

MOTH MUMBLINGS – LATE MAY 2022

NATIONAL MOTH NIGHT

We are now two-thirds of the way through the 3-day event that is the 2022 National Moth Night. Tonight, 21st, is the final night. I confess that whilst supporting this event I am not usually a direct participant. It is very useful in encouraging people out with their moth lights and, in particular, to organise local events for the general public, but many of us are already running moth traps on almost every night of the year – at least from about May to October, so our contribution takes place by default!

If you wish to submit your National Moth Night lists direct to the organisers do please do so **BUT ALSO** include them in your annual returns to me as County Moth Recorder. The organisers will, in due course, “repatriate” records to the relevant CMRs, but this will not be until early 2023. The data will be mixed in with other stuff sent direct to Butterfly Conservation and casual data from the general public via iRecord or whatever. This overall dataset is usually beset with errors and it takes me ages to sort through it (and frequently, simply delete anything not 100% reliable). It is important that you repeat your NMN data to me in your end of year lists so I have a chance to ask awkward questions if need be.

If you do not submit data to the NMN organisers direct, but want me to submit it on your behalf (your name will always be credited) then do; please send it to me and **make sure you tell me that it has not been separately submitted**.

SOME RECENT MOTH NEWS FROM HERTS & MIDDLESEX

Much of south-west Britain has seen a mass arrival of immigrant **Striped hawk-moth** (*Hyles livornica*) in the last two days. These have reached as far east as our neighbour Buckinghamshire, though none are yet reported in Herts or Middlesex. Could be worth getting the traps out tonight – you might be the first! Meanwhile, we do have our own share of good stuff. The following is a selection only.

Return of the *rubi*

The **Small Square-spot** (*Diarsia rubi*) looks like it is staging recovery. After several years with pitifully low numbers across the two counties, accompanied by an apparent complete loss from several quite large areas, this species started to re-appear last year, 2021. I am happy to report that the first brood is currently (mid – late May 2022) pitching up in moth traps across the county, including at sites where it has been absent from lists for several years.

Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet (*Xanthorhoe ferrugata*)

Other counties may differ, especially “up North”, but on our patch we are generally agreed that the Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet is extinct. There are no valid records for over 20 years (a few claims have all proved to be Red Twin-spot Carpet (*X. spadicearia*) when the specimens have been critically examined (male genitalia is easy with a hand lens without full dissection). I am pleased, therefore, to have received a recent report from south-east Herts. The photo looks good, but I am awaiting the arrival of the actual moth to verify the ID. If anyone else catches candidates for the Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet, then please note that I WILL NEED TO HANDLE THE MOTH. The record will not be accepted unless this has happened – no matter whether you are a beginner or a seasoned expert. The only exception will be if you have examined the genitalia yourself and are qualified to make the decision.

Red-belted Clearwing (*Synanthedon myopaeformis*)

This species was reported in the last few days – coming to the correct pheromone lure. This is usually the first one of the year, but the date is in keeping with county records; other clearwings are likely to be out very soon.

White Pinion-spotted (*Lomographa bimaculata*)

This one has been conspicuously absent from many areas for many years, but it has recently turned up at two sites in our two-county area. I have not seen one myself for several years; they used to be "dirt common" in Bishops Stortford, but are currently as rare as hen's teeth. Perhaps they are making a comeback?

***Chrysoesthia drurella* (Fabr.)**

[It may well have an English name – but I refuse to use it, if it has]. This superbly attractive little micro moth has suddenly arrived at five separate sites in Hertfordshire where it has never previously been recorded. Hertfordshire reports all affect the north/north-east of the county, but there is a grouping of Middlesex reports in the east/north-east of the county. Of our 17 records in the present millennium, 11 relate to larvae/leaf mines in *Chenopodium/Atriplex* species. There is no reason why this species should not be widespread and numerous. In the autumn, mines should be looked for wherever the two types of food plant grow – typically on derelict land.

Masses of White Ermine

On 17th May I visited a site at Wallington in north-eastern Herts. It was pleasing to see masses of Green Carpets (*Colostygia pectinataria*) and Silver-ground Carpets (*Xanthorhoe montanata*) at dusk (and at the traps) affecting the field margins against the woodland edger – just like back in the 1980s when this was the norm. Over great interest, however, was the sudden appearance of (literally) hundreds of **White Ermine** (*Spilosoma lubricipeda*) affecting all 7 traps. I first ran a moth trap *in anger* in the year 1978, but have never seen this species in such number! All the moths were absolutely *fresh-out-of-the-nest*!

Map-winged Swift (*Korscheltellus fusconebulosa*)

The same Wallington site also produced a single female Map-winged Swift on the same night. Widespread but exceedingly local in Herts; a single Middlesex record from Greenford in 1950 – not necessarily believable.

