

## MOTH MUMBLINGS – A CORRECTION

### A CORRECTION: DID IT FLY? OR WAS IT PUSHED?

In the last “Mumblings” just a couple of days ago I talked about the status of some formerly immigrant species that are now regular in light traps and widely regarded as residents now.

Including **Dewick’s Plusia** (*Macdunnoughia confusa*) in my list of species not yet proved to breed in our area was a mistake on my part. As many of you have not been slow to point out, the early stages of Dewick’s Plusia were reported on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2020 in these very “Mumblings”, from an allotment in western London (Middlesex) – by Barbara Mulligan.

At least it shows that someone does actually read my ramblings!

Barbara also tells me that she found a larva of **Kent Black Arches** (*Meganola albula*) on Bramble on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020 with an adult moth later emerging as proof of correct identification.

Two down – two to go. This still leaves **White Point** (*Mythimna albipuncta*) and the **Clifden Nonpareil** (*Catocala fraxini*), unless someone can tell me different. I am aware of a breeding record of Clifden Nonpareil in Essex, but I have none for either Herts or Middlesex. I am quite sure that both species do now breed in our area, but I still need this to be proved!

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## MOTH MUMBLINGS – EARLY SEPTEMBER 2021

### REPORT OF THE LAST FIELD TRIP:

**28<sup>th</sup> August 2021: Bricketwood Common, near Watford.**

About 10 people turned up for this event; the low attendance may in part have been a consequence of the fact that it was a bank holiday weekend. It may also have been because of the low air temperature and the fact that most garden traps were indicating clearly that summer moths were more or less over without any real sign of the start of the autumn species!

Bollards were lifted to allow us access to a long straight track that traverses the site between two small lanes. This passes through various type of deciduous woodland and open areas – some with scrub and others presenting a near heathland habitat. A 125-watt mv was hung by the vertical sheet on the side of my Landrover, parked on this track, and then we deployed a further 4 x 125-watt mv Robinson traps – one in an open area with birch-scrub, a second under semi mature willow trees at the edge of the track, the third in an open grassy area, reminiscent of heathland, with quite a bit of Heather and several adjacent Aspen trees and the final one in broad-leaved woodland zone. The lights were turned on at around 20.00 hours, since the complete cloud cover allowed darkness to arrive early. However, the moths were few in terms of species and even fewer in numerical abundance – certainly so in relation to the effort expended, and so after a cold few hours we packed up not long after midnight and were away from the site by 01.00. Nevertheless, we added some useful records to the database and the slower than expected pace allowed beginners to look at the captures in a relatively leisurely manner. Micros were largely absent, though the night did start with someone netting *Metalampra italica*, which used to be very rare but is now spreading, probably feeding on fungi under bark of fallen oak logs. *Musotima nitidalis* is a recent introduction to the British fauna and is becoming widespread in suitable habitat; the caterpillar feeds on Bracken in woodlands and by now is likely to be present in most of the woods in southern Hertfordshire and northern Middlesex. An accidentally introduced species (with oak trees imported from Europe – a consequence of a lapse in the quarantine process within the horticultural trade), the **Oak Processionary** is known to breed in the Watford area. We caught several males which are presumed to represent locally raised individuals, though it should be noted that males migrate to Britain from Europe making interpretation of isolated adults difficult. The moth has spread to become established as a breeding resident across much of northern Middlesex and the southern third of Hertfordshire. This is in spite of the utterly pointless and completely unsuccessful insecticidal “carpet bombing” campaign undertaken by the men in bowler hats; this failed utterly to stop the spread of the moth, but was greatly successful in wiping out many other species. What the Yanks call “collateral damage”?

The full list of captures on the trip is as follows:

**PART 1: LEAF MINES SEEN****Gracillariidae**15.064 *Phyllonorycter coryli* (Nicelli, 1851)

Nut Leaf Blister Moth

**PART 2: MOTHS ATTRACTED TO THE LIGHTS****Argyresthiidae**20.012 *Argyresthia goedartella* (Linnaeus, 1758)**Oecophoridae**28.008 *Metalampra italica* Baldizzone, 1977**Peleopodidae**31.001 *Carcina quercana* (Fabricius, 1775)**Gelechiidae**35.107 *Psoricoptera gibbosella* (Zeller, 1839)**Blastobasidae**41.002 *Blastobasis adustella* Walsingham, 1894**Pterophoridae**45.01 *Amblyptilia acanthadactyla* (Hübner, [1813])

Beautiful Plume

**Tortricidae**49.024 *Pandemis corylana* (Fabricius, 1794)

Chequered Fruit-tree Tortrix

49.150 *Apotomis betuletana* (Haworth, 1811)49.166 *Celypha lacunana* ([Denis & Schiffermüller], 1775)49.249 *Epinotia ramella* (Linnaeus, 1758)49.255 *Epinotia nisella* (Clerck, 1759)**Pyralidae**62.029 *Phycita roborella* ([Denis & Schiffermüller], 1775)**Crambidae**63.119 *Musotima nitidalis* Walker**Geometridae**70.036 *Cyclophora punctaria* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Maiden's Blush

