

Notes on two interesting specimens of *Hippotion celerio* (Linnaeus) (Lepidoptera, Sphingidae)

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Moths of the genus *Hippotion* Hübner, 1822 (Family: Sphingidae) are distributed in Africa, Central and southern Asia and as migrants in southern Europe and Australia. Currently, around 30 species are accommodated in this genus. *Hippotion celerio* is a regular migrant to the Maltese Islands (SAMMUT, 2000). On the onset of warmer weather conditions, colonies establish themselves in North Africa and Europe. It is a resident species in the Azores and the Atlantic coast of Morocco and most probably also in the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt.

During the months of October and November 2012 a breeding colony of *Hippotion celerio* was started in Malta in a greenhouse which is not temperature controlled. Several eggs of *Hippotion celerio* were collected from the wild on leaves and flower buds of *Mirabilis* plants from two localities in Malta (Mellieha and Żebbug). Caterpillars in the third larval stage were transferred from *Mirabilis jalapa* Linnaeus to *Rumex conglomeratus* Murray as this latter plant continues to grow during winter till late spring. A small number of larvae made it to pupation. Pupation took place in leaf litter and pupae were left *in situ* till adults emerged in spring. Soon after, a mated pair deposited hundreds of eggs on leaves of *Pentas lanceolata* Forssk and several specimens developed into mature caterpillars. These were collected just before pupation and transferred in a plastic container containing a layer of peat, moss and bark chippings. Adult moths started to emerge in May 2013 and several normal specimens of *Hippotion celerio* were observed. On the 13th and 14th of June two specimens turned out to be remarkably different from the rest. They lacked the silver stripes on the forewing and had a darker colouration and wing margins were also of an unusual shape.



Figure 1: *Hippotion celerio*.

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There are several named forms of *Hippotion celerio* (MILLER & HAUSMANN, 1999) but it seems that this specimen (Fig. 1) did not fit any of these described forms. It was similar to the form *luecki* Closs (Kitching, I., *pers. comm*) however some differences were noted, mainly the presence of a pale cell ring and the postmedial borderline distal of the dark medial area on the forewing (Hausmann, A., *pers. comm*). The Maltese specimens were also examined by Dr Ulf Buchsmaun and confirmed that this aberration was unique. In view of the fact that these specimens were breed in captivity, this new form is not being formally named.

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