

Identifying the 'autumn thorns'

In this document I will cover the identification of the four species of thorns which are on the wing from late summer to autumn and occur in Montgomeryshire: August (*Ennomos quercinaria*), Canary-shouldered (*E. alniaria*), Dusky Thorn (*E. fuscantaria*) and September (*E. erosaria*). These species can look alike, especially August and September. All four species are found in the county, though August Thorn seems to be the least common overall.

Despite their common names, August Thorn and September Thorn are on the wing at the same time and can be found from late July.

Canary-shouldered Thorn

This is the most easily recognised species. It has orange wings with a strongly contrasting bright yellow head and thorax. The other species of thorn do not show this obvious contrast.

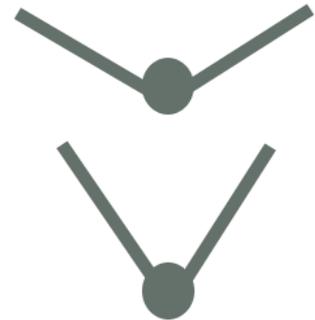


Wing posture

August: rests with its wings at a fairly shallow angle.

Dusky: wings held fairly steeply above head.

September: wings held steeply above head.



wing angles: viewed head-on

Wing colouration

August: often orange coloured and usually speckled. Female paler. Outer section of the wing may be shaded.

Dusky: grey shading across whole outer section of the wing.

September: the plainest of the group. Forewing usually uniformly coloured pale yellow.



Dusky



September

Cross-lines

N.B. The shape of the cross-lines in these species are rather variable and are probably best avoided as a sole identification feature.

Outer cross-line

August: tends to meet the leading edge of wing (costa) with a distinct kink.

Dusky: generally joins the costa without kink.

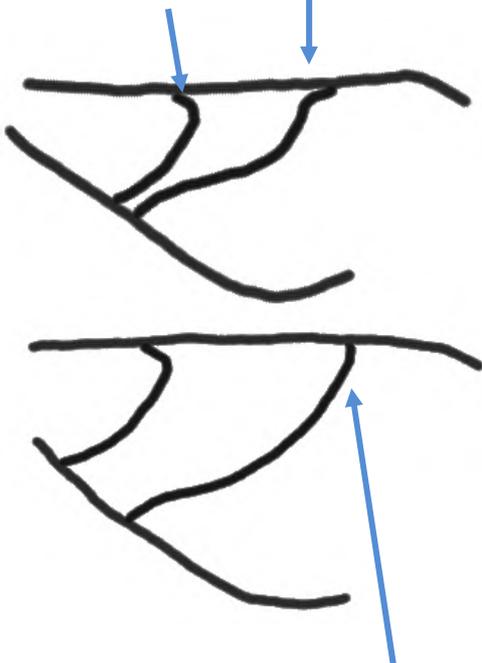
September: tends to join costa smoothly. Occasionally may show a small kink.

Inner cross-line

August: usually meets costa with a long sweeping angle. This angle is often less pronounced in similar species.

September

not always smooth
angle usually less pronounced

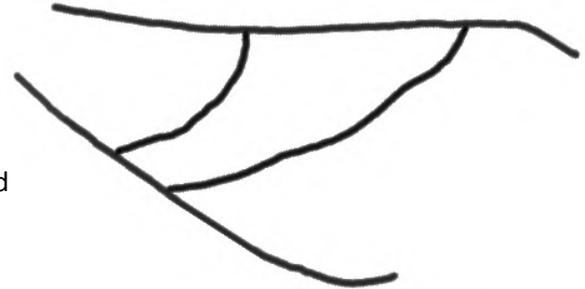


usually joins costa smoothly

Dusky

Both lines usually join costa fairly smoothly.

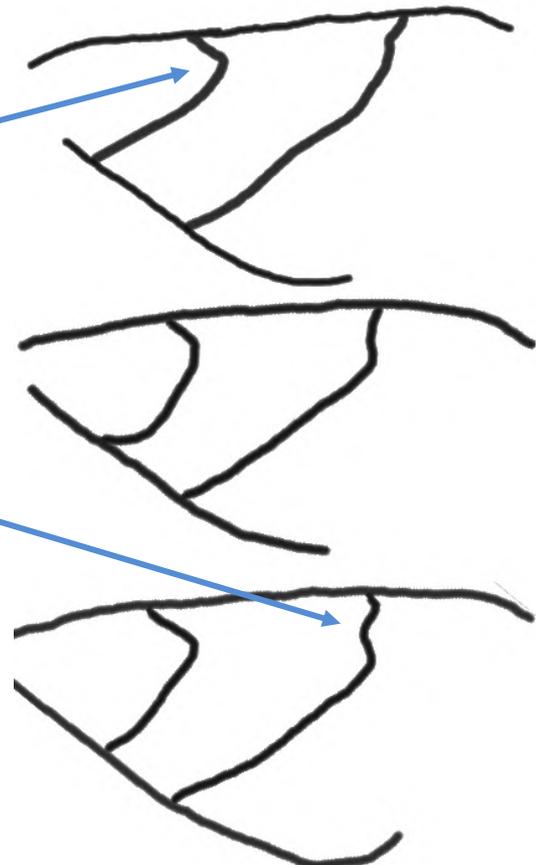
They are variable so ID should be based on colouration and wing posture, however.



August

Angle usually long and sweeping.

Often distinctly kinked



Simplified drawings of some forewings.
N.B. these are not necessarily exact and there is considerable variation within each species.

Images



Wings held quite steeply
Generally yellow
With dark shading in outer section



Wings held steeply
Plain yellow
Cross lines curved smoothly



Wings held shallowly
Orange in colour
Outer line kinked
Inner line with large angle

Dusky Thorn

September Thorn

August Thorn

Conclusion

There does seem to be some confusion amongst recorders over September Thorn and August Thorn particularly, which I would suggest is due to paying too much attention to the angle of cross-lines. We talk a lot about under-recording of certain species but I would suggest August Thorn might be over-recorded!

It is one of those groups where past experience with each species makes ID much easier. If in any doubt, take a photo and send it to the county recorder.

Douglas B.

Photos by MDH, PRW & HB.