

MOTH MUMBLINGS: JULY 2024

RECENT REPORTS

Well – that must have been summer? A couple or three days of hot sunshine – very welcome, but I would have preferred a gradual warm up over the months. By the end of that very short heatwave the ground was already parched in some places and the very light rain was welcome. I have a vague childhood recollection of long hot summers punctuated every few weeks by rain-bearing thunder storms. That was the 1950s; I was young, of course, but do I seem to recall a certain measure of stability in the condition of our woodlands, lanes and meadows.

Back to the present and the last few weeks have presented a mixed bag of moths. The over-riding theme continues to be one of occasional “good” species set against a miserable background of very few moths (numerically) and with many seasonally expected species yet to put in an appearance. Impressions can be misleading, of course, but I am receiving the same message now from at least a dozen people scattered across both counties from West London to the northern border with Bedfordshire; it is the same everywhere. Of course, almost always the results from back garden light traps are poor in comparison with those from outings to the local woodland or wherever – it is a simple matter of the wider habitat diversity. However, as the weather improves and people are actually going out to such places at last, we are now getting a clear message that it is the same in the local woods as it is in the back gardens of suburbia.

I took a break from writing this article to answer a telephone call from a mothy friend on the Dorset/Wiltshire border – he reports exactly the same situation in those two counties. It seems that the situation affects the whole of Britain, to some degree or other. It is vitally important that we do not lose heart and give up trying until it improves; your records from this awful year are utterly essential as a part of the scientific analysis of the wider, long-term situation. If nothing else, we will have the evidence to prove that our impressions are real; the actual numerical data that you provide will feed in via our counties database to the national database and allow for a much more meaningful analysis of the situation.

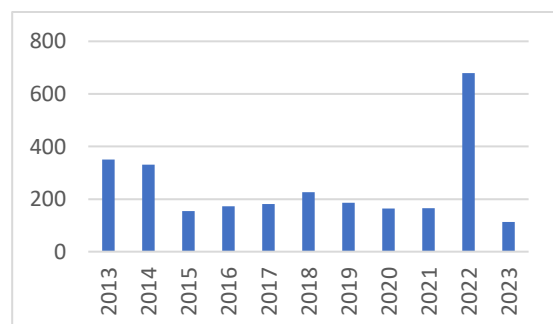
Hiding in plain sight – on the home page of our own web site – is an interesting set of statistics. For the years 2013 to 2023 the numbers of records received, moth species recorded, recorders and affected sites are tabulated; that table is reproduced here:

Year	Records	Species	Recorders	Sites
2013	71010	998	203	803
2014	63901	974	193	732
2015	63246	1007	402	993
2016	63047	1043	365	1188
2017	62065	1089	410	2503
2018	62682	1099	277	3251
2019	69423	1104	374	1443
2020	89377	1130	545	1562
2021	99971	1135	607	2021
2022	104634	1159	154	1107
2023	80375	1022	713	1738

It is not acceptable to simply use these numbers without some tweaking. As a minimum, if there is an increase in the number of recorders there will be an increase in the number of submitted records and so a first sensible step would be to divide the number of records by the number of recorders. That gives the following results:

Year	Records per recorder
2013	350
2014	331
2015	154
2016	173
2017	181
2018	226
2019	186
2020	164
2021	165
2022	679
2023	113

Expressing this graphically, we get the following:



In 2022 there was a peak in records received; the reasons are not at all clear. We did have a targeted search for the Bramble Leaf-miner (*Stigmella aurella*) that year – but that would only reduce the numbers in the second graph marginally, from 679 down to 673. There must be other factors to discover in order to understand the 2022 result. However, ignoring that one year just for a moment, the graph shows:

- a significant reduction in the number of moth records received from 2015 onwards;
- From 2018 to 2023 there is a gradual downwards trend.

Of course, 2024 data re not yet available.

