

MOTH MUMBLINGS – LATE JUNE 2021

WELCOME

Quite a lot in this issue – many thanks to the chaps and chapesses that contributed. In particular, the beginnings of a field trip program. I hope you will support the trips that we organise for you – experience is the best (only?) way of learning the moths properly.

Data Protection Rules: The mailing list for this newsletter has increased, which is very pleasing. In part this is because I have randomly added anyone with an interest in moths that has made an enquiry. For boring legal reasons, however, I must make it clear that if at any stage anyone wishes to stop getting this newsletter, all you need to do is simply e-mail me and say so! The same applies if you are reading someone else's copy and would like your own. In both cases use colinwplant@gmail.com.

CLEARWINGS

Oh well – that's summer done and dusted, then! Just as it was getting good. Of course, we all know that the nights were still clear and cold, but the daytime was much better. In the last two days of sunshine many species of clearwings (Sesiidae) were on the wing. Those of you who had purchased pheromone lures ages ago were well-rewarded. Almost everybody caught **Red-belted Clearwing**, usually in good number and in almost all cases within minutes of hanging out the lures. Moths were attracted as early as 11.15 hours on 12th June in Harpenden (by David Hunt) and as late as 18.00 hours by myself in Bishops Stortford.

In the Letchworth area, Roger Millard attracted **Red-belted, Currant, Yellow-legged and Red-tipped** – all on the same morning of 16th June. This was his first ever outing with pheromone lures! Our ancestors would have killed to get just one species! Other people were also equally successful. **Red-tipped Clearwing** even put in an appearance in my own garden, in Bishops Stortford, also on 16th June, with 4 examples to the lure sometime between 14.00 and 17.00 hours. The trap was simply placed on my patio steps within 10 feet of an established Sallow bush. The time of day may or may not be relevant?

Several people, including myself, have also noted Red-belted Clearwing coming to the “wrong” lure! In total, three of us have caught this moth at the CUL lure (designed for **Large Red-belted Clearwing** – a species that is neither known nor expected in our area).

OTHER RECENT REPORTS

There was a small amount of immigration activity in June.

A **Mocha** (*Cyclophora annularia*) came to light 10 June 2021 in Ware, noted by Liz Goodyear. Outside our area there was also one at Denham, Buckinghamshire on same night (Robin Knill-Jones).

A **Gem** (*Nycterosea obstipata*) came to light in Abney Park, Stoke Newington, on 9th June 2021, Matthew Gandy.

There was a **Pearly Underwing** (*Peridroma saucia*) at Harpenden, 10th June, David Hunt.

Two examples of **White-point** (*Mythimna albipuncta*) were noted, one at Sawbridgeworth, 8th June, Lance Spring and the other at Berkhamsted, 5th June, Ian Gamble. The latter was accompanied by **Diamond-backs** (*Plutella xylostella*) and **Silver Y** (*Autographa gamma*).

There was a single **L-album Wainscot** (*Leucania l-album*) in the Isle of Dogs, Middlesex, taken on 11th June by Peter Minvalla (report via John Archer).

As for the resident moth species, numbers remain abysmally low and many species are late in appearance. Amongst the highlights:

Bill Last and Trevor Brownsell tested the new LOB lures on 15th June and were rewarded with the target species of the tortrix *Grapholita lobarzewskii*.

there were larval “nests” of **Oak Processionary** (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) at Capel Manor Gardens in the Enfield area of Middlesex on 14th June (David Riddle) and at Station Road, Bricket Wood (Isabel Crozier).

The tortrix moth *Ancylis diminutana* put in an appearance at Harefield, Middlesex, on 12th June 2021, Simon Buckingham. New species for Middlesex (VC21), but in Hertys (VC20) there are 4 recent localities in the east.

The striking *Alabonia geoffrella* was noted in several places, by several people, usually in light traps but there was also one sitting on bramble leaves on Harpenden Common on 6th June (David Hunt). David also noted that the fern-feeding *Psychoides filicivora* was flying in reasonable number on the same date.

Over to the west in Berkhamsted, Ian Gamble caught **Buttoned Snout** on 1st June (I have heard of at least 2 others about the same date). Also in his trap were the pyralid *Elegia similella* and the micro *Argyresthia cupressella*, both on 6th June – two species that are extremely local in Herts and perhaps absent from Middlesex.

In terms of the more “attractive” moths, Bob Parker tells me that he had not one, but two **Netted Pug** (*Eupithecia venosata*) in his garden at Letchworth. This is a chalk loving species, but is depressingly scarce in the county (unless you know different).

SILKY VERGES

Has anyone checked/can anyone check, the ID of whatever is spinning the bushes on the verges of the Watton-at-Stone by-pass? Huge sections are completely defoliated and spun up with sheets of silk. Almost certainly going to be *Yponomeuta evonymella*, but if you happen to be able to grab any larva infested twigs on your way past that would be useful. I expect that “Highways” will probably assume it is Brown-tail (which it is not) and spray everything!

CALOPTILIAS & COLEOPHORAS

Thanks to those who have sent me *Caloptilia* specimens. The project is ongoing – so I am keen to receive all of your *Caloptilia* specimens, alive or dead, at my address. Late June onwards ought to be a good time to find the adults of many species. Look in the vicinity of *Acer* trees (Field Maple, Norway Maple and Sycamore) in particular. If there are several flying together in the same spot they MIGHT all be the same species or they might not. Please collect two or three from such situations – that way, at east me might get both sexes. Alder, Birch and Sallow trees may also produce *Caloptilia* adults. They often fly in sunshine and are not just nocturnal.

These should be named fairly rapidly. However, I am also stock-piling *Coleophora* specimens for a wo=inter dissection session, so all un-named *Coleophora* are warmly welcomed at my address.

BIG BUTTERFLY COUNT

Butterfly Conservation's "Big Butterfly Count" this year has added **Jersey Tiger moth** (*Euplagia quadripunctaria*) to the identification sheet. Naturally, we are delighted at this early sign of conversion of the BC hierarchy to the true path! The event starts on 16th July and goes on for 3 weeks! Thanks to Liz Goodyear for passing on this information.

A SHORT SERIES OF FIELD TRIPS

We have not had any group outings for some years. For some reason, people lost interest about ten years ago or and I spent hours arranging trips that nobody showed up for. Now, most of the membership is relatively new and I am getting regular requests for field trips. As luck would have it, we have recently received three separate requests for moth surveys and so, being the clever chap that few people think I am, I have combined the two. Thus, I give you Springwell Reedbed for the Middlesexers as well as Bean Marsh and Panshanger Park for the Hertfordians.

Field trips are aimed at all members at all levels. Beginners and those seeking experience of the moths in a different habitat should benefit from being in the presence of "grown-ups" who will be able to name all the moths and discuss related matters. More experienced people will be interested in particular species, perhaps, and may want to bring their own lights. All will hopefully gain first-hand experience of moths that are not found in their gardens.

Group policy on collecting specimens: The Group has no formal policy on specimen collecting but is, in general, in favour of scientific collecting, provided that large numbers of rare species are not taken. In many cases, a "voucher specimen" may need to be collected as evidence of a correct identification. Collecting of "critical" species (those requiring genitalia dissection or other means of close examination) is positively encouraged. However, nobody is obliged to collect specimens. We are happy to accommodate photographers in particular.

FIELD TRIP TO SPRINGWELL REEDBED

We have been asked by Josh Kalms at the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust to survey the wetland moths at Springwell Reedbed in order to advise future management works. This site is south of Rickmansworth, just south of Stockers lakes and directly east of Maple Cross. The O.S. grid reference is TQ041923. The marsh is actually just within Middlesex; the river down the western side is the boundary with Hertfordshire at this point. Access is only possible from the north. The O.S. map shows a car park just to the north and from here a gated track runs south. We are to receive keys to this gate so we can park at the end of the track. This leaves only a 200 yard walk with the equipment to the marsh. As far as I can tell there is no other physical access, so the site ought to be secure. See <https://w3w.co/shed.song.ears/TQ0409592469>.

I have agreed to do some trapping there, but as most people know, a walk of 200 yards with equipment is not ideal for my dodgy legs – I am going to need help. With that in mind, I have decided to make the first visit a formal moth group outing and I have randomly selected the night of Saturday 10th July 2021 for this (changes in the Covid situation permitting, of course). Please put this in your diary. A start time has not yet been selected, and the whole thing depends on me receiving the gate key first. I will announce details in the next newsletter.

As far as I can tell there are no historical data from the reedbed area; this is a completely unknown site for moths. This should be set against the background of a known high invertebrate interest for the River Colne valley at this point. Weather permitting, we ought to get a good haul of wetland specialists. **This is likely to be an excellent opportunity for beginners and for others whose experience of wetland species would benefit from a boost.** Extra light traps are warmly welcomed.

Watch this space.

MOTH SURVEYING AT BEAN MARSH, HERTFORD

This is a smallish wetland area adjacent to Hertford North rail station. We have been asked to survey the moths here – especially wetland species, so that management plans might be specifically targeted towards moth conservation. We are awaiting permission and a key to the field in the south-east corner (the only bit not owned by the Trust) as it is intended to park cars here (otherwise you may have to park literally miles away). If anyone wants to go there by day, do please just go; if challenged ensure that you always mention “Herts Moth Group”. If you want to run lights that is also fine – but you **MUST** tell me in advance so I can let people know (it is an open site, very much overlooked by the public from the road and adjacent housing, so it is essential that your presence is approved in advance. If and when the plods arrive, ensure that you always mention “Herts Moth Group” and that you are surveying wildlife biodiversity for the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

Again – watch this space for details of a formal group outing!

MOTH RECORDING AT PANSHANGER PARK

We have been asked by Jo Whitaker at the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust to survey the moths at Panshanger Park (all of it – not just the nature reserve area). Jo is the “People and Wildlife Officer” for Panshanger Park (jo.whitaker@hmwt.org). This site is in eastern Hertfordshire, just west of Hertford town in the valley of the River Mimram. This request has just come in today, as I was typing this newsletter, so I have not yet fully organised anything. I have just spoken at length with Jo and she is keen to see us there – both as an organised trip and as individual visits by moth group members doing their own thing. I hope to arrange a formal session in the next 4 weeks, but in the meantime people who wish to get over there themselves should not worry about treading on my toes – just contact me for access details and then I will let Jo know when you will be there. The site is driveable – some tarmac roadways and other unsurfaced tracks that might be better suited to my Land Rover – but don’t drive in without permission.

OUR FACEBOOK THINGY

For those who simply cannot wait for the next issue of this thrilling newsletter, there is a Herts Moth Group Facebook site that is open to all comers. I am told that it is easy to join, so if you want to be up to date and also to contribute, why not investigate this. The site is administered for the group by Ben Sale. [I am told it is something to do with computers!].

EUROPEAN RED LIST OF MOTHS

The following text is reproduced as received – without editing.

IUCN in partnership with Butterfly Conservation (UK) and De Vlinderstichting (NL) launches a new project on setting up a European Red List of Moths

Moths are a biologically diverse group and as such form a significant part of Europe’s fauna. They are found along shorelines and on mountaintops, and from the Mediterranean to the sub-Arctic regions contributing to key ecosystem services, such as plant pollination (Macgregor & Scott-Brown 2020) and nutrient recycling. As a group, moths are often extremely specialised organisms, that sometimes rely on single food plants. Moths are also sensitive to the availability of certain habitat structures and specific regional climates.

Population declines in moths have been identified in various European countries, and in some cases quantified. For example, Valtonen et al. (2017) identified a dramatic rate of species loss and a homogenisation of community compositions in Hungary. Antão et al. (2020) reported that in Finland moth abundance had declined although species richness had increased. In the UK, Bell et al. (2020) concluded that moths had declined by 31% over 47 years with significant declines found in a range of habitat types. Many species are likely to be threatened through

habitat change (e.g. Baker et al. 2016, Ellis et al. 2012), for example agricultural intensification and abandonment, changing woodland management and urbanisation.

Despite initiatives, information on moth biodiversity that is readily available can be limited in scope and accuracy and is often out of date. However, information about biodiversity is critical to achieve both global and European environmental protection objectives.

At the European level, the EU's biodiversity strategy for 2030 clearly sets a target to reverse the decline of pollinators across Europe by 2030, through the EU Nature Restoration Plan and the EU Pollinators Initiative. The latter was launched by the European Commission in 2018 to improve the knowledge on wild pollinators, in particular the causes and consequences of their decline in Europe. Moths are part of this group.

The vision of the European Red List is to produce reliable information on the status of biodiversity available to support the work of conservation practitioners, scientists, land-use planners, policymakers and others. Red List data are primarily used as indicators of biodiversity trends at the species level but can also be extrapolated for use as indicators of trends at the habitat/ecosystem level.

With this new project on moths which is funded by the European Union, experts will work on assessing the regional status of all native species of macro moths present in Europe and a selection of micro moth species.

The project is expected to run until March 2024. As an output, several factsheets and publications will inform practitioners, policy makers and the public on the status of a selection of moths assessed following the IUCN's Red List methodology.

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All for now. Do keep me updated.

Happy mothing,

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