

Beginners' Guide to Macro Moths

Ngā Paihau



Te Takenga mai o te Pepe - The Origin of the Moth

Tāne climbs to the highest heaven to visit his brother, Rēhua. Rēhua calls for a fire to be lit and calabashes to be brought forth. Tāne asks his brother "What will we be eating, brother?" At this, Rēhua shakes his head and two kōkō/tūi fall from his hair. Tāne refuses to eat the birds as they have been living in Rēhua's hair and are tapu. Tāne asks if he can return to earth with the birds. Rēhua agrees, and says that the birds will live in the trees, and feed on the fruits of the trees. When Rēhua shook his head other 'birds' also fell out: pēpepe, the moth; tātarakihi, the cicada; pihareinga, the grasshopper; and kēkerewai, the beetle. Collectively these are known as 'Ngā Manu a Rēhua' and come out in summer.

Ngā Whetū - The Stars

The story of the moth is told in the stars of the Rēhua constellation. Rēhua, the eldest son of Raki and Papatūānuku, is the reddish star Antares in the western Scorpius constellation.

Wairua Tangata - 'The Spirit of a Person'

A common held belief was that the spirits of those who had passed would be reincarnated as a moth.

Moths are an important part of New Zealand's biodiversity

Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies) are the third largest group of insects in New Zealand (over 1750 named species). Scientists estimate there are still more than 300 moth species to be discovered and named in New Zealand.

NZ moths are special

More than 86% of the known moths in NZ are endemic. They only occur in NZ so we have to look after them.

Why are moths important?

Moths are a key part of the wider ecosystem and they sit in the centre of a complex food web. The caterpillars are herbivores eating a range of native plants.

Many adult moths drink nectar and are important pollinators. Many of our native plants are likely pollinated by moths. Moths go quietly about this critical job during the night when most people are sleeping, which means we often overlook how important they are. Moths are a major food source for other insects and native birds. Unfortunately, they are also an important food source for introduced pests like mice, rats, and hedgehogs.

Moths can also be pests

Hihue (the kūmara moth, *Agrius convolvuli*) had a large impact on kūmara crops and there are