Sorry – no in depth analysis here ... just though people would like to se the numbers. Analysis of the numbers of species recorded each year might differ, but that data is harder to extract (anyone interested and with the computer skills is welcome to get in touch).

Without YOUR lists none of this would be apparent.

FLYING NOW

The few “good” moths reported to me in the last four weeks are either primary immigrants or well-known wanderers. The summer solstice seems to have been a particularly active period. The following list is not exclusive.

The **Festoon** *Apoda limacodes* is far from a common sight on our patch; one south-west Middlesex at Sunbury caught by John Maxen last week is therefore of interest. Reading the text on our own web site at <https://hertsmidxmths.uk/> may suggest that this species is following in the footsteps of a few other species in converting from rare visitor to gradually stablishing resident? The classic example of this is the **Toadflax Brocade** *Calophasia lunula* which was restricted to the shingle beach in Kent and Sussex, in particular at Dungeness. In the 1980s we had to travel there to see this species, but since then (again, read our web site) it has spread north and colonised all of our two counties. This begs the question of whether or not this is a naturally occurring balancing operation to offset a wider loss event? [It is unclear to me whether we are losing our moths through mass extinction or through a continental-level range contraction event].



Toadflax Brocade (*Calophasia lunula*), North London (N6), 21 June 2024, ©Jen Musgreave.

Two other presumed immigrants reported in the last week, were unheard of in our area twenty years ago. **Clancy’s Rustic** (*Caradrina kadenii*) caught in the Ealing area last week is cropping up with increasing frequency since our first record in 2018. After that single report there were two in 2020, four in 2021, 14 in 2022 and then a staggering 117 in 2023.



Clancy’s Rustic (*Caradrina kadenii*), West Ealing, area, 23rd June 2024, Peter Edwards/Barbara Mulligan.

The pyralid *Acrobasis tumidana* (which I feel sure may have a contrived English name that I refuse to acknowledge), was caught at Tufnell Park (North London, on 21st June. It is easy to this species with the resident *Acrobasis repandana* (which is not common in our area), so if you catch one or the other



Acrobasis tumidana, Tufnell Park, 21st June 2024, Tim Blackburn.

please check carefully and, ideally, let me see the moth. *Acrobasis tumidana* appears to be a new moth for Middlesex.

STOP PRESS: As I read this newsletter before sending it, I just received a report of the pyralid *Matilella fusca* in the Tufnell Park area last night, caught by Tim Blackburn. Photo below:



Matilella fusca, Tufnell Park, London, 1st July 2024, Tim Blackburn.

There are rather few Middlesex records and all examples are considered to be migrants from elsewhere.

Switching briefly to non-moths, the green lacewing *Peyerimhoffina gracilis* (family Chrysopidae) turned up at light in Welwyn on 22nd June. This represents the 12th British record at the 10th British locality, all of which are centred on the south-east from Essex to Berkshire. Prior to 1999, it was unrecorded in Britain in spite of extensive

nationwide examination of our lacewings, especially during the 1980s. Is this another example of a non-British insect arriving here and setting up shop? It is important that moth people don't get too focussed; interaction and communication between those interested in different taxonomic groups is likely to be extremely valuable.

Amongst the resident species there is little to report. There is also little consistency between reports: one person reported a complete lack of **Red-belted Clearwings** *Synanthedon myopaeformis* at artificial pheromone lures in central Middlesex, whilst someone else, in north-east Hertfordshire attracted at least 20 males within 10 minutes to a pheromone lure put out at 1pm on 21st June. Interestingly, the lure involved was "CUL" – designed for Large Red-belted Clearwing *Synanthedon culiciformis* which is, as far as we are aware, completely absent from both Hertfordshire and Middlesex. **Red-tipped Clearwing** (*Synanthedon formicaeformis*) was noted at Ruislip whilst in central London the **Hornet Clearwing** (*Sesia apiformis*) was found next to a small group of poplar trees on 21st June. at St James' Park.



