

# MOTH MUMBLINGS – MIDSUMMER 2022

## WELCOME

A couple of new people join us in the Herts & Middlesex Moth Group – so welcome to them. Our numbers are currently around the 300 mark, but as we don't pay a membership fee it is all a bit vague. The only list is my mailing list – and I split that into three so that nobody can hack us all in one go, so even I am not 100% sure without adding them up!

## THAT WAS SUMMER THAT WAS!

Wow! What an interesting couple of days. After weeks of depressingly poor catches suddenly we got Thursday and Friday nights (16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> June, for the record)! For me, it was a long overdue return to normal (in the 1980s most summer nights were as manic as this), though for many of you it seems to have been overwhelming. On the Thursday night I caught 135 species in my garden and at last there were good numbers of many species. On the Friday, William Bishops and I had over 160 species in a woodland at Watton-at-Stone. Much more like it. It is too early to know about all the good discoveries, but one that can be mentioned is the rare tortrix *Eucosma metzneriana* caught by John Chainey at Royston (new to Herts; known from Middlesex only at Holland Park in 2005). In central Herts, Trevor Brownsell caught the equally exciting tortrix *Clepsis dumicolana* - a recent addition to the British moth list (from several places in the central London area). It is associated with Ivy on vertical surfaces.

Of course, the rain has now returned! Whether or not we get any further good nights in the near future remains to be seen. The shortest night of the year will soon be upon us – which means that after next week we start off on that slippery downwards slope to winter! On the plus side, the short nights may well mean that some of us might be able to afford the generator fuel for a whole night!

## THANK YOU

First of all, thanks to those of you who made visits to “the” site for the **Liquorice Tortrix moth – *Grapholita pallifrontana***, namely in alphabetical order by surname, William Bishop, Jono Forgham and Andy King. I am delighted to learn that all three people found the moth, including at least one pair *in copula*. Additionally, the foodplant patch seems to be thriving, if not expanding.

The verge where the moth is located is managed as a wildlife verge and there are no perceived threats. That said, one accidental wild fire could take the whole lot out in one go (it is in the seed pods, so would not be protected below ground). It is imperative that we try to find the moth elsewhere. It is still flying now so can someone go and look at the area around **Tingley Wood** (north side of the A655 Hitchin to Barton-le-Clay road, to the east of Hexton and south-west of Pirton), where I am told there is Wild Liquorice growing. If we can find the moth here as well that would be excellent. Remember that you need to be there in the afternoon, and that the moths flit about in the sunshine – diving under cover every time the sun goes behind a cloud. It would be worth taking a camping chair and sitting on it by a suitable patch of Wild Liquorice for an hour.

I would be keen to have any details of the status of the moth in Bedfordshire (a county that starts in the next field along from Tingley Wood!). Indeed, perhaps the Beds moth-ers have already surveyed Tingley Wood?

## OUTSTANDING SURVEYS

All three species mentioned in the last newsletter could now be usefully looked for – historic dates within Hertfordshire are summarised as follows:

Species	Recorded dates	Habitat
Heart Moth	25 June – 26 July	Veteran oaks in open grassland (wood pasture habitat); possibly also in woodland with long-standing oak trees.

<b>Pale Shining Brown</b>	11 <sup>th</sup> June – 28 <sup>th</sup> July	Arable field margins
<b>Forester</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> June – 5 <sup>th</sup> August	Larger areas of grassland that supports the foodplant (Sorrel)

## OTHER INTERESTING REPORTS RECEIVED

*Glyphipterix thrasonella*: New to Middlesex in the Uxbridge area (Roger Morton). There are only 6 records from Hertfordshire:

- Sandridge 1890 A. F. Griffith;
- Cheshunt 1900 W. C. Boyd;
- Suffolk Road, Royston 1999 John Chainey;
- Tewinbury 1992 Raymond Uffen;
- Broxbourne Wood 2013 Colin Plant;
- Scales Park, 2020 John Chainey, Jenny Spence, Ted Ponting.

**Scarlet Tiger** *Callimorpha dominula* continues its relentless invasion of Hertfordshire from the west. It has now established itself across the entire north-western half of Hertfordshire and has also popped up at several sites in central Middlesex. It is flying now, with the first report this year on 26<sup>th</sup> May (Jersey Tigers should still be a month away, yet, so confusion is very unlikely). So ... eyes open! In spite of my mahoosive spread of Green Alkanet laid out for it, the ungrateful insect does not yet seem to have reached me in Bishops Stortford, but I expect it will do in either this year or next. Monitoring the spread is important – please note and submit all records (including counts where available).