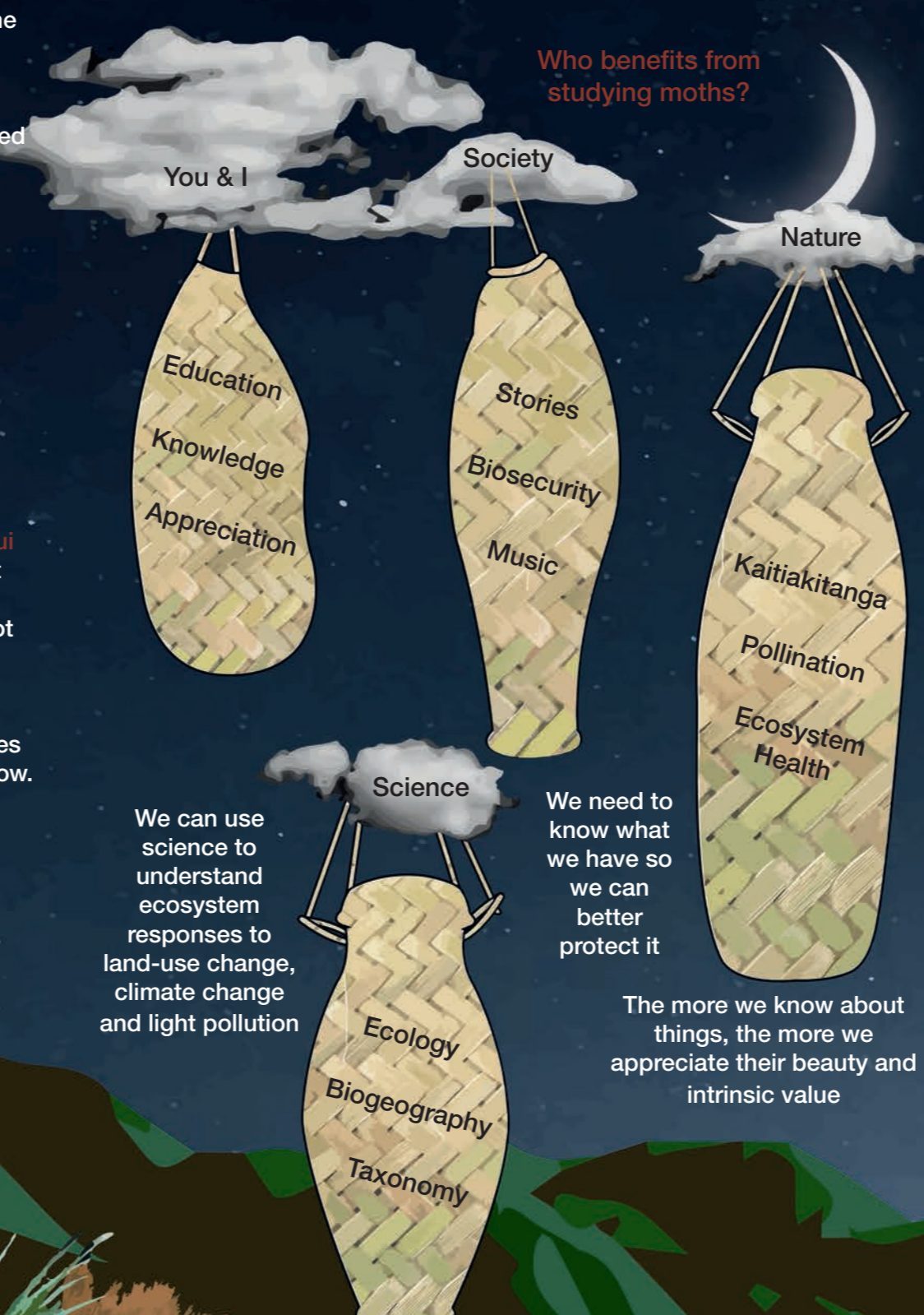
many whakatauki written about the caterpillar and its capacity to eat.

A more recent pest is the codling moth (*Cydia pomonella*). Introduced from Europe, it attacks apples, pears, walnuts, and other fruit.

Moths have a bad reputation for eating clothes, especially natural fibres like wool, silk, and fur. In reality there are very few moth species whose caterpillars eat clothes. You can easily solve this problem by putting the clothes in and out of the freezer a couple of times.

Puka Whakamārama o te Pepe Nui

This guide contains only the most common larger moths in this large region. If you find a moth that is not in this guide, this may be because it is rare, a range extension (not normally found in this place), a 'micro-moth', an introduced species or a new species. Please let us know.



Who benefits from studying moths?

Why we need to trap the moths?

Moths are mainly out at night, so most people don't see how many there are or what's happening to them. Unfortunately we need specimens for identification.

Why we need standardised data?

If we all use the same type of trap (e.g. a Heath Moth Trap) we can compare data from different places and over time. With standardised information we can all work together to keep an eye on the moths. This way, if they start to decline we can see something is happening and work together to take better care of the moths.

Why we need quantitative data?

Counting the number of individuals of each species gives us more information than just a list of the species present. This quantitative information helps to detect change over time or between places.

Why do we need to study moths?

Moths breed fast and have lots of offspring. There are lots of different moth species playing different roles in the ecosystem. Moths have links to lots of other species (e.g. plants, birds, introduced pests, other invertebrates).

If something is changing in the ecosystem, moths are amongst the first creatures to respond. They are likely to be good indicators of change.

What does that word mean?