Hornet Clearwing (*Sesia apiformis*), St James' Park, London (Middlesex). Tim Freed.

Also from St James' Park, a pupa in the stem of Reed (*Phragmites*) found a couple of weeks earlier on Duck Island emerged on 21st June and was immediately identifiable as a **Fen Wainscot** *Arenostola phragmitidis* – not at all bad for central London. Middlesex records of Fen Wainscot are scattered around the peripheral areas of the vice county and this record is a first for the central zone: take a look at <https://hertsmidxmths.uk/index.php?bf=23770>. Note that both areas of St James' Park referred to here are out of bounds to the general public.



Fen Wainscot (*Arenostola phragmitidis*), ex pupa in Reed stem, St James' Park, London (Middlesex). Tim Freed.

Amongst the images awaiting final upload to the web site, I just spotted *Cydia interscindana* caught by Bill Haines at Ealing on 29th June 2024.



Cydia interscindana, Ealing, 29th June 2024, Bill Haines.

This is a relatively new species for the whole of the British isles and we are host to the focus of the British population in western London. It is a distinctive moth, as the photo shows, and is unlikely to be missed by moth hunters – which means that we can be fairly sure it has not yet spread to a significantly larger area. Keep your eyes open, though!

Finally, a complete surprise was a large and almost unmarked tortrix moth at Welwyn on 29th June 2024, caught by William Bishop. William recognised it as a rather local coastal species *Celypha rufana*

(apparently also called the Rufous Marble) and I was pleased to be able to confirm this from the live moth which he brought round for me to see. This species is completely new to Hertfordshire and is also unknown in Middlesex. The caterpillars feed internally in the rootstock of Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) and Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*). Presumably it was a wanderer, although apparently suitable habitat exists in the general area.

SNAIL-TRAIL MINES ON WILLOWS

I warned you about this last autumn; now it is getting towards time for action. A glance at the phenology chart on our own (recently updated) web site at <https://hertsmiddxmoths.uk/micros.php?bf=3670> shows that whilst we are not quite into leaf-mine season just yet, we are about to enter the peak few weeks of the year to encounter the adults.

You will all be familiar with the “snail trail” mines on leaves of poplars and willows. If not, then look at the several photos of the leaf-miner web site at <http://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/P.unipunctella.htm>. These are made by species of *Phyllocnistis*. Those on poplars (*P. xenia* on Grey Poplar and *P. unipunctella* on most other poplars) are recognised in the adult stage by the entirely white wing base; those on *Salix* species (until recently, *P. saligna* on leaves and *P. ramulicola* in the stems), have a brown longitudinal streak from the wing base outwards, dissecting the white basal area.

At the end of 2023, a paper was published in the *Norwegian Journal of Entomology* in which *Phyllocnistis asiatica* was, somewhat casually, added to the British moth list (for Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve in Cambridgeshire). The separation of leaf mines of *P. asiatica* from our allegedly common *P. saligna* seems to be a problem. It is unclear if we really have *P. saligna* in Britain, or if all GB records actually relate to *P. asiatica*; or we may have both? To add to the confusion, careful examination of the *Salix* mines collected in Hertfordshire in the tail end of 2023 suggests that we almost certainly also have another species - *P. extrematrix* and that this may be widespread. This one mines in the stem only, not extending up any petiole and is so far only on *Salix ?fragilis*.

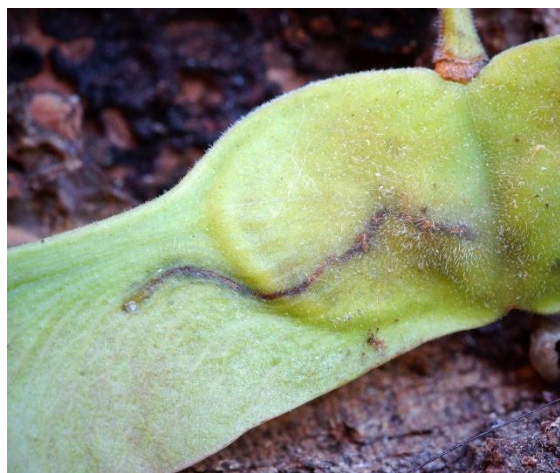
Plans are afoot to try and sort out this confusion. When leaf mines start to appear on long-leaved willows (White, Crack, Weeping and others) **I want them** so I can rear adult moths and then send these for DNA bar-coding. I do not want snail-trail mines on Poplar leaves – I do want the records, of course, but this project targets the mines on willow (*Salix* sp.).

