

MOTH MUMBLINGS - FEBRUARY FLURRY

WELCOME

Being the terribly efficient chap that I (probably erroneously) consider myself to be, I typed brief reminders of important stuff to mention into a blank template of the newsletter. For about the past 4 weeks it all sat there, waiting for me to find time to knock it into shape, and then, somehow, I deleted the file! The skies over Bishops Stortford were blue – and not entirely because of the blissful aeroplane-free months for which we must offer thanks to “the Covid” [for the benefit of the geographically challenged, I am almost next door to Stansted Airport]. So – this is from scratch. I apologise if I have forgotten to include something that you mentioned to me!

RECENT SIGHTINGS

We went through a cold spell, but we have now come through it and the weather is milder, though still cold – getting more and more like February used to be when I was a kid. There was a flurry of repeat sightings of Black-spotted Chestnut in two different parts of the wider Hertford area in both January and February; the moth seems to be well established in Hertfordshire from Ware in the east to just north of Hertford in the west, with ongoing reports from three map tetrads and more recently is reported from Welwyn Garden City. It appears to be still flying in the third week of February.

Now (25th February) we are starting to get spring species in garden moth traps: March Moth, Spring Usher, Chestnut, Dark Chestnut, Common Quaker, Hebrew Character, Grey Shoulder-knot and a few others (the list is not exhaustive so apologies if I missed off your species). There are also micros in the form of *Tortricodes alternella* and several *Acleris species*. Common Brown Plume (*Emmelina monodactyla*) is emerging from hibernation in many areas and some people are catching Beautiful Plume (*acanthadactyla*). Spring IS coming – let us just hope it is not a false start..

Not that we are likely to be allowed out all that soon, of course. Although our glorious (?) leader has set a date for the virus to be vanquished, one might be tempted to think that his plans may be somewhat premature. I am not sure how moth trips to the local woods are categorized – are we liberated with football fans or pub-goers. Or perhaps we can claim educational status and go out on 8th March with the kids? Whatever our masters decide, I am not at all sure that the police, who seem to have got used to busting groups of more than 2, will be quite so fast to tolerate a group of 20 gathering in a car park for an all-night session! We shall see.

ANNUAL RECORDS SUBMISSION

The lockdowns during 2020 may well have boosted moth recording – specifically in people’s gardens. For the past two weeks I have been validating/verifying and otherwise playing with the list that you have all sent in to me. Perversely, this rather boring task has made me very happy, as we seem to have received an all-time high in terms of the number of moth records.

All of the *valid* records sent to me have now been entered into the County Moth Database. Some stats may be of interest:

- **110,496 moth records from year 2020 have been entered into the database (Herts & Middx combined);**
- **A totals of 65 people’s names are associated with these data;**
- **I also received 8,679 *valid* records from the annual “data repatriation” from Butterfly Conservation (mostly records submitted to iRecord);**

- **This means that, in total, I have entered 119,175 moth records into the database in the last week or so.**
- **Consequently, the Herts & Middlesex Moth Database now contains 1,631,682 records.**

Numbers were correct at 25th February 2021, but I have since received three further lists from people.

This represents an outstanding effort on YOUR part. Records received range from lengthy garden lists where a trap was run on every night of the year all the way up to a single report of a Yellow Shell disturbed whilst gardening. I cannot emphasise enough that ALL of these records are equally important. Less commonly encountered species are especially likely to boost the distribution maps – as are common species if reported from new places. All reports, even of boring old Heart & Dart or Large Yellow Underwing, provide phenological data (information on dates when the adults fly). This is enormously important in terms of understanding climate change; many of our local moth species are showing very clear evidence of flying (consistently) up to a week earlier than the baseline published in our 2008 book “*Moths of Hertfordshire*”. Now that we have the data on board, this can be examined in greater detail. As an aside, such an analysis might make a fantastic undergraduate project; if there are any students (or their proffs) out there reading this I invite them to contact me.

MISSING DATA

One person with a (presumed) significant data set has yet to submit his annual report to me. He is aware and is working on it and I have no intention of naming him. Moth catching is a hobby to be enjoyed. Records should be submitted to me as and when time/inclination permits. It is me alone who should get stressed about these things – but do hope he will get around to it sooner rather than later!

However, there may be others who have not communicated with me? If so, NOW is the time to get stuff to me if possible, and especially if you want it included in any analyses. By March I am likely to be far less inclined to spend 24 hours per day at the computer!

