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**First record of *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus* (Walker, 1864) for the Italian fauna
(Lepidoptera Pterophoridae)**

Abstract - *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus* (Walker, 1864) has been found in urban areas; this species is recorded for the first time in Italy (Sicily); it feeds on *Lantana camara* L. and *L. montevidensis* (K. Spreng.) Briq.

Riassunto - *Prima segnalazione per la fauna italiana* di *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus* (Walker, 1864) (Lepidoptera Pterophoridae).

Lo studio della microlepidotterofauna infeudata a piante ornamentali ha condotto al ritrovamento del Lepidottero Pterophoridae *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus* (Walker, 1864). Questa specie vincolata principalmente a piante del genere *Lantana* (Verbenaceae), diffusa in diverse aree tropicali e subtropicali del pianeta, recentemente è stata rinvenuta in diverse località della Sicilia orientale e rappresenta un elemento di nuova segnalazione per la fauna italiana.

Key words: Lepidoptera, Pterophoridae, *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus*, Sicily, new record for Italy, *Lantana* spp.

The increasing use in European parks and gardens of numerous and diverse plants native to different regions of the planet, causes the enrichment of European faunas mainly in relation to the occurrence of exotic species which develop on the same host plants. This is particularly evident in the Mediterranean basin area where the climatic conditions are more favourable to the establishment of new species.

However, as regards Lepidoptera Pterophoridae, *Megalorhipida leucodactyla* (Fabricius, 1794) was recently recorded in Italy on *Boheravia repens* L. ssp. *viscosa* (Choisy) Maire, a Nyctaginacea with paleotropical distribution (Bella & Ferrauto, 2005).

The study of some Pterophoridae records in urban environment in different Sicilian cities led to the discovery of the species *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus* (Walker, 1864) (figg. 1-2), that is here recorded as new for the fauna of Sicily and Italy. This taxon, of South American origin, in the course of the years has been following its principal host plant (*Lantana camara* L.). This botanical species, voluntarily introduced in various areas of the planet, has been causing serious ecological problems due to its diffusion without the containing action of any biotic factors, as it happened in Australia, South Africa and Hawaiian Islands (Day & Neser, 2000).

Presently *L. pusillidactylus* is reported in many tropical and subtropical areas of the world and only recently it was found in the Mediterranean-Macaronic Region; King (2000) reported

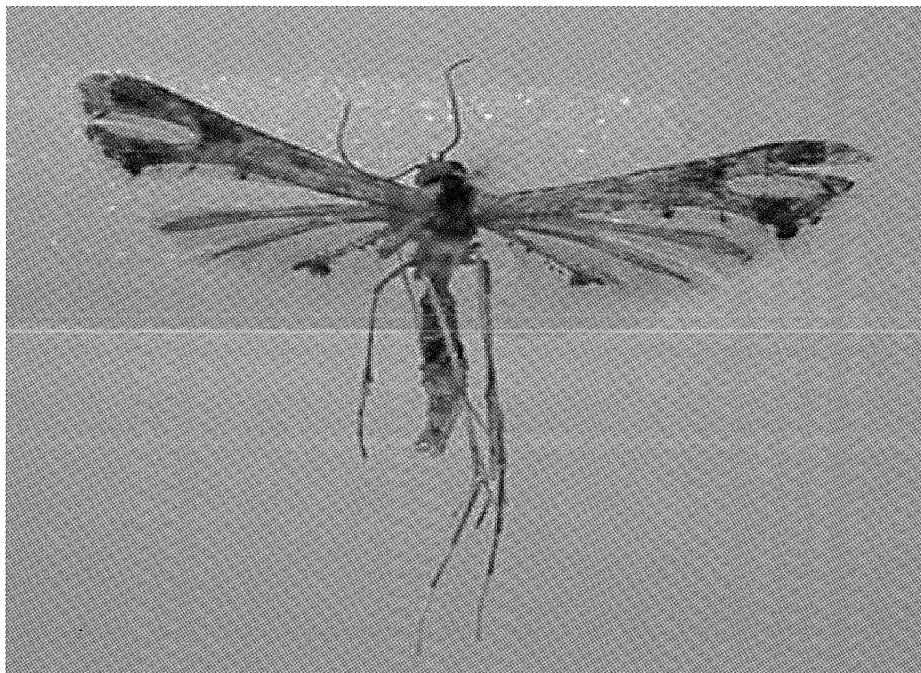


Fig. 1 - *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus* (Walker), male (Acireale, S. G. Bosco, 30.X.2002): habitus.