70.061 *Epirrhoe alternata* (Müller, 1764)

Common Carpet

70.100 *Colostygia pectinataria* (Knoch, 1781)

Green Carpet

70.159 *Eupithecia phoeniceata* (Rambur, 1834)

Cypress Pug

70.207 *Lomaspilis marginata* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Clouded Border

70.226 *Opisthograptis luteolata* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Brimstone Moth

70.235 *Ennomos fuscantaria* (Haworth, 1809)

Dusky Thorn

70.258 *Peribatodes rhomboidaria* ([Denis & Schiffermüller], 1775)

Willow Beauty

70.278 *Cabera exanthemata* (Scopoli, 1763)

Common Wave

70.283 *Campaea margaritaria* (Linnaeus, 1761)

Light Emerald

**Notodontidae**71.001 *Thaumetopoea processionea* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Oak Processionary (several males)

71.018 *Pheosia gnoma* (Fabricius, [1777])

Lesser Swallow Prominent

**Erebidae**72.002 *Rivula sericealis* (Scopoli, 1763)

Straw Dot

72.010 *Lymantria monacha* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Black Arches

72.011 *Lymantria dispar* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Gypsy Moth (two males)

72.030 *Euplagia quadripunctaria* (Poda, 1761)

Jersey Tiger

72.078 *Catocala nupta* (Linnaeus, 1767)

Red Underwing

**Noctuidae**73.045 *Acronicta rumicis* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Knot Grass

73.107 *Mormo maura* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Old Lady

73.109 *Thalpophila matura* (Hufnagel, 1766)

Straw Underwing

73.131 *Luperina testacea* ([Denis & Schiffermüller], 1775)

Flounced Rustic

73.253 *Tholera decimalis* (Poda, 1761)

Feathered Gothic

73.291 *Mythimna pallens* (Linnaeus, 1758)

Common Wainscot

73.297 *Mythimna albipuncta* ([Denis & Schiffermüller], 1775)

White-point

73.329 *Ochropleura plecta* (Linnaeus, 1761)

Flame Shoulder

73.334 *Diarsia rubi* (Vieweg, 1790)

Small Square-spot

73.348 *Noctua janthe* (Borkhausen, 1792)

Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow

Underwing

## REPORTS OF INTEREST

A great many of you have been finding **Clifden Nonpareil** (= **Blue Underwing**) *Catocala fraxini*. Too many of you to name here, though I will mention that the moth has been noted as far north as the Royston area, a few metres from Cambridgeshire, where one was found at rest, by day, by Phil Jenner. Do make sure these are reported in your end of year lists to me.

**The Fig Leaf Skeletoniser** *Choreutis nemorana*, an introduced species first found in Britain in Hyde Park just a very few years ago, has been found in half a dozen new locations across Middlesex – always in association with Fig trees, of a variety of ornamental species. Worth looking for now, still, if you have a fig tree in your garden.

### **Sloe Blotch Miner** *Lyonetia prunifoliella*

This formerly rare micro has suddenly “taken off” this year. Mines in leaves of Blackthorn, and probably other species of *Prunus*, have been found across much of our area and **should still be evident** to the unaided eye as you walk past an affected Sloe bush. Take a look at [www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/L.prunifoliella.htm](http://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/L.prunifoliella.htm), memorise, then go look!

## DID IT FLY? OR WAS IT PUSHED?

The status of some species that are now regular in light traps, but which were once scarcer than the proverbial hen’s teeth, is hereby opened up for discussion. In particular, I give you **White-point** (*Mythimna albipuncta*), **Dewick’s Plusia** (*Macdunnoughia confusa*), **Kent Black Arches** (*Meganola albula*) and the **Clifden Nonpareil** (*Catocala fraxini*). Various people had told me, often with great conviction, that “these are residents now” BUT I have yet to have this proven to me – at least in Herts and Middlesex. There are no caterpillar records! No egg-laying observed. No pupae accidentally encountered. A bad case of Chinese Whispers? Furthermore, almost invariably, captures either coincide with activity by known immigrant species or occur a few days or so following a known period of primary immigration activity.

Now, before someone points it out to me, let me eliminate from the discussion **Tree-lichen Beauty** (*Cryphia algae*), **Gypsy Moth** (*Lymantria dispar*) and **Oak Processionary** (*Thaumetopoea processionea*). All these three are PROVEN to breed in one or both of our counties. That said the unusually high number of male Gypsy Moth in the last few weeks is of interest. Only the males migrate. Breeding records are widespread but sparse, whilst the recent flurry of males affects more or less the entire of Hertfordshire – including areas where we do not yet think the species is resident. So are these dispersing residents, primary immigrants or what? And if they are immigrants, why then are White Point, Dewick’s Plusia, Kent Black Arches and Clifden Nonpareil considered to be residents? I know that moth-ing is for fun, but we do need to introduce an element of scientific scepticism when we interpret our findings. Can anyone out there PROVE residency in my list of suggested species? I don’t “do” the social media so perhaps I am missing something interesting/significant? If so, I will expect your Note for the *Entomologist’s Record* so I can publish it.