## CLEARWING UPDATE

**Lunar Hornet Clearwing** has been reported recently (coming to the “correct” pheromone lure). The ordinary **Hornet Clearwing** is also reported from several places (even I found one in the extreme north of the county at Sandon). There are many reports of **Currant Clearwing** whilst the **Red-belted Clearwing** has re-appeared after a short gap of a couple of weeks. Also widely reported are **Red-tipped Clearwing**, **Yellow-tailed Clearwing** and **Orange-tailed Clearwing**. If you have never seen clearwings, there is no better time than now to get started. In another couple of weeks we should start getting Six-belted and Raspberry as well.

There is a lot of interest in moths coming to the “wrong” lure. There are reports, for example, of Red-tipped coming to the lure designed for Currant. This is all important information so do please record it. However, please take care to avoid cross-contamination. We now know that these lures usually stay active for several years – implying that only the minutest amounts of pheromone are needed to attract male moths. I am sure that we all take care not to touch the actual lures, to wash hands between lures and also to ensure that they are stored in dedicated containers in the fridge or freezer when not in use. However, I wonder how many of us remember the little green cages on the traps? It is worth bearing in mind that the chemicals used clearly bind to plastics – which are then sold to us in small pieces as lures! So, if you put them in a plastic cage in a trap it stands to reason that we should strive to have dedicated traps for each lure. This may be financially unviable for some of us. I certainly have more lures than traps and whilst some traps are designated for particular clearwing lures, the remainder get used for a variety of lures (many of which are aimed at tortrix moths) and so I have started cleaning both the little green cages and the entire yellow trap tops in boiling water for ten minutes after each use (a pressure cooker is big enough to take a trap top easily).

## DO WE REALLY KNOW ALL THE BRITISH CLEARWINGS?

Consider .... before lures, **all** clearwings were phenomenally rare, some probably extinct, and many confined to counties well away from home. Must be true – all the books say so! Then someone inverted lures, marketed them and suddenly most species of clearwing in Britain are common and widespread! Clearly there are a few exceptions, but it is plain that we simply did not know how to find them ... they were always common. So, and here’s the interesting bit, **why are we so confident that we have recorded all the available clearwing species in Britain?** Time to start thinking outside the proverbial box. The last record of Dusky Clearwing (*tabaniformis*) in Britain was evidently in the year 1931 (apart from a random example on the Channel Isles in 2012 (politically Britain, but then so are the Falkland Islands). Really? How many people have actually used the new TAB lure in

long-established Poplar plantations in southern Britain, I wonder? And has anyone **ever** looked for the **Rock Rose Clearwing** in chalk downland? Or what about the **Cypress Clearwing** – potentially associated with mature Lawson’s Cypress trees. All I am saying is open your mind as well as your eyes. The potential for other species, not officially on the British list, is far from small. My personal “thing” is the Dusky – I am determined to find it, though so far all I have attracted to the TAB lure in the few poplar plantations I have visited is the standard **Hornet Clearwing** and the poplar-feeding tortrix *Gypsonoma oppressana*. My challenge to you all is to find it before I do (ideally in our area, but elsewhere will do nicely) and so get YOUR name in print rather than mine! It flies in June and July (i.e., now!) and is, of course, immediately recognisable from the completely dark wings.

The old texts tell us that the **Welsh Clearwing** is found only in a very small area of coastal Wales (and also extremely locally in Kerry in south-west Ireland). This is another good example of laziness by us Brits ... the species is in fact widely distributed across most of Wales and extends eastwards into England in Staffordshire and elsewhere. It is also now known to be widespread in western Scotland. I agree, it is not amongst the more expected species in the south-east – we just don’t have the riverine Alder woodlands, but in areas where Alder does dominate wetland sites it would not hurt to try! It is scarcely any effort to hand a trap on a tree. Interestingly, the appropriate lure (SCO) has attracted the tineid *Psychoides verhuella* twice – near Harpenden (David Hunt) and my garden in Bishops Stortford.

## REMINDER– SOUTH-WEST HERTS NIGHT OUT

There is still plenty of room on this trip so it is now worth contacting me if you plan to come along.

By special invitation, we are invited to spend a late night of mothing in the garden of moth group member Paul Williams and his wife Angela, in Oxhey, south-west Hertfordshire. The date is 2nd July 2022. Based on my records for the last ten years, lighting up time will be around 10pm, therefore people are invited to arrive at around 9pm. All traps will be provided and we do not need extras. The garden is around half an acre in size, but a rear garden gate leads to adjacent woodland and other habitats that are also available for trapping. Weather permitting, this should be a good night. I hope it will also be an opportunity for less experienced people to mingle with supposed “experts” and to get to see a range of moth species that they may not be familiar with? I am told that “tea and eats” will be provided. Please let me (Colin) know if you want to attend. Once you are on the list, I will provide you with the actual address (I cannot give it here, mostly because this newsletter ends of on social media sites and so the entire universe would be able to gate-crash). I shall look forward to seeing many of you there.

## MORE THAN HALF OF OUR MOTHS HAVE VANISHED!

A citizen-science survey, led by Kent Wildlife Trust and Buglife, has found that the abundance of flying insects in the UK has plummeted by nearly 60% over the last 17 years; highlighting a worrying trend and the crucial need for insect-focused conservation research, nationwide. The 2021 Bugs Matter findings, which are published in a report released by Kent Wildlife Trust and Buglife ([Bugs Matter 2021 Full Technical Report](#)), show that the number of insects sampled on vehicle number plates by citizen scientists across the UK reduced by a staggering 59% between 2004 and 2021. These findings are consistent with research which has widely reported declining trends in insect populations globally.

**The Trust needs lots of people to take part in the Bugs Matter survey this summer** (from 1 June to 31 August 2022), sharing findings from their journeys to help understand more about our insect populations! Download the Bugs Matter App now ([App Store](#) or [Play Store](#)), sign up and get your ‘splatometer’ at the ready!

## GYPSY MOTH NOW ESTABLISHED ACROSS OUR AREA

The Gypsy Moth *Lymantria dispar* is now, apparently, established across most of Hertfordshire as a breeding species. There are reliable records of caterpillars up the eastern side of Herts, via Rye Meads and Bishops Stortford (perhaps the Lea and Stort Valleys are of importance and corridors of movement?) and via the central north as far as Hitchin. There are fewer reports from the west. Unconfirmed reports emanate from most of the London area of Middlesex, but sadly very few of these are backed by a record that can be added to the database. Larvae are evident now (early June) – so please keep an eye open and let me know the details if you find any. I am happy to receive photos etc for confirmation. Don’t forget to record the plants they are found on.

Although the Gypsy Moth is certainly guilty of occasional localised defoliation of woodlands in Europe, here in Britain the species is, so far at least, not causing any particular problem. Localised control measures are quite pointless and likely to be damaging to a much wider range of moth species and reporting of sightings to “the authorities” is not advised; they are already busy enough spraying the county’s oak trees with pesticides with the aim of killing a few Oak Processionary Moth (and as a by-product, annihilating all other insect life forms). And we wonder why insect numbers have fallen by 60% (see lead article in this newsletter).

## WHAT IS THE BEST CATERPILLAR ID BOOK?

This is an increasingly asked question, to which there is not really a definitive answer. The big problems is that many caterpillars differ in appearance in their final stage (the last stage before pupation), to that in their earlier stages. Great caution is needed on occasion – the books rarely tell you if this applies. Most books illustrate only the final stage anyway. That said, the best general caterpillar book is perhaps that by Jim Porter, 2010. *Colour identification guide to caterpillars of the British Isles*. Apollo Books (ISBN: 978-87-88757-95-8). There is also probably an “app” (whatever one of them is).

## NOMINATIONS OPEN FOR NBN AWARDS FOR WILDLIFE RECORDING 2022

Building on the success of the previous seven years, the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Trust has launched the **2022 NBN Awards for Wildlife Recording**. These annual NBN Awards recognise and celebrate the outstanding contributions made by individuals and groups to wildlife recording – which is helping to improve our understanding of the natural world within the UK and enabling evidence-based environmental decision making.

There are five categories of awards:

- NBN Award for wildlife recording – terrestrial (open to individuals 21 years +)
- NBN Award for wildlife recording – marine (open to individuals 21 years +)
- NBN Group Award (no age restrictions)
- NBN Young Person’s Award (open to individuals aged 11-20)
- NBN Newcomer Award (open to individuals 21 years +)

Nominating someone for an award couldn’t be simpler, you can even nominate yourself! Just visit <https://nbn.org.uk/news-events-publications/nbn-awards-for-wildlife-recording/nominations-for-the-2022-nbn-awards-for-wildlife-recording/> and complete the appropriate Awards nomination form either online or email the edited MS Word document back to [support@nbn.org.uk](mailto:support@nbn.org.uk) by **17 July 2022**.

Lisa Chilton, CEO of the National Biodiversity Network Trust, says: “Nature’s recovery depends on the collection of wildlife records – so that we can measure and see if our conservation actions are working or not. In the UK, the collection of these vital records predominantly relies on a community of tireless and often overlooked volunteers. So, help us celebrate their commitment and hard work by nominating your favourite wildlife recorders – be they individuals or groups, young or older – for this year’s NBN Awards for Wildlife Recording!”

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Sorry for any typing mistakes – I am doing this in a hurry after being out nothing two nights in a row – need to find a bed!

Enjoy!

Colin

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