Please get out there now and identify areas to be searched for these mines in a few weeks' time. Find accessible stands of **long-leaved willows** (White, Crack, Purple etc). Get a botanist to attempt to name the species. Make a note in your diary to visit each area on several occasions from late August onwards. I will be reminding you!

JULY CHALLENGE – MINES IN ACER KEYS

For the benefit of those who did not know, **samara** is the correct name for the “key” of trees such as Field Maple, Norway Maple, Sycamore, Ash and some others. I am reliably advised that the larval mines of micro moths are currently (29th June) abundant in the young samaras of **Field Maple** (*Etainia louisella* – see our own web site at <https://hertsmiddxmoths.uk/micros.php?bf=210&abh=4.074&next=yes> and **Norway Maple** (*Etainia sericopeza* – see our own web site at <https://hertsmiddxmoths.uk/micros.php?bf=190&abh=4.072&next=yes>).

The mines of both *E. louisella* and *E. sericopeza* are obvious to the unaided eye, as they are brownish against the fresh green of the tender young samara. The image below shows the mine of *E. louisella* on



Field Maple (Photograph © Ben Sale – nicked by me from our web site!). **Can you find either or both of these two species?** They are host-plant specific and there are no confusion species mining the samara of these two host trees. There is no real reason, given the status of the trees, why they should not be found in just about every map tetrad in the two counties – just like the Bramble Leaf-miner (*Stigmella aurella*). But are they? Over to you.

As always, I am very happy to receive samples in the post if you want to confirm that you are on the right track. All material should please be fully labelled with date, place name, tree name and your name, please).

Mines of the very closely related *Etainia decentella* on **Sycamore** samaras are unlikely to be evident at the moment as the adults are currently on the wing. That said, it may be worth bashing accessible Sycamore branches to see if any adults are dislodged. The moth is very small – but very pretty and quite distinctive!

COLEOPHORA SURVEYS

I am delighted to learn that some of you took up the recent hints/challenges and have been collecting cases of various species of *Coleophora* during May and early June. The advantage of doing this is that the larvae/pupae in the cases are likely to be fully fed in June and require little or no attention – even I can keep them alive! Just pop them in a jar (suitably labelled) and wait for the adults to emerge.

Of course, naming the adults is usually very tricky and so I have had a full mail bag for the last few weeks. This pleases me as I have been able to name most and have added several dots to the distribution maps. Males are almost always possible to name; some females might be more tricky, but I have been using the new Norwegian guide (mentioned in the last newsletter) and find it relatively easy – certainly a lot better than the existing British literature. In the past two weeks I have named examples of *Coleophora flavipennella*, *C. lutipennella*, *C. glaucicolella*, *C. peribenanderi*, *C. alcyonipennella*, *C. deauratella*, *C. striatipennella*, *C. versurella*, *C. therinella*, *C. caespittiella* and *C. laricella* – all from either Herts or Middlesex.

Keep them coming, please. Of course, in July fewer species will be found easily as larval cases, but there are some: It is worth targeting the following list in our area in July (people reading a copy of this in newsletters in other counties may not find the list of species locally relevant). Pupation takes place in the case so even if you can't find active larvae on the leaves you might find occupied cases at the base of the foodplant (herbs) or on twigs (trees):

ALDER

C. alnifoliae
C. orbitella

APPLE

C. siