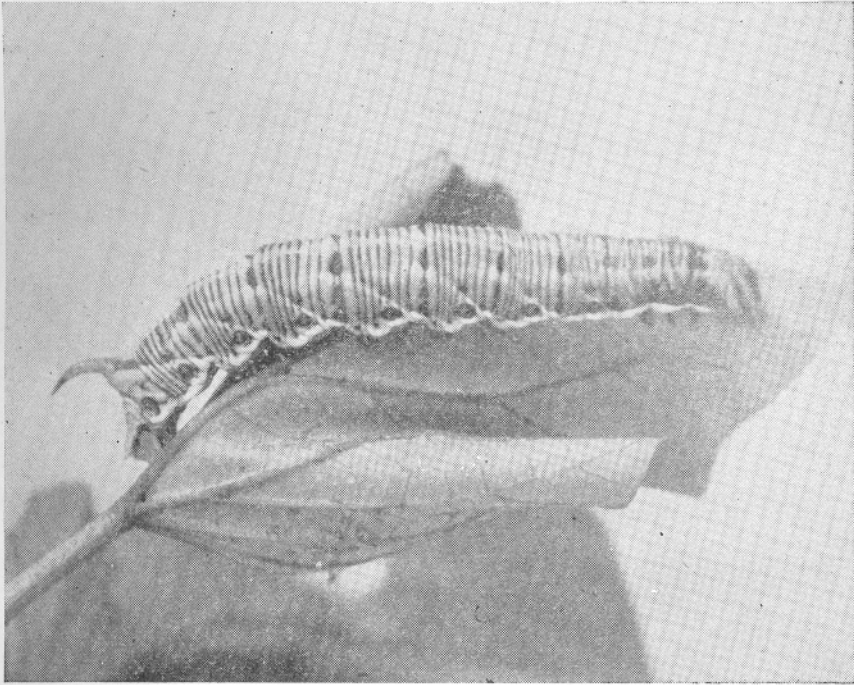
In East Africa the number of hawkmoth species is far greater than in England, and I have taken 24 different ones in my garden at the foot of Mount Kenya; most of them are attractive in appearance, and have distinct habits and markings.

Thus the big Death's Head, a skull clearly marked in yellow on its dark brown thorax, is not only an inhabitant of much of the world's surface but has two colour forms of the caterpillar which feed on different plants, yet the moths which emerge do not differ. Take a caterpillar from a Sodom apple plant, and another from the potato plot, and it hard to believe that they belong to the same species. The larva, pupa and adult are all endowed with the power of making a squeaky, snapping noise, which is quite startling to the novice. The Death's Head moth, when settled on the bark of a tree, is very difficult to spot, and is a great exponent of protective colouration, its wavy dark and light brown streaks merging with the bark. The caterpillar was very common near Nyeri in 1951, feeding most destructively on potato foliage. The larva of this species and its near relations are easily identified through having a short and rough horn with a kink in it. Two near relations which one is most likely to encounter are *Euchloron megaera* and *Coelonia fulvinotata*, each of whom has a rough kinky horn on the caterpillar. *E. megaera* has deep green forewings and yellow and black hindwings; and although it is commonest near the Coast, I recently bred out a dozen or more of them at Nyeri. I have also reared a number of *Coelonia fulvinotata*, whose forewings are rather like those of the Death's Head, but strongly patched with white.

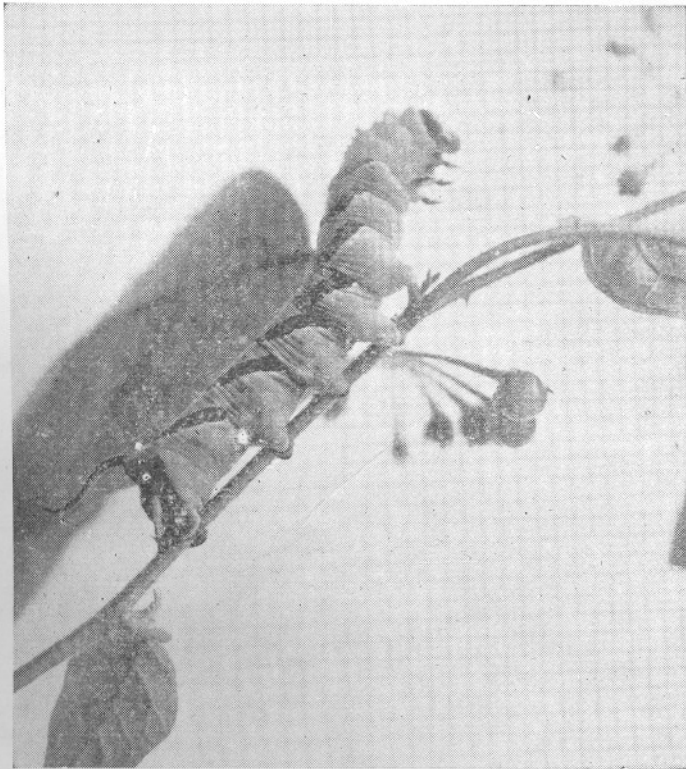
The most beautiful of all moths is the Oleander Hawk (*Deilephila nerii*), which I took in 1936 and never saw again until last year, when I took more on the wing at verbena flowers, and also bred out specimens. It is tinted in waves of dark and light green curves, shaded with grey and pink, the whole looking rather like the "dazzle" paintings of a ship protected against submarine attack. Though it is called the Oleander Hawk, I never found either moth or larva on that shrub, but have most often found them on a wild vine.

Another hawk moth, *Pseudoclanis postica*, did not turn up for several years, but then became fairly common. As the caterpillar feeds on new shoots of the commonest jungle tree which edges every road, one would have expected to have come across it much sooner. A large Hawk moth, pleasantly coloured in yellow and grey, its larva has a slender horn, gracefully curved, and very distinct from the larvae of the first group.

The commonest of all our hawk moths, and one of the larger species found in East Africa, is the great grey *Convolvulus* Hawk, which is blest



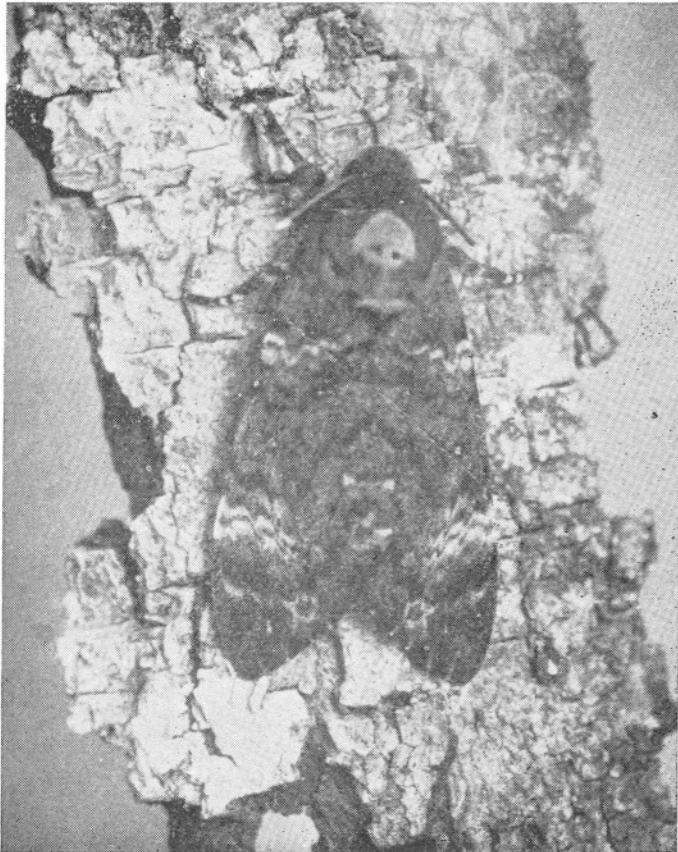
Larva of *Convolvulus Hawk-Moth*.
(*Herse convolvuli*).



Larva of *Fulvous-Marked Hawk-Moth*.
(*Coelonia fulvinotata*).



Oleander Hawk-Moth.
(*Deilephila nerii*).



Death's Head
Hawk-Moth.
(*Acherontia*
atropos).

with a sufficient long tongue to enable it to reach the bottom of the nicotiana flowers, so that a clump of these may have half a dozen grey phantoms hovering with a deep hum that can be heard a dozen yards away. Their bodies are barred with pink, and any time between sunset and dark a sweep of the net through the tobacco flowers whence this deep hum is heard may secure one or more of them, and the long tongue be examined with profit.

Fuchsias in verandah boxes are sure to attract an assortment of "Striped" Hawks, whose caterpillars are marked with an "eye" behind the head. Many of them come to light and dash about the ceilings of our houses, and far more are taken during daylight, settled inside the house. The larvae are mostly marked along the sides in continuous lines, and not with separate lateral oblique stripes; and the Striped and Silver-striped Hawks of this group are great prizes to be collected occasionally during a fine late summer in England.

There are many small hawk moths in East Africa which are not found in England, and have no "trivial" names. Some of them are handsomely marked and shaded in red, and one common one, *Basiothea medea*, has green forewings with orange hindwings, and is very plentiful at verbena and phlox. These are among the earliest sunset hoverers, and at times may even be seen in company with the Hummingbird Hawk Moth, so like our English *Macroglossa stellatarum*. There is also another day-flier, the pied *Leucostrophus hirundo*.

Our one large and obvious Beehawk is *Cephanodes hylax virescens*, which is also common in Southern Asia, and is much attracted by static flowers: a handsome insect, with green and red body.

The absence of English names to our hawk moths is a great handicap to beginners; but Mr. Pinhey, our Entomologist at the Coryndon Museum, has written an excellent book on the commoner butterflies of Rhodesia, to which he has assigned English names; and I hear that he is about to do the same for East Africa. I hope this is true, for beginners need encouragement, and to those without a classical education the absence of names in their own tongue is a serious handicap. Brigadier Evans, the world authority on skippers, wrote a most useful book on the butterflies of India, supplying them with English names which he collected from those in use in schools, and furnishing it with a key. It is invaluable, and has enabled many boys to make a sound start with collecting. Let us hope that Mr. Pinhey will be able to do the same for East Africa, though the rearrangement of the Coryndon Museum collection, with much new work on the "life study groups," has filled his working hours to repletion for the last two years.

Perhaps some local entomologist will start on the Hawk moths, and then on the large and handsome *Saturniids*, whose larvae in some years swarm on our roadside trees. It is even possible to plant part of one's garden with a view to harbouring both these big groups. For the trees involved are mainly those we already plant for ornamental purposes (e.g. Pepper Tree), while the flowers which attract hawk moths are static, nicotiana, petunia, phlox, fuchsia and salvia, already welcome settlers anywhere.