- Lepidoptera:** moths and butterflies
- Endemic:** found only in that place
- Ecosystem:** all biological and physical processes in an area
- Food web:** what eats what
- Herbivores:** animals that eat plants
- Nocturnal:** active at night
- Community:** species in an area

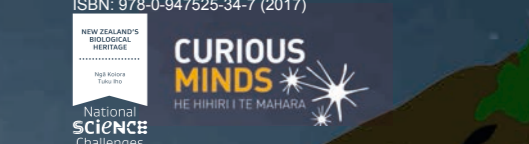
Where to get more information & help

- www.landcareresearch.co.nz/mothnet
- Email: MothNetOtago@gmail.com
- @MothNetNZ
- MothNetNZ
- www.naturewatch.org.nz/
- Entomological Society of New Zealand: www.ento.org.nz

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Ka hou ki te whenua, he tūkoukou; ka puta ki te rangi he pepe – The pupa enters the Earth, a moth emerges to the sky

Te āwheto kai paeka – The caterpillar eats the leaf (Said of someone who goes around tasting various dishes)

Me te upoko tūkoukou – like the chrysalis of the Sphinx moth (When likening something to especially fine weaving)

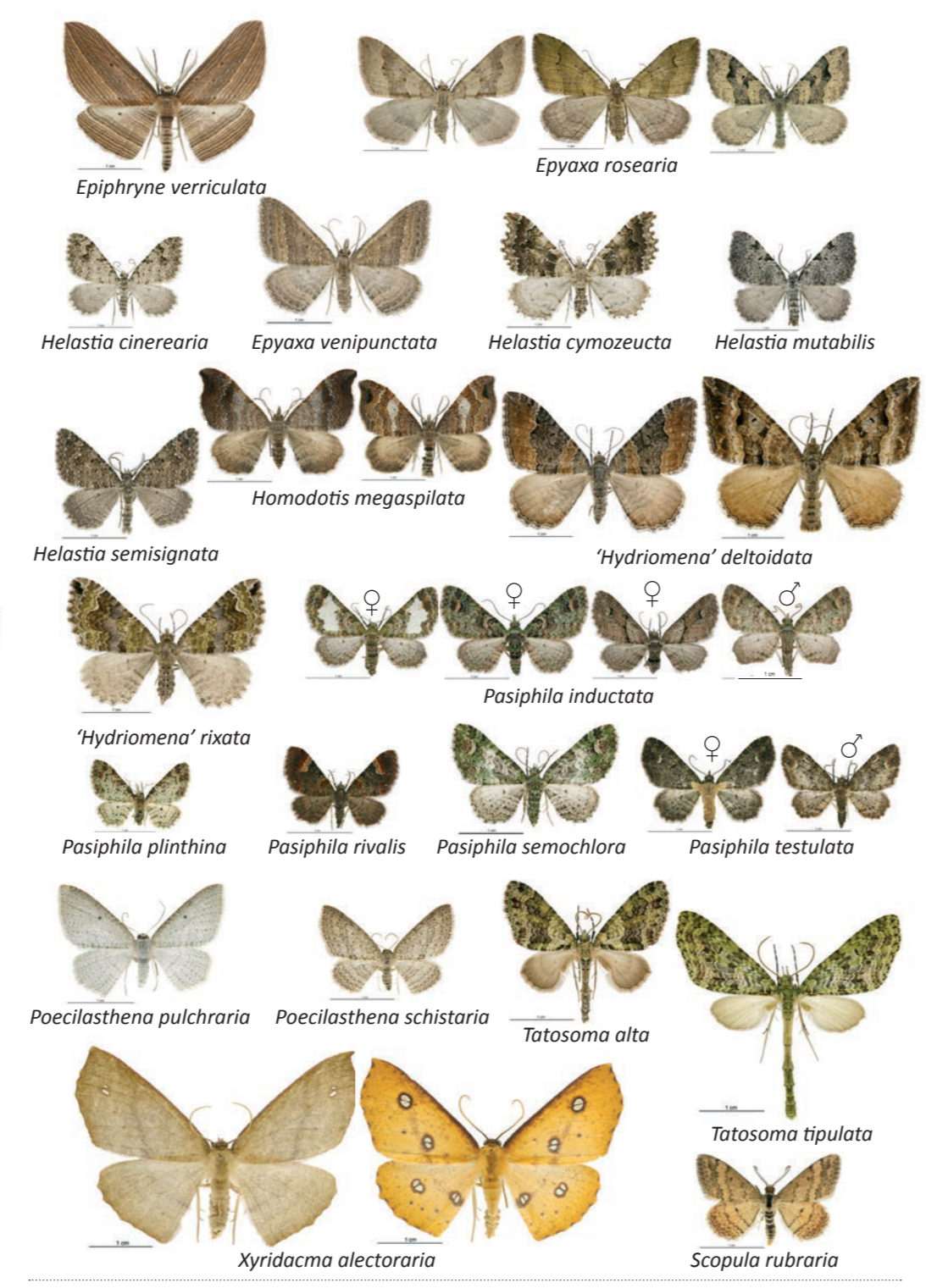
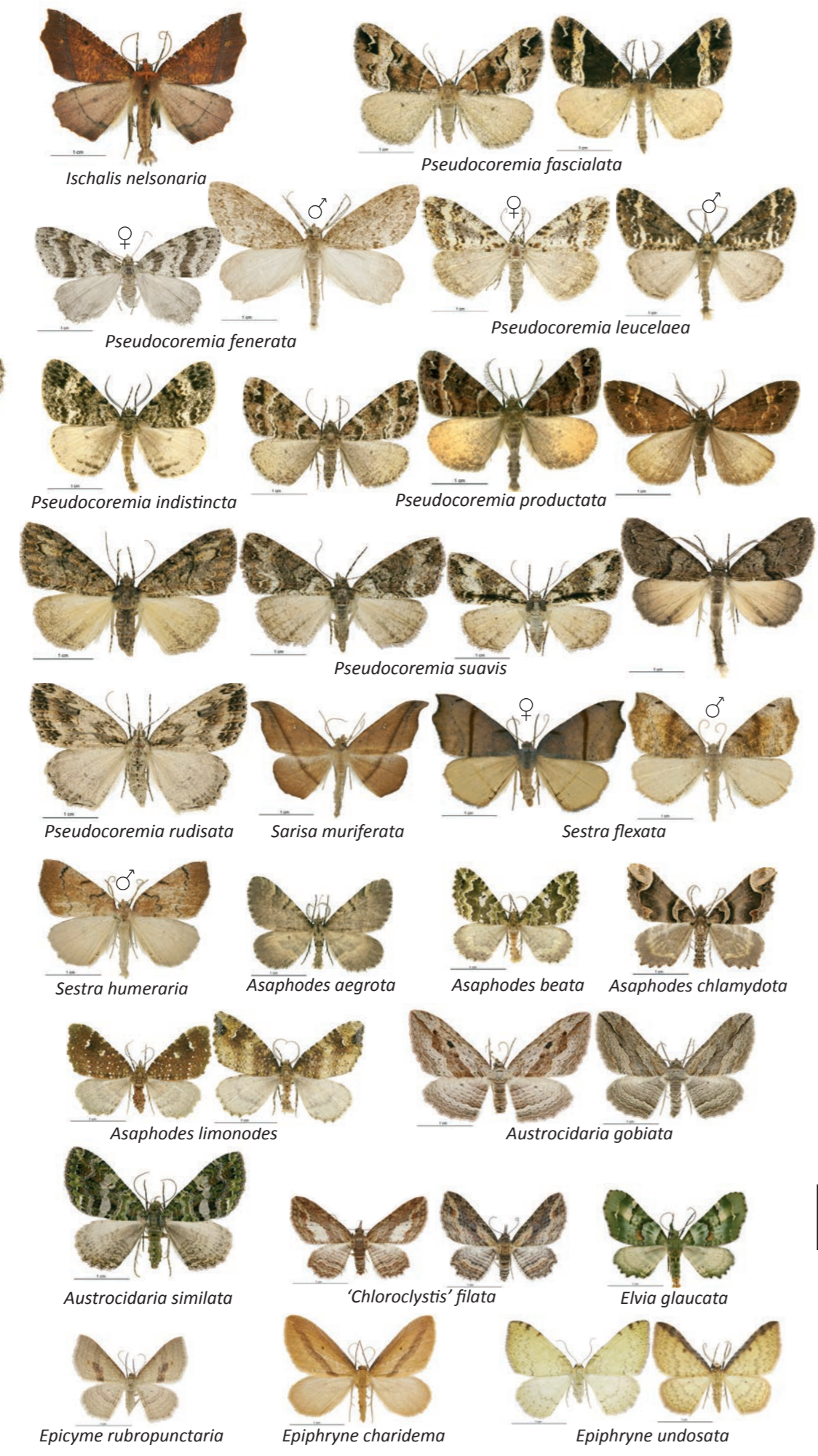
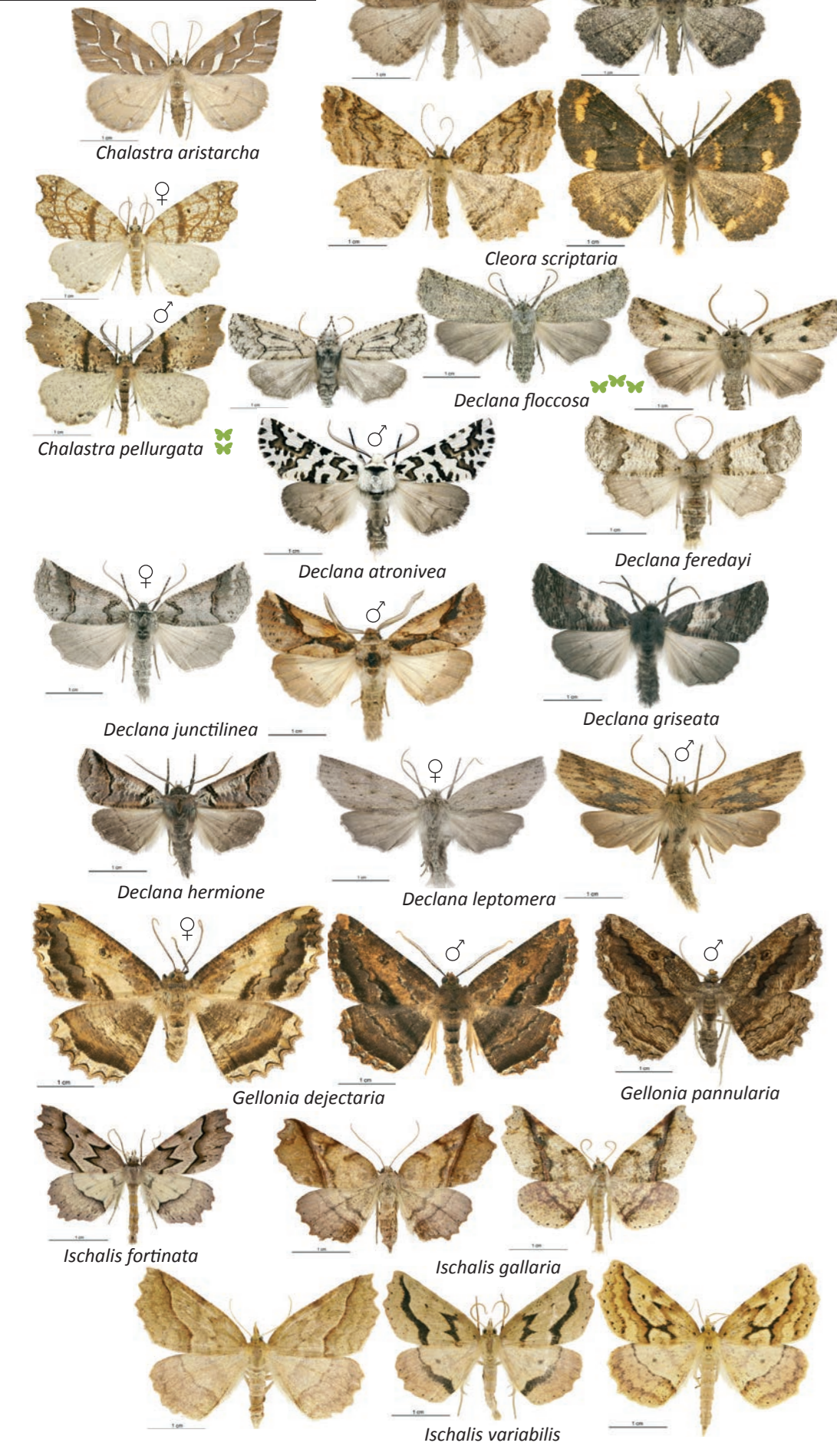
I hikaina te ahi titi, engari i whakapoapa kā i te pepe – The fire was lit to attract the mutton birds and the moths flew into it – Te Whiiti o Rongomai

