

# MOTH MUMBLINGS – EARLY SEPTEMBER 2022

## WELCOME TO ALL READERS

Especially new ones! Note that past issues of this informal and rather irregularly produced newsletter of the Herts & Middlesex Moth Group are uploaded to our website at [www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk](http://www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk) and may be downloaded from there if you so wish. Please allow a few days after each issue for Andrew Wood to do the uploading.

Please feel free to pass on/circulate this and any other issues as a single unit (including contained images) to anyone who may be interested. The more readers the merrier. To get on the list yourself, e-mail me ([colinwplant@gmail.com](mailto:colinwplant@gmail.com)). However, please do not strip images from this newsletter and circulate separately and/or out of context without the permission of the photographers (if named) or me (if not).

## BY POPULAR REQUEST ...

Having already moulted a couple of times since it first appeared, this newsletter is now entering its pupal stage; it remains to be seen what species of adult eventually ecloses! I am petitioned to produce the newsletter more frequently if and when there are reports of interesting moths to share. This will allow people to go and look for them rather simply read about them after the event. I will do my best (of course, it all depends on me finding time!). I welcome contributions, of course.

Related to this, people are asking why there are no pictures in the newsletter. The answer is simple – I type it in my g-mail account and g-mail only allows text. I can attach files, but I cannot paste them into the text. So, from now on I will attach “Moth Mumbblings” as a Word file. This may contain photos, maps, tables and other things of potential interest that are not in the pasted g-mail message (which I will continue with for the time being). My next bold step into the world of techy stuff will be to try saving the newsletters in pdf format, but I think I probably need to spend money and buy some extra computer software (the notion of coercing a teenage child into doing the hard work also has merits, but is probably impractical on a regular basis).

On the plus side, an advantage of Word files is that you can enlarge the images by dragging and dropping the bottom right-hand corner. They will revert to original size on closing the file (unless you save the changes). This can be a very helpful feature when looking at detail.

## MOTHS ACTIVE IN HERTS & MIDDX NOW – END OF AUGUST START OF SEPTEMBER

The big news at the moment in the massive invasion of Beet Moth *Scrobipalpa ocellatella* – theoretically a nationally noteworthy species restricted, in Britain, to feeding on Sea Beet on the south-eastern coast. In the last week of August, these moths pitched up across East Anglia, west to Leicestershire and Buckinghamshire as well as south to Kent and Surrey. Other counties are probably affected but nobody has told me about them yet. On 26<sup>th</sup> August, William Bishop and myself caught over 300 in our 7 light traps at Sandon, in north-east Herts, but this is unusual and we may have just “hit” a fresh influx. Moths were of both sexes and in immaculate condition. Everyone is else picking up single figures, but this is in traps across the entire of both Herts and Middlesex. If you don’t have this species ticked off for your garden list, there is never likely to be a better time to do so than now – give it a week and they *might* all be gone.





2 images of adult *Scrobipalpa ocellatella* (**Beet Moth**), Twickenham, 26<sup>th</sup> August 2022, Peter Gray. These two photos “stolen” by me from an e-mail sent by Peter Gray.



Sugar Beet crop affected by *Scrobipalpa* larvae – almost certainly *S. ocellatella*. Enlarge the image and note the brown, curled leaves. Image by Ben Sale.



Sugar Beet leaf mined by *Scrobipalpa* larvae – almost certainly *S. ocellatella*. Image by Ben Sale.

Both images taken in Cambridgeshire. Many fresh adults present at rest, but none actually reared to provide absolute confirmation.

### OTHER IMMIGRANTS NOW

Several presumed immigrant species are proving to be widespread, having turned up in many garden moth traps and elsewhere. These include **Humming Bird Hawk-moth** (*Macroglossum stellatarum*), **Bordered Straw** (*Heliothis peltigera*), **Scarce Bordered Straw** (*Helicoverpa armigera*), **Vestal** (*Rhodometra sacraria*), **Pearly Underwing** (*Peridroma saucia*) and **Dark Sword Grass** (*Agrotis ipsillon*). A great many of you are catching these.

Closely following these, numerically, is the **Convolvulus Hawk-moth** (*Agrius convolvuli*), of which there are half a dozen reports of adults in the last week.

**Cypress Pug** (*Eupithecia phoeniceata*) is also widely reported, with many of you catching it for the first time ever. We THINK these are immigrant examples, but the species is also now resident (it arrived in Britain in 1959) on Monterey Cypress and has almost certainly adapted to feeding on *Chamaecyparis leylandii* trees.

A **Striped Hawk-moth** (*Hyles livornica*) was caught at Letchworth on 24<sup>th</sup> August (Roger Millard).

Staying with big moths there are several reports in the first few days of September **Blue Underwing = Clifden Nonpareil** (*Catocala fraxini*). Not only from traps – the general public are starting to report them so one assumes there must be lots of them out there. It is harder to define these as immigrants with certainty, since at least some are probably the progeny of adults that reached us last year.

Henry Wyn-Jones was lucky enough to catch a **Light Crimson Underwing** at his twin-actinic trap in his garden at Muswell Hill (near Alexandra Palace) on 18<sup>th</sup> August.

**Clancy's Rustic** (*Caradrina kadenii*) has been reported twice so far, from Ware (Liz Goodyear) and St Albans (Mark Stirling). Sorry, I seem to have temporarily mislaid the dates. The inexperienced might overlook it as an unusual Pale Mottled willow; check in a book if you are unsure (the dark, often reddish, reniform stigma on the forewing is diagnostic).

I have so far had one report only of **The Delicate** (*Mythimna vitellina*) from Letchworth on 29<sup>th</sup> August by Roger Millard.

Amongst the smaller species, reports include the crambid **Loxostege sticticalis**, seen at Albury on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022 by Jono Forgham (probably the 6<sup>th</sup> Herts record) and another in a nearby village a few days later.

The pyralid **Ancylosis oblitella** was light trapped on 2 September St Margarets, near Twickenham, by Peter Gray and this was followed by one in Hertfordshire at Welwyn on 4<sup>th</sup> September by William Bishops.

There are a few reports of the tortrix **Cydia interseindana**, which seems to have colonised west London in the last few years. It is unclear if recent reports away from there relate to immigration or range expansion. The most recent report was from Hackney Tree Nursery on 6<sup>th</sup> September (Sarah Lo). The larva feeds on Junipers.

One other moth worth mentioning is without doubt the crambid **Sceliodes laisalis** (**Walker**) from the Ealing area of Middlesex on 29<sup>th</sup> August by Barbara Mulligan. Officially it is an adventive species (imported with various foodstuffs), rather than an immigrant, though it would be well worth examining this record later in the light of all the other arrivals. It is an African species; given the likely origin of many current immigrants, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that this species could also come here in the same way?

## RESIDENT SPECIES

The fauna is changing rapidly now that September is with us. Peter Clarke caught the year's first **Brindled Green** (*Dryobotodes eremita*) at Stevenage on 31<sup>st</sup> August. The following night I caught a freshly emerged **Feathered Gothic** (*Tholera decimalis*) at Little Hadham. Every site I visited in the last week where there are Ash trees present has produce both **Centre-barred Sallow** (*Atethmia centrago*) and **Dusky Thorn** (*Ennomos fuscantaria*). Both species in good numbers with peaks of around 30 of each. Interestingly, both these moths do not arrive until around 23.30 hours and then only get going by about half past midnight. If you pack up early you will miss them!

I have been getting several reports of diminutive **Common Brown Plume** moths (*Emmelina monodactyla*). This phenomenon seems to be widespread. Has anyone else noticed?

In the Watford area on 1<sup>st</sup> September, Andy King found a larva of the **Fig-leaf Skeletoniser** (*Choreutis nemorana*). This relatively recent addition to the British list has its HQ in West London, and is showing clear signs of spreading. The present Watford sighting is almost certainly the first for Hertfordshire – though I am not currently able to check the database (plus, of course, there may be other records not yet submitted).

An outstanding Hertfordshire record is that of a male **Coleophora lithargyrinella** caught by William Bishop in his garden at Welwyn on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2022. Named by me recently from genitalia examination, it is completely new to Hertfordshire, whilst the only Middlesex record is from prior to 1902 at Northwood. The absence up to the present record is rather surprising, given the national distribution, but it may just have been under-recorded (few records of wild-caught *Coleophora* species are submitted; even fewer will be accepted by me unless the genitalia were examined).

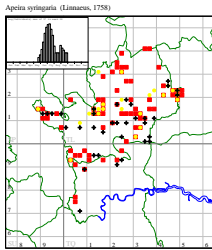
## FEMALES WANTED (OF ORANGE SALLOW!)

I am looking at the life cycle of Orange Sallow and wish to breed adults. Therefore, **I am looking for eggs of the Orange sallow (*Tiliacea citrigo*)**. The moth is flying now (I have had two reports so far) and is associated with Lime trees (including street limes). If anyone catches a female Orange Sallow, can he or she please post or deliver to me, alive, as soon as possible. Or, failing that, if she lays eggs I would be keen to have at least some of these).

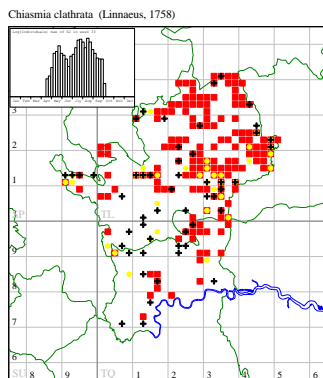
## WHILST NOBODY WAS LOOKING .....

I spotted these two maps by accident, whilst looking for something else.

**Are there really no Lilac Beauties in Middlesex?**



**... and are there really no Latticed Heath's in south-west Herts and most of Middlesex?**



The distribution patterns in the maps pasted above are not reflected by other macro-moth species and so are probably real rather than artificial. Over to you lot!

## SEXY HAWKS

It has dawned on me recently that people seem unaware that the two sexes of *Convolvulus* Hawk-moth differ in appearance and records can, therefore include the sex in many cases. Knowing the sex of an immigrant moth can be useful as it is assumed that in many cases immigration = dispersal and, therefore, it is the egg-laden females that reach us. I wonder if this is correct? Females tend to be more or less uniformly grey; males are usually marbled with areas of blackish. I welcome clear, crisp photos for the next newsletter.

## IT IS TIME TO LOOK FOR MAPLE TREES

Please look out now, whilst the leaves are still present, for mature native Field Maple trees (*Acer campestre*). Make a note of where they are and how accessible they are (both physically and practically) for moth trapping in mid-November. Having done so, please jot it all down and tell me. I am still determined to find the **Plumed Prominent (*Ptilophora plumigera*)** in Hertfordshire (sadly, I think Middlesex is a non-starter). If it is present, it is most likely to be on the chalky

soils along the northern border area with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. It is known from a handful of sites only (probably less than 20 places) from Dorset to Kent and then, nearest to us, in Suffolk and elsewhere. I was shown how to find it at a known site in Suffolk and remember this well because I caught it on my birthday in mid-November (though it probably flies from about 8<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> November in typical years). Looking for target sites before the trees lose their leaves and become harder to spot is seen as important!

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That's your lot for now.

I welcome contributions to this newsletter – and this can now include photos. PLEASE REMEMBER HOWEVER that this newsletter is informal and by no means includes everything of interest. It remains essential that any records included are also added to your end of year listings to me as County Moth Recorder.

Enjoy,

Colin

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