

MOTH MUMBLINGS APRIL 2021

FLYING NOW

The sun has come out! By the time you read this it may well have gone again, but it is pleasant whilst it lasts. To paraphrase Winston Churchill ... the is not the end, not even the beginning of the end, but it is at least the end of the beginning! I fully expect both winter and Covid to return, so let's get out there while we can. Many moths are now flying – I noticed whilst entering last night's catch into the database that we are bang on the peak of flight period for moths like the Early Grey and Twin-spot Quaker. In celebration of the easing of the lockdown rules (we are now allowed to travel and to meet a limited number of people out of doors) a few people ventured out to their local woodlands last night – unsurprisingly they had better catches than in their gardens. In no particular order, last night's combined catches included:

Chestnut
Dark Chestnut
Dotted Chestnut
Common Quaker
Small Quaker
Twin-spot Quaker
Hebrew Character
Early Grey
Grey Shoulder-knot
Red Chestnut
Yellow-horned
Red-green Carpet
Double-striped Pug
Brindled Pug
Oak Tree Pug
Engrailed
Shoulder-stripe
Early Thorn
Diurnea fagella
Light Brown Apple Moth

I am also aware of **Northern Drab** – adults common at Sallow blossom at the usual site near Therfield and **Light Orange Underwing** at Park Wood in Ruislip (Middlesex). The light and ordinary Orange Underwings are easily separated if you get a male – the antennae of Light Orange Underwing are obviously bipectinate (hand lens) whilst in the ordinary Orange Underwing they are simple filaments. Females of both species have simple antennae so be careful feathered antennae = Light, but simple antennae = check the sex first!

Both species affect both host trees of Aspen and birches (so tree species is no guide in spite of what some books might say). They are usually seen through binoculars flying in the tree tops, but occasionally swoop down to drink at puddles and can be netted. **TIP:** Take the dog with you and allow it to poo in the general area where the moths are swooping down (it will usually be in a sunlit area). Retire to a safe distance and wait; moths are likely to spend more time imbibing salts and fluids from the poo allowing you time to net them. If there is no dog available, and nobody is watching, human urine can be just as effective if concentrated in a small area. At the risk of putting a bad image in your head for the rest of the afternoon – take a yellow tray to “fill” as this avoids the liquid from soaking away and becoming useless. Of course, always remove deposited objects, biological or otherwise, at the end of the session.

There are probably other moths active now that are not reported to me.

Please, everyone, make sure all these records are added to your own lists for reporting at the end of the year. I welcome news of captures for this newsletter, but these casual reports are for shared interest and are NOT necessarily captured for the database.

PHEROMONES AND TORTRIX MOTHS

Last year, a good number of you evidently invested in the pheromone lure for the tortrix moth *Grapholita molesta*. Wisely as it happens, because so far ten of you have reported putting the lure out and, in the last week, attracting the non-target species *Pammene giganteana*. Reports are spread across the south and east of Hertfordshire, with “dozens” at Hertford Heath nature reserve. Reports extend northwards to Therfield, where oak trees are less frequent than hen’s teeth, whilst Tim Green has been catching them over the border into Essex in The Rodings. The more oak trees in the area, the higher the number of moths caught.

The larvae of *Pammene giganteana* feed inside galls on deciduous oak trees (oak apple gall/spongy gall) and according to the *Herts Moth Book* (page 242) this was a scarce species at the end of 2006, with recent reports from the south-west of Hertfordshire only. The latest Middlesex list (*London Naturalist*, volume 98 (2019), pages 130 – 219), states that there were only 4 records of this species, between 1959 and 2008. It seems likely that this moth might, as proven to be the case with the clearwing moths, actually be quite common – just difficult to find. It clearly comes to the “MOL” pheromone lure; I do hope that if you still have this lure in your freezer you thaw it out today and go looking for *Pammene giganteana*. Sadly, I was too miserly to get it!

AND WHILST WE ARE DISCUSSING TORTRIX MOTHS ...

In preparing a short paper on moth losses and gains for the journal *Hertfordshire Naturalist* I observed that another very rare species with us – *Cydia strobilella* – has reappeared after an absence of 114 years in Hertfordshire (last record – 1899 in the Hertford area). Of course, there is nothing unusual in this. Moths are highly mobile and many “lost” species have magically reappeared over the last few years. However, *Cydia strobilella* has shown itself likely to have been here all the time – hiding from the gaze of moth group members! In 2013, adults emerged from Spruce cones, brought indoors by John Murray at Marshall’s Heath.

I mention this now because if you were to collect spruce cones **this Easter weekend** and bring them indoors, you may well get adults emerging in three or four weeks’ time! Just store them in an open bucket somewhere in the house, or if you prefer them contained, in a loosely tied cotton pillow case. I should add that there are only two Middlesex records – from Barnet in 2011 and Sunbury in 2020.

Note that other species may also emerge and, as they say in the adverts, other cones are available! Fir, Pine, Spruce, Larch all support different suites of invertebrates, including moths!

FACEBOOK PAGE

A good many of you are associated with the Herts Moth Group’s Facebook page, run most efficiently by Ben Sale. Good for you – social media is not my thing, but good for you anyway. However, just now and again I hear of people who think that the Facebook page **IS** the Herts Moth Group. They are wrong – it is just a part of what we offer. Admittedly we are offering rather little else at the moment, but if you do not get this newsletter (“Moth Mumblings”) either direct via e-mail or as paper copy in the post then you are not on the membership list and may miss out in the future. Also, bear in mind that the more of us there are the more likely that various others will take us seriously when we start banging on about moth conservation issues. If you know of someone, or if you are reading this over someone’s shoulder, all you need to do to sign up is e-mail me and ask. There are no fees.

That’s all for now. Get out there and enjoy!

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