He iti hoki te mokoroa, nāna i kakati te Kahikatea – Although the mokoroa is small it attacks the Kahikatea

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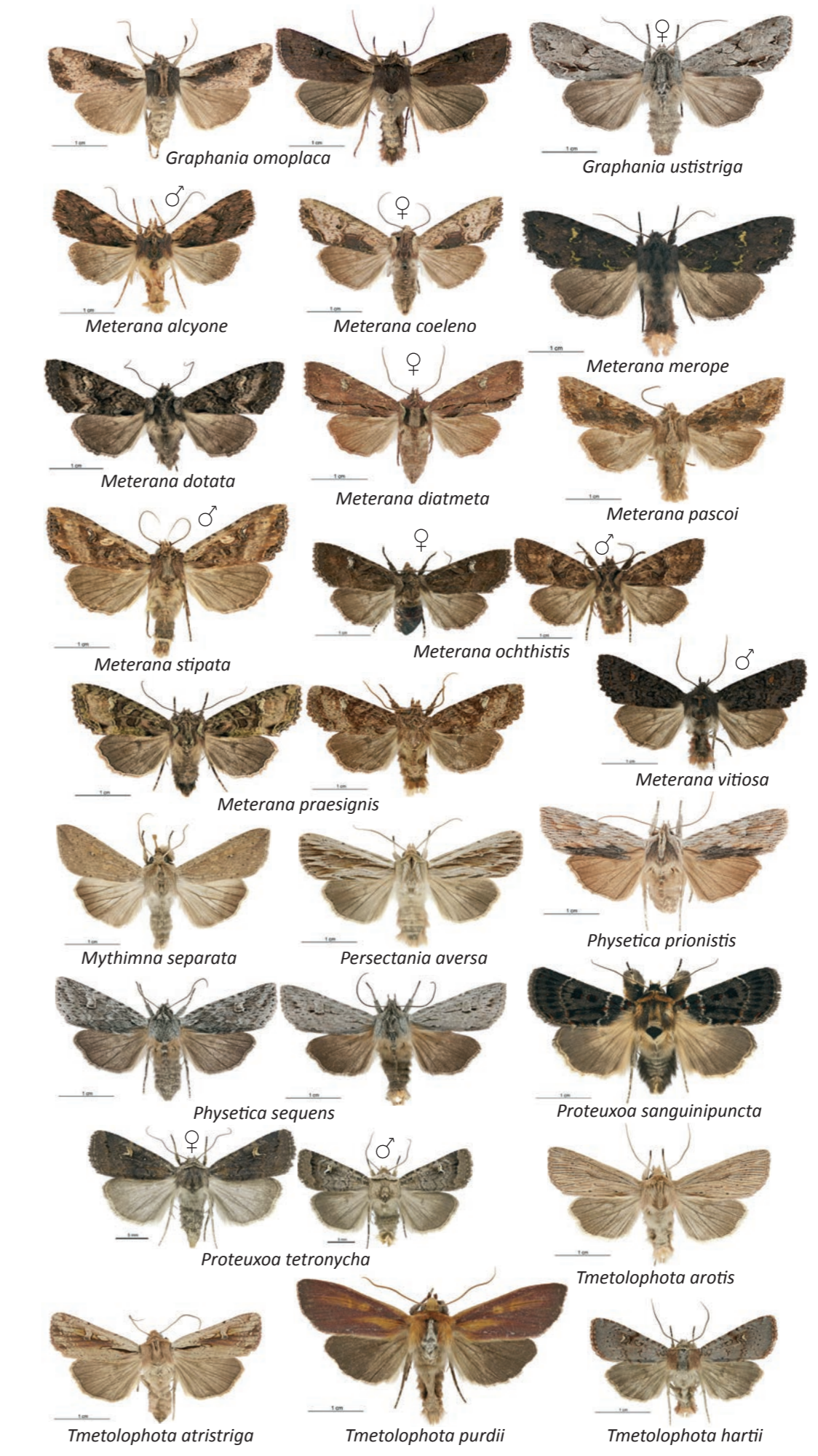
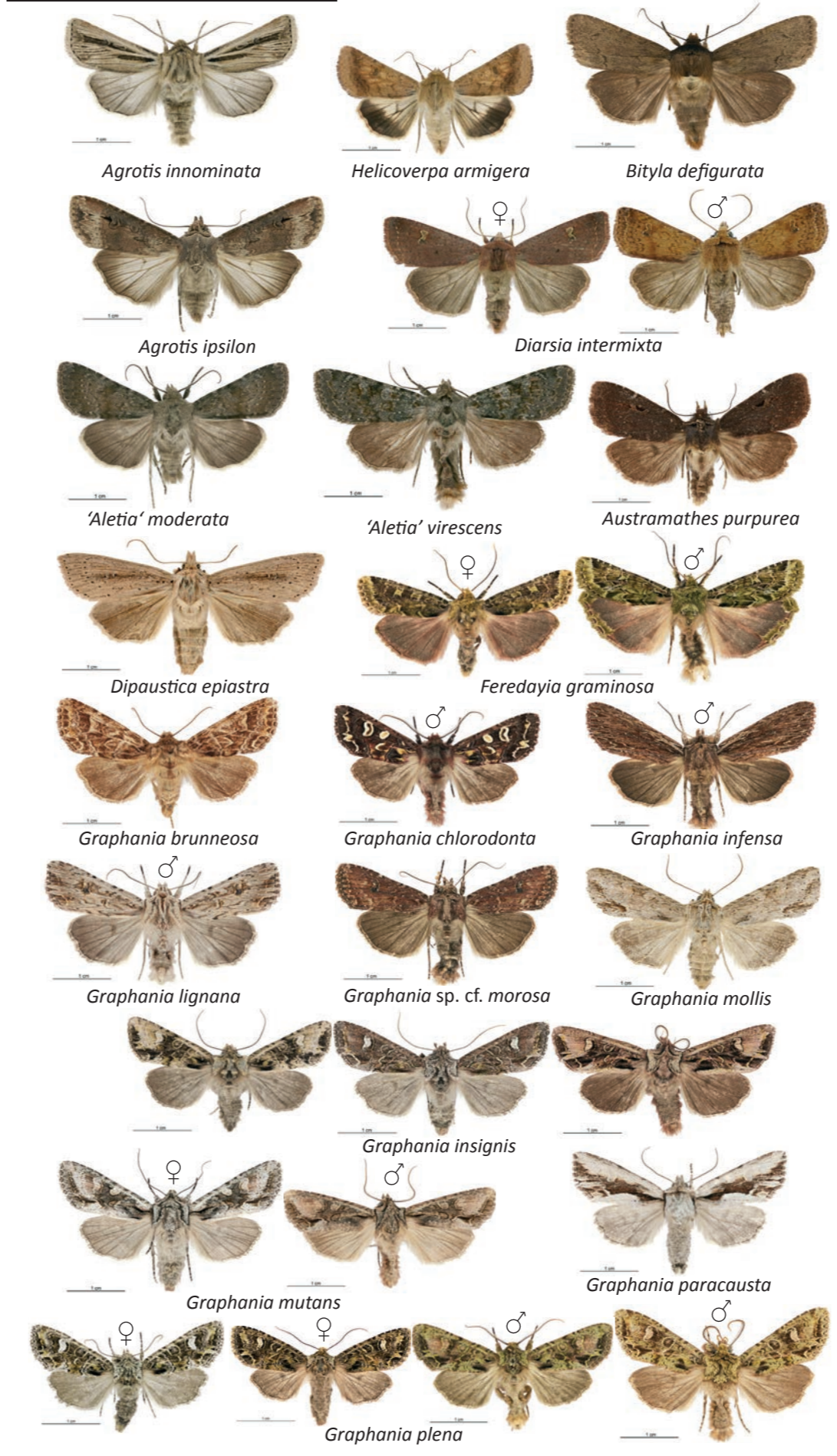
Geometridae



