

MOTH MUMBLINGS APRIL 2021

SNOW MOTHS

In what was probably the greatest ever response to anything I have ever written, I am reliably informed that it was snowing at the time I suggested looking for *Adela cuprella* above the tops of willow trees. All I can say is that it wasn't snowing in Bishops Cleeve – in fact it was quite sunny. All day! I am entirely sure, based on considerable experience, that the sun does not usually shine on me, wherever I am, so I can only assume it was a fluke. Dare I suggest that the weather is warming up again!

LONDON MOTH BOOK REVISITED

The following is taken from the upcoming newsletter of the **London Natural History Society**:

LARGER MOTHS OF THE LONDON AREA – THIRTY YEARS ON

The year 2023 will mark the 30th anniversary of the Society's book *Larger Moths of the London Area*, authored by our Moth Recorder, Colin Plant. The work was extremely well-received by the wildlife recording community and by others including, as it did, text and distribution maps for all of the 715 "macro" moth species that had ever been recorded in the London Area by the end of 1991. Equally remarkable was the fact that this major wildlife atlas was produced in the pre-computer era; although the distribution maps were created using the DMap program. Even then, the data all had to be typed in from the hand drawn maps that had been created over the previous ten or so years!

Thirty years later there have been many changes. Animal communities are fluid by nature, but various reports have been published alerting us to massive declines in the populations of moths and many other invertebrates. At the same time other species seem to have expanded their distribution and, in some cases, may have become more numerous. Several species that previously affected the London Area only as immigrants from overseas are now established breeding residents! The *Larger Moths of the London Area*, provides a baseline of moth data, against which comparisons can be made and changes detected but, at thirty years old the book is now, inevitably, out of date.

Changes have also been made to the organisation of moth recording. The LNHS continues, quite properly, to record wildlife in those parts of the surrounding counties of Buck., Herts, Essex, Kent and Surrey that protrude into the 20-mile diameter recording circle which, effectively, creates a giant transect from rural, across suburban and urban and out again the other side. The merits of having such data available for analysis speak for themselves. However, the advent of personal computers has allowed for increased efficiency within the County Moth Recorder (CMR) network. Vice-county boundaries are rigidly used to delimit areas of responsibility; moth recording in Middlesex has improved leaps and bounds and there is a good solid core of regular contributors of moth records, whilst at the same time, people living in the overlapping counties now send their records direct to the relevant CMR. Though this might seem, initially, as if the LNHS is being by-passed, this is not the case. All the counties use the same computer software and the data, which as a result is completely compatible, can now be shared with the pressing of a few keys on a computer keyboard.

So, the time has come. At the initial suggestion of Les Evans-Hill, Senior Data Manager for the National Moth Recording Scheme, plans are afoot to update the London moth book. The new work will be authored by both Les and Colin and it is pleasing to report that the CMRs from the counties surrounding the London Area have unanimously agreed to provide relevant data to the project.

The new book will not be merely an updated copy of the 1993 effort! Computer technology now allows us to deal with data in many different ways. We can, for example, select numerous different background maps, not necessarily the same background for every species, and we can have more than one map per

species if it helps to interpret the patterns of distribution. All in glorious technicolour, of course! No more need for the easily lost sheet of transparent overlays for the rather uninteresting black and white distribution maps. We can also analyse changes in populations and status over the past 30 years and we can create graphs or other visual aids to show not just adult flight periods, but also changes in these where they have occurred. And all this can be done digitally!

Most people who record moths already submit their records to the appropriate CMR; this should not change. However, if you have a backlog of data please try to get it submitted to the appropriate CMR by the end of 2021. Better still, if you are able to target particular sites, especially urban ones, from where there may be few or no moth records, please do so this year.

COLIN'S *CALOPTILIA* CAMPAIGN (including *COLEOPHORA*)

During 2021 we will, as a group, be targeting two of the least well-recorded groups of micro moth in the two counties of Herts and Middlesex. We probably all recognise them, but since naming correctly them very often involves genitalia dissection, they are usually ignored. They are, in no particular order, *Caloptilia* and *Coleophora*. If you are an "expert" then please just carry on as you are (remembering to send me your records at the end of the year, of course). For the rest of us, however, please read on.

CALOPTILIA

Most species with well-marked wings can be named, but those with more or less un-patterned wings, as well as the plain forms of species with patterned wings, are likely to require genitalia dissection. Additionally, there is a brand new species in the form of *Caloptilia juratae* that cannot be separated from *C. semifascia* without full dissection. To date, *C. juratae* has been found in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Belgium. In my opinion it is likely to be in Britain. The larva feeds on Norway Maple.

Problems include:

alchimiella / *robustella* – very common oak-feeding pair;

azaleella =- might be confused by the inexperienced with *alchimiella/robustella*;

hemidactylella / *honoratella* – both increasing in Hertfordshire;

populetorum – some of which resemble *honoratella*;

juratae / *semifascia* – both on *Acer* trees (Sycamore, Maple – better definition required);

betulicola (on birch) / *elongella* (on Alder) / *rufipennella* (on Acer) – plain forms;

COLEOPHORA

Only the strong-hearted, or foolish, should engage with this particular adversary! If you don't already have a level of expertise, then you need to be mentored by someone who does if you are to learn. You will never learn *Coleophora* from books – a few species yes, but the overall group, no! Sadly, we have few much mentors available and even then many species require dissection for correct naming. Most species are, of course, better recorded by collecting the larval cases. However, here we are concerned with adult moths attracted to garden light traps etc.

I would like you to send me ALL specimens of *Caloptilia* and *Coleophora* that enter your traps during 2021 – live or dead. Send specimens via the post, but do make sure they are in something crush-proof. If the package is too big for the average letter-box, please label it with the words "*If out please leave in black box by door*".

Material will be numbered and then "described" by me. Next the abdomens will be detached and the genitalia will be dissected by Graeme Smith (until he gets so inundated with samples that I have to help). We will share the results in due course.

A good method for posting **dead** specimens is to use the plastic screw lids from milk containers or similar. Pop them in the clean, dry lid with a bit of loose cotton-wool to minimise movement then sellotape a piece of paper or card over the top. These can then be posted in an ordinary envelope, though a padded envelope is always better.

Live moths do fine in plastic or glass containers but note two things. Firstly, **DO NOT** make breathing holes in the lid: these are completely pointless as there will be enough air in the tube for several weeks plus, since we are talking very small moths here, they might escape! Secondly, if the container is not “see through” (e.g., old fashioned film canisters or similar) **PLEASE LABEL** the container with the word “LIVE”, otherwise when I open it the moth may escape!

Do please remember to label the moths with all available data (bare minimum is place name, collecting date and your name). Without these data the samples will simply be binned. You will eventually get a list of material sent to me, but this will not be until the winter in most cases as I hope to be inundated with samples!

AND FINALLY ... MOTH CARPENTER WANTED

I am looking for someone half way qualified to help me to build a couple of shelves in my Landrover (for storage of traps and other equipment). I have the design; I am getting the wood today (I hope). It is a fairly easy job, but I cannot saw in a straight line to save my life! Any volunteers? I need it completed by the end of this coming week. I am, of course, offering hard cash in return. Please phone me if you can help. 01279-507697 or mobile 07770-766416.

That’s all for now. Get out there and enjoy the sun while it lasts.

Colin

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