Note, finally, that there is an old misconception to avoid. Fresh immigrants are usually in fresh condition; the worn ones are usually the residents that have been around for a few days and got battered in the bushes. Of course, fresh immigrants will also become worn after a few days, but either way, freshness is no indication of status. Many people seem to think the opposite.

## DATABASE CLEAN-UP

Those who attended the Bricketwood trip will know that Les Evans-Hill, the data manager for the National Moth Recording Scheme was staying at my house that weekend. Hopefully, by now, all of you will know that the two of us are working on an update of my 1993 book *Larger Moths of the London Area* (thirty years on and I don’t feel a day over 21 – honest Guv). As a part of this process we have been “cleaning” the Herts & Middlesex database. Much of this involves technical stuff that is way over my head, but I gather that, for example, data imported from Excel spreadsheets can be contaminated with stray bits of machine code (I don’t know what it

means and apparently it doesn't really matter). What does matter, on the other hand, are duplicated records. This happens, for example, if I enter a record part way through the year, when it is mentioned to me and the source person also sends it again at the end of the year. Or perhaps several people on the same field trip each send separate lists. It matters because the inflated numbers of each species could potentially affect the flight-time graphs. Les created a fancy bit of software to allow us to delete the exact duplicate records. The result is that we deleted approximately 100,000 duplicates – a surprisingly large total. Nevertheless, that leaves us with a “clean” database of one and a half million valid records (1,496,804 to be precise – counted before any 2021 data is added). Thanks to Les for his effort (which almost cost me a curry – except that my card was damaged and so rejected, so he ended up paying for that as well).

## THE CONTINUING QUEST FOR *CALOPTILIA* (AND *COLEOPHORA*) SPECIMENS

I still want these. The September issue of *Entomologist's Record* will add a new *Caloptilia* to the British list. As it is probably one of the worst kept secrets in entomological history, I feel ethically able to say here that it is *Caloptilia fidella* and that the larvae mine leaves of Hop (*Humulus lupulus*) before rolling the leaf tip. Look for it at, for example, <http://www.bladmineerders.be/nl>, then go and find it for me in both Herts and Middlesex! You should be able to spot it starting now for the next two months (and remember to look also for *Cosmopterix zieglereella* which also mines Hop leaves). Not for gain – just for the brain – but can YOU be the first? (I may ask for proof).

## LACEWING RECORDING SCHEME

Not really moths, but light trap operators often come across lacewings, so this is for you!

The British Isles national recording scheme for lacewings and allied insects (Neuroptera, Megaloptera, Raphidioptera and Mecoptera) has been conspicuous by its inactivity over the last twenty years – a fact that is entirely the fault of myself, as scheme organiser/national recorder. This is about to change, however, as the scheme is being re-launched as of now. I very much welcome material for identification and/or confirmation. In particular, operators of light traps are encouraged to save the lacewings, alderflies, snakeflies and scorpion flies that enter their traps. **All of them** – there are several near identical species amongst both the greens and the browns. I also want material collected casually, away from light traps. There are over 70 species to find! Specimens may be pinned, papered, preserved in alcohol or simply stored dry in tubes. Dated, nightly/daily samples would be the absolute ideal, but pooled, weekly samples are better than nothing. I will supply lists to all contributors, but note that the default position is that I will keep or discard specimens unless directed to return them (and ideally with return postage enclosed).

We are also revitalising the website (<http://lacewings.myspecies.info>) and the newsletter *Neuro News*, with a first edition appearing this autumn. The newsletter will be edited by James Jepson, who is based in Manchester. Please send contributions for the newsletter to him, preferably by email to [LacewingRS@gmail.com](mailto:LacewingRS@gmail.com) or by post to Dr James E. Jepson, Editor, *Neuro News*, Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Williamson Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, M13 9PL. **Specimens for naming or checking should be sent to myself** as should any Notes or Papers for publication in *Entomologist's Record*.

## AND FINALLY ...

I plan to host another open-house event soonish. The last one was generally regarded as a success. An opportunity to meet other moth nerds, look at different catching equipment, access my collections and library and so on. No date yet fixed, but it will be open ONLY to people who have been double-vaccinated against Covid. So get vaccinated and watch this space.

All for now. Apologies for anything important that I missed. Do keep me updated.

Happy mothing,

Colin

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Colin W. Plant  
Herts & Middlesex Counties Moth Recorder  
14 West Road  
Bishops Stortford  
Hertfordshire  
CM23 3QP

E-mail: [Colinwplant@gmail.com](mailto:Colinwplant@gmail.com)  
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