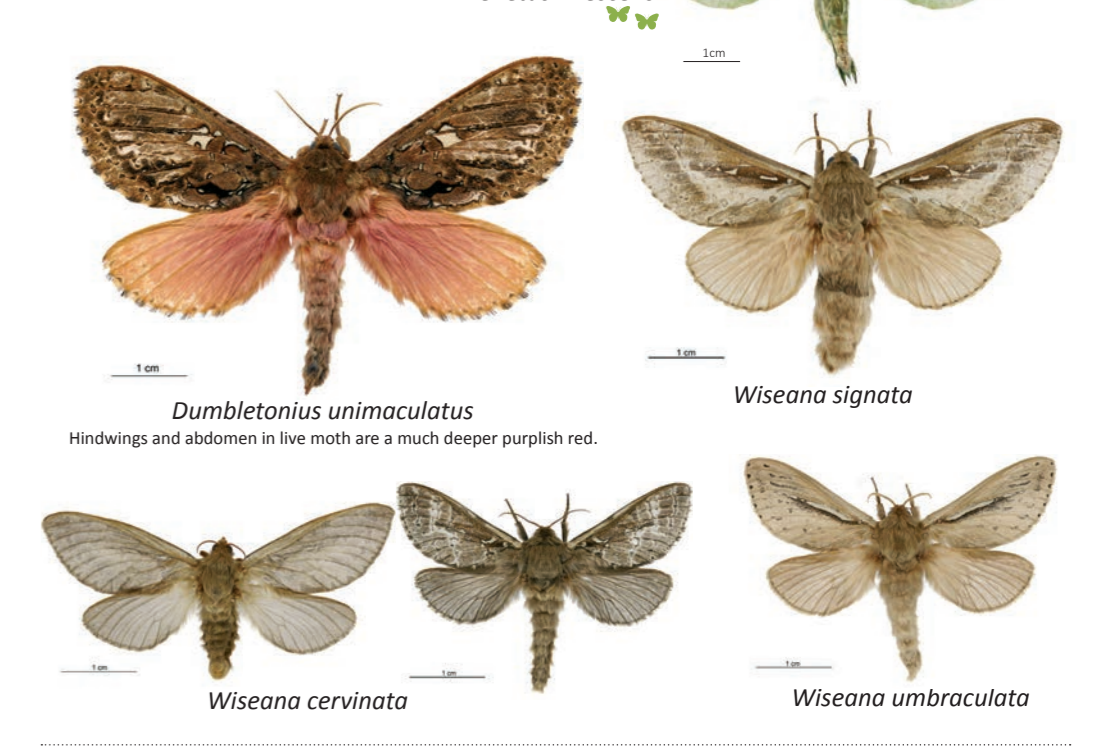
Sphingidae



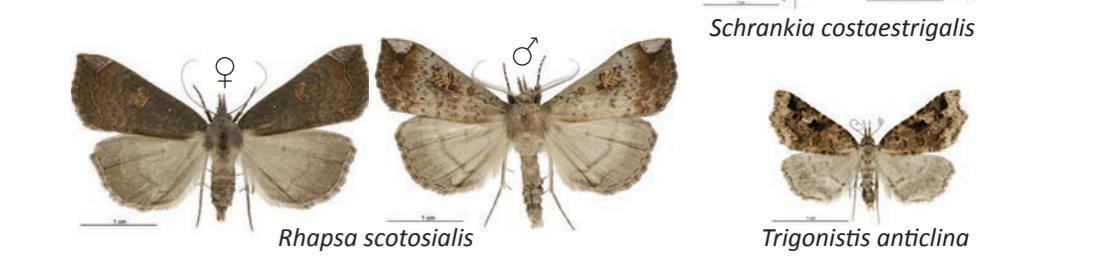
Noctuidae



Hepialidae



Erebidae



NOTE: When printed *Aenetus virescens* NOT TO SCALE of other moths. Image and scale bar shown here at 75% of actual size.