

MOTH MUMBLINGS – JANUARY 2021

WELCOME

Well here we are – a new year. Unfortunately, it does look, so far, rather likely to be a case of “same problems – different year”. Speaking to your next door neighbour can kill you, but it is OK to send the kids to school! Seems rather odd to me (a hundred years ago I majored in microbiology at university but hey, what do I know!). This is not the place for political opinion, so I will shut up. I shall instead spend January repairing and maintaining my mothing equipment in the hope that we may be allowed out of doors at some stage in 2021.

FIRST AND LAST MOTHS

Well done to all those of you who accepted the challenge. Unfortunately, the air temperature was somewhat low at the turn of the year and it seems most of you, in the absence of any (legal) street parties went to bed early. This rather left the field clear for John Murray, whose garden is more or less in the centre of Hertfordshire at Marshalls Heath. John most definitely had the first moth of 2021 (unless you know different), courtesy of a Winter Moth on the night of 1st – 2nd January 2021.

As for the last moth of 2020, the results are still coming in. So far, the honour is held by Bob Clift in Bishops Stortford, for a caterpillar of the Angle Shades moth discovered whilst gardening on 30th December. Not sure if it should count, since it didn't have any wings though it does remind all of us, including me, that the adult insect is not the “be all and end all” of a moth! It looks like John Murray may also be able to claim the honours for last flying moth of 2020, with 2 Winter moths and 1 Mottled Umber on December 23rd. John did trap every night for the remainder of the year as did many of you. Consequently, lists are still coming in and the last moth of the year might well change.

John Murray also comments: I ran the Heath actinic trap in the garden on every single night of the year. 6573 moths of 425 species were caught in this trap. This makes it a poor year: 5th lowest numbers out of 28 years (after adjustment for absences abroad), yet 2nd highest as regards the species total, though the number of species is certainly not comparable as I am normally away from home on about 60 nights. The Robinson mercury vapour trap was run on 104 nights from June 20th. Taking all the moths from the two traps, plus those seen flying in the daytime and as caterpillars or leaf mines, brings the garden species total to 520 and the total moths seen to 12033. In all, 18 species were added to the garden list in 2020. Exact species totals quoted here are liable to change as there are a few dozen awaiting dissection.

I would be interested in a similar brief analysis from other areas, if anyone is bored. Of course, once all your lists are entered into the County Database I will be able to do an analysis for the entire area of Herts and Middlesex.

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SENDING YOUR MOTH LISTS TO ME

I am delighted to report that, so far, I have received 25 separate moth lists for 2020 for the two vice county areas of Herts & Middlesex. This is most encouraging – especially so as all except one have adopted my preferred data format. This latter means that I should be able to get all the incoming data into the main database without too much fuss and bother – not to mention time! My thanks to all – your efforts are greatly appreciated.

I now look forward to receiving remaining moth lists from 2020 (I know that many of you trapped right up to the end of December, so I expect to have to wait a short while until you get organised and send lists to me).

Once all the new records are in the database, I will be able to send a copy to our Webmaster, for him to selectively update maps and species accounts on our web site. Of course, I cannot speak for others and for all I know it might be months before he can make time to do this. However, he can't do it unless we have the data – so please strive to let me have outstanding lists by about the end of January if at all possible.

Do always feel free to contact me if there are any queries about this or any other mothy matter.

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CHARLES BAKER

I am saddened to report that our member Charles Baker passed away in hospital 28th December. He was born in 1933; find his picture and very short biography on page 509 of the Herts Moth Book. Charles was active in the **Herts Moth Group** in the first decade of the present century and was a regular on our field trips (which, in those days, we ran almost weekly). He was a resident of Bedfordshire and a long-time member of Bedfordshire Natural History Society, a former Bedfordshire Recorder for butterflies and joint author of "*The Butterflies and Moths of Bedfordshire*", published in 1997.

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That's all for now.

Do let me have details of anything you think worth sharing in this newsletter.

Colin

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