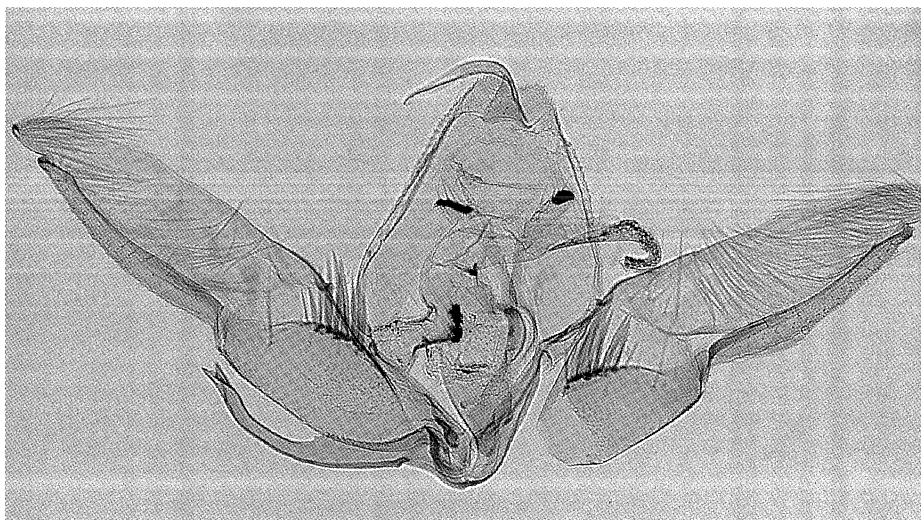


Fig. 2 - *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus* (Walker), idem: genitalia (slide 76, S. Bella Lepidoptera Collection).

it for Spain; Gielis (1996, 2003, 2004) reported it for Spain, Canary Islands, Madeira, Morocco and Israel.

MATERIAL EXAMINED. Sicily: Monti Nebrodi: Furnari (ME), Portorosa, m 0-5 a.s.l., 21.X.2005, (1 ♂, 1 ♀, *Lantana camara*, G. Marchese leg.).

Monti Peloritani: Roccalumera (ME), m 0-5 a.s.l., 25.VII.2000 (1 ♂, lux, G. Marchese leg.); idem, 5.VII.2001 (1 ♂, lux, G. Marchese leg.); idem, 7.VII.2002 (1 ♂, lux, G. Marchese leg.).

Monte Etna: Aci Castello (CT), Cannizzaro, m 30 a.s.l., 7.X.2005 (1 ♂, *L. camara*, S. Bella leg.); Acireale (CT), San Giovanni Bosco, m 80 a.s.l., 30.X.2002 (1 ♂, *L. camara*, S. Bella leg.); Catania, m 10 a.s.l., 18.VII.2001 (nearly 15 specimens observed, *Lantana montevidensis* (K. Spreng.) Briq., S. Bella leg.); Catania, Canalicchio, m 200 a.s.l., 10.XII.2005 (3 ♂♂, 2 ♀, *L. camara*, G. Marchese leg.); Catania, Giardino Bellini, m 10 a.s.l., 10.IX.2004 (1 ♂, lux, G. Marchese leg.); idem, 22.XI.2005 (1 ♂, lux, G. Marchese leg.); Catania, Parco Gioeni, m 100 a.s.l., 18.VII.2000 (1 ♂, *L. camara*, S. Bella leg.); San Giovanni La Punta (CT), Trappeto, m 350 a.s.l., 10.IX /18.XII 2000-2005 (13 ♂♂, 10 ♀♀, lux, *L. camara*, G. Marchese leg.); idem, 2.I.2003 (1 ♂, lux, G. Marchese leg.); San Gregorio di Catania (CT), Contrada Cerza, m 200 a.s.l., 1.XI.2000 (1 ♂, lux, S. Bella leg.); idem, 29.VI, 18.VII.2001 (2 ♂♂, *L. camara*, S. Bella leg.); idem, 13.XI.2005, (1 ♂, lux, S. Bella leg.).

Monti Iblei: Siracusa, m 0-5 a.s.l., 7.IX.2003, (1 ♂, lux, S. Bella leg.).

The female of this species lays the eggs on the flower-bracts of its host plants and the larvae complete their life cycle feeding exclusively on various floral parts. The host plants known from the literature (Herbison-Evans & Matthews, 2004) are: *Lantana camara*, *L. involucrata*, *L. peduncularis*, *Lippa alba*, *Phyla lanceolata* (Verbenaceae); *Caperonia palustris* (Euphorbiaceae); *Mentha spicata* (Lamiaceae); *Utricularia* spp. (Lentibulariaceae).

The Sicilian specimens were found on the blooms of *Lantana camara* and *L. montevidensis*; both species are frequently used in urban green areas because they combine remarkable cultural resistance with a low water demand and an extraordinary variety of colours of the flowers.

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