***Cochylidia heydeniana* (H.- S.)**

I caught a male of this somewhat scarce (in our area) tortrix at Roe Wood in the far north-east of Herts in the last few days. This is only the 5th Herts site for the species; all affect the northern boundaries with Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire but are not all specifically on the chalk. There are no reports from Middlesex (yet?).

***Gravitarmata margarotana* (Hein.)**

An exceptionally rare tortrix (nationally) we have a single population in the Bramfield area of Hertfordshire. There are several suitable woodland areas, but only one small area of one of these woodlands supports the moth. It was discovered here as recently as 2019 by Ben Sale. A group of us (myself, Trevor Brownsell, Mark Stirling and John & Jenny Chainey) undertook a monitoring visit on 2nd May and managed to find the species in good number in the same small area of the site. Males and females were evident, but all were slightly worn, indicating that they had been flying for several days already. This is in keeping with information that we have, which indicates a flight period starting in mid-April.

***Pammene* and pheromone lures**

Those who have been out and about with pheromone lures will already know, but those who have not will read this as new information, that various allegedly rare species of tortrix have been found over the past 3 or 4 weeks in good number. This is especially the case with species of *Pammene*. During April, we discovered that *Pammene giganteana* was both widespread and numerically abundant – almost wherever an oak tree was growing, from woodlands to gardens. Over 50 were recorded in one pheromone trap after only 15 minutes. As May arrived, the same pheromone lures (mainly "FUN" and "MOL" started to catch a different species, in the form of *Pammene suspectana*. This was regarded as incredibly rare, nationally, but the rumours are false! It is currently widespread across all of Hertfordshire in association with Ash trees, though usually caught as singles or at least only in single

figures. It is clear that it is only “rare” because it does not come to light traps! It flies in late afternoon sunshine and is probably in your garden! It might still be on the wing, but there has been another shift as *Pammene albuginana* has started to fly. Not so many of these – yet. It seems to be another that shuns light traps and flies by day, this time associated with oaks. Yet another allegedly rare species is *Pammene agnotana*, associated with “ancient” hawthorn woodland. We have two Herts records, both made in the last few weeks; the microhabitat may be a limiting factor? It may now be nearing the end of its flight period, but it remains worth the effort of hanging out pheromone traps in suitable habitat. The “FUN” and “MOL” lures seem to be favoured for a wide range of tortricid species.

Once you get your eye in, these species can be separated in most cases, as long as they are not worn, but if you don’t have experience they should be “shown to a grown up” or else have their genitalia examined for correct naming. For some species of *Pammene* the hind wing provides important ID characters.

Carnation Tortrix *Cacoecimorpha pronubana* (Hb.)

Carnation Tortrix are falling into my pheromone traps in my garden. The “correct” lure for this species is the one that works.

I recommend most strongly that people with pheromone lures get them out of the freezer now – regardless of what their alleged target species are. I am told that the Gypsy Moth lure also attracts a wide range of unrelated species. There are new discoveries to be made out there.

SPECIAL EVENT – SOUTH-WEST HERTS NIGHT OUT

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.

There will be a maximum limit of 30 people so **it is essential that you 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!

Car parking is limited at the address itself, but is available in the local area. If there is a big demand, it may have to be “first come first served” so get in touch with me soonish if you plan to attend.

I shall look forward to seeing many of you there.

PLEASE COME AND CATCH MOTHS HERE FOR ME ...

The Royal Entomological Society have recently acquired their next-door neighbour’s land which will be known to many as *The Gardens of the Rose*, at Chiswell Green, near St Albans. The aim is to convert the garden to an invertebrate-friendly habitat. A baseline survey is required now, in 2022, with further monitoring after one and five years. The Herts Moth Group will be surveying moths there!

I hope to make a preliminary visit next week, (late May), but I am looking for people who will be able to make occasional visits to the site throughout the year (all seasons, now to December, for a complete list). These people

will be able to visit without the need for me to be present – i.e., they will have their own equipment (though that said, I may also make trapping visits myself). **EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST TO ME, PLEASE.** Please don't just turn up without me first organising. I am happy to take on several people who may choose to either combine forces on each visit or alternate to increase coverage across the year. We are talking ALL moth species; if micros are not your thing you will be asked to collect them anyway and somehow get them to me for naming. Trap by-catch (non-moths) should also be kept.

I am told that a small amount of money may be available to cover things like generator fuel etc. We can discuss this.

The Royal Society is doing things exactly as they should be done – creation of wildlife friendly habitat, but first with a survey to see what is there and also followed up with monitoring visits. There is also a certain element of pride here ... in **our** county we have the national headquarters of the Royal Entomological Society. In my view it will reflect very poorly on the Herts Moth Group if we don't do a darn good job here!

VACANCIES ON MOTH TRIPS

Subject to weather, I try to go out with my moth traps on alternate nights from about now to September. This is not always successful, but it is a target. I am talking about private outings – not moth group events. This is my personal pleasure activity and I am under no obligations to anyone. On occasion, where I have the landowner's permission to be accompanied, I am happy to have other people come along if they wish. Boys or girls equally welcomed. Some trips might be suitable for beginners to come along and learn more about moths; others may not be so. No event is planned more than 48 hours in advance. Sites will mostly be in the eastern half of Hertfordshire – though not exclusively so.

If you wish to join me, call me the day before you are free, if possible, and ask if anything is happening. If it is I will tell you; if not, then I will also say so!

You will need to get to sites under your own steam and be prepared to help me carry generators etc. I tend to arrive at sites about one hour before lighting up time. There is never a time limit on staying; sometimes I stay to dawn and other nights I pack up earlier if it is not especially good. There is no rule that says you have to stay as long as I do, but if we do stay all night then sleeping will be in your own vehicle (on some sites a small tent might be permissible, but this is generally not allowed by the landowners). On most sites where I can take other people there will be a very strict limit on numbers and if I am already booked then that is just tough, sorry!

If this appeals to anyone, get in touch.

THERE ARE STILL LEAF MINES TO SPOT

Bramble leaf-miner *Stigmella aurella*

Mined leaves of Brambles are still fairly easy to spot at the moment wherever other vegetation has not really yet got going. Look for the distinctive mines on last year's leaves (see <http://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/S.aurella2.htm>) for an image. Parts of north-west Herts in grid squares TQ01 (northern half) and TQ02 (southern half) still lack records. The same applies to much of the Herts/Middx boundary area in TQ29. There are more blank tetrads in Middlesex than tetrads with records (for current situation visit the website at www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk and enter the moth name).

Mined leaves on Birch trees (*Eriocrania* species)

Most birch trees now have their leaves fully opened and the various species of *Eriocrania* that mine them are getting started. *Eriocrania unimaculella*, *E. sparrmanella*, *E. salopiella*, *E. cicatricella*, *E. semipurpurella* (not *subpurpurella* – that one is on oaks) and *E. sangii* can all be found in our area starting about now. Most are hopelessly under-recorded. For our current situation visit the website at

www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk and enter the word “Eriocrania” to pull up all the maps in sequence. For an ID guide go to <http://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/mine-guide/birch.htm> [clicking on the names in this key will bring up lots of pretty pictures].

BAGWORMS ON TREE TRUNKS

Case-bearing larvae of the Psychidae – known as bagworms – are currently in evidence on tree trunks, gate posts, old concrete fence posts, old wooden garage doors, wooden washing line poles and so on. They feed on algae/lichens, so look for older substrates and don't waste time inspecting “clean” surfaces. There are several species and the form of the case is often important. When making notes on this remember to record the nature of the case in cross-section – round, square or triangular are popular forms! Oh, and size matters (so they tell me!). Measure in millimetres. Photos will normally do if accompanied by measurements, but feel free to send me live cases (ideally with a bit of substrate so I can see what they are feeding on).

NEW SPECIES OF *PHYLONORYCTER* DISCOVERED ON TURKEY OAK

A new species has been found in Europe on Turkey Oak. ONLY on Turkey Oak (though not all *Phyllonorycter* on Turkey Oak will be this species). It is worth re-examining any pale-looking *P. quercifoliella* specimens that you may have reared from mines in Turkey Oak. Not yet recorded in Britain – but then a few weeks ago it was not yet recorded in the World! Eyes open!

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN

Weirdly, in the last few weeks three or four people have asked me the same question about labels on moth specimens. The question is “What does *leg.* mean?”

Odd that more than one person has asked at the same time, but for those interested it is an abbreviation of *legit* (singular) or *legerunt* (plural) from *legere* in Latin (to collect). A data label might say:

Hertfordshire
Place name & date
Fred Smith leg.
C. W. Plant Coll.

Or the other way around

Hertfordshire
Place name & date
Leg. Fred Smith
C. W. Plant Coll.

This means that Fred Smith collected the specimen and that the specimen is in the C. W. Plant collection.

It matters little, but never mix Latin and English or confusion will follow!

SPECIMENS FOR IDENTIFICATION

I remain very happy indeed to receive moths for confirmation/identification – both via the post or by personal delivery. This is especially so for “good” species, which will usually be added to the Hertfordshire reference collection that I maintain. **Please keep on sending stuff to me.** However, the quick service that I may have provided for the past few weeks is slowing down as the season picks up

– put simply I am getting too many moths to turn them around by the next day. **I do very much still want to see your unknown moths**, but you may have to wait a few days for the names. If the weather is good, I will likely be out at night and in bed the next morning until midday; this leaves only a few hours in the afternoon for lab work on each day and that has to fit around my own dissections! It is a good job I don't have a life! If there is any urgency over a specimen, then you need to tell me. Please remember the "*Standing Order*" – no phone calls to the home number before midday!

Enjoy!

Colin

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