



MONSTER MOTH MOVES IN

Wilton International has welcomed one of its rarest and most unusual visitors.

With a wingspan of 13-centimetres, the spectacular Death's Head Hawk Moth is the largest-ever moth to appear in Britain.

Site protection and security officers Bob Booker and Scott Duffy were startled by the size of the insect in their office at the Sembcorp-owned South Gatehouse last Friday.

Recognising that the intruder was something out of the ordinary they called in lepidopterist (i.e. moth expert) Jamie Duffie from the Wilton Centre who identified it as a migrant from Southern Europe.

The creature, which gets its name from a distinctive skull-like mark on its thorax, is usually to be found in hot spots like the Canaries so how it has ended up here given the soggy summer is a mystery?

Said Bob: "My first thought was 'I don't want to be bitten by that!' It was a monster!"

"I understand it is the same type of moth as one devoured by Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal 'The Cannibal' Lecter in the film Silence of the Lambs! Somehow that doesn't surprise me."

Now the Industry and Nature Conservation Association (INCA), based at the Phoenix Centre on the site, has taken the moth under its wing and raised a flicker of hope that there could be others.

Ecologist Ken Smith said: "We know that they do sometimes come to Britain, but it's rare that they are seen in this area."

INCA is checking the South Gate area to see if there is a mate for the moth, which they believe to be female.

One unusual aspect about the moth is that it has the unusual habit of entering beehives in search of honey, and if handled, emits a loud squeak – an action which might be intended to pacify the angry bees.

Robert Woods of INCA congratulated the Sembcorp contractors for reporting the find and protecting the moth.

He said: “This shows the increasing concern that Sembcorp and other industrial companies in the Tees Valley have for wildlife conservation.”

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