One private person, in central Herts, who I will also not name, purports to be sitting on an enormous moth data set – having never submitted an annual list since we set up the moth group in April 2000. A twenty-year data set from continuous near nightly, trapping at a single fixed point is judged to be of colossal importance; it is crucial that this dataset is, finally, included on the counties database so that analyses can begin.

DEATH TO iRECORD! A SHORT RANT

iRecord, along with iNaturalist (and iDontgiveafig) is the new kid on the block. And like many new kids that have gone before, it has introduced helpful ideas, but without consulting with the older kids to see what the effects might be. Let me start by saying I am not anti iRecord, but do have considerable reservations about the way it is being presented to the recording community by various vested interests.

As I understand things, it is a useful means of catching records that slip through the net. At the end of each year the received data are “repatriated” to the appropriate County Recorder. However, it is being interpreted by many as THE moth recording system. Earlier in February I was asked if I, as County Moth Recorder, submit all the received records to iRecord! The enquirer was concerned that iRecord might not get her data if she only gave it to me. It took a lot of persuading that the data flow is actually in the opposite direction and that data flows from iRecord to me. Even then I failed, as she gave it to me AND duplicated it to iRecord.

In the last couple of weeks, I have received a staggering 11,130 repatriated Herts and Middlesex moth records from iRecord, via Les at Butterfly Conservation. This was very worrying! Are there really that many people out there who have no idea who the County Recorder is? Well, no ... because a very large

number of those iRecords were already duplicated to me. THIS IS A STUPID AND POINTLESS EXERCISE. iRecord is not an entity in its own right – it is just a means of getting data to me (and other county recorders). I have neither the means nor time (let alone interest) to sift through those record to find and eliminate duplicates; all were summarily deleted on the basis that I already had them. You wasted your precious time in sending data to iRecord if you had already sent it to me.

Of the remainder, thanks to the GDPR (can't we ignore this now we have [stupidly] brexited?), Les is only allowed to give me the contact details of recorders if they have specifically given advance permission. In most cases, this has not happened. It is not quite that simple as I can get involved in a long and complicated, time-consuming process to get contact details and then still have to find the time to contact these people to query their data. Sorry – there is but one option; these records were deleted.

So, as mentioned above, only 8,679 of the 11,160 records from iRecord were accepted as valid and entered to the database.

In summary, iRecord is good as a catching system for records from people outside the main recording network; but that is not you! Unless it develops into a rival, it is a useful extra method of getting moth data to the appropriate CMR, but the CMR remains at the apex of the recording pyramid. Witness the recent Atlas of Britain's Larger Moths – only data received direct from CMRs was included in that work. YOUR data has no place on iRecord. Although you are, of course, at liberty to copy your own data to anyone you wish – it should be sent direct to me, as usual and, to avoid confusion, not duplicated in any other recording system.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE YAHOO GROUP E-MAIL THINGY?

I was asked this recently. Sadly, I understand that all Yahoo discussion groups are now closed down. I understand that there is some kind of new alternative; if there is anyone out there who knows about these things I will be happy if you want to set up a new discussion forum for this moth group (but please contact me first so we don't get duplication). Please note that my own e-mails to the group are NOT a replacement for a discussion forum.

We do of course, have a Facebook page, but you will need to ask someone younger than me how to work it! The page is managed by Ben Sale.

NATIONAL MOTH NIGHTS (S) 2021

These will be held on 8th to 10th July 2021. Reedbeds and wetlands. For details click on this link or copy to your browser: https://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Countdown%20to%20Moth%20Night%202021%20promo.pdf?_cldee=Y3BhdWsxQG50bHdvcmxkLmNvbQ%3d%3d&recipientid=contact-3bb1e2737435eb11a81300224801c499-f4341abbf84a4ffda5f49e34b967b898&esid=3eb8c7ad-716f-eb11-a812-00224840e8a8

A MYSTERY

Does anyone know who or what is identified by “*Heathrow, EHM*”? This person/group is listed as both Recorder and Determiner in a long list of moth records repatriated to me as CMR via butterfly Conservation. If valid it is a useful list, but there are some suspect entries that need verifying. If anyone knows who they are please get in touch to let me know.

That's all I have got for the moment. Traps out – those Black-spotted Chestnuts won't catch themselves!

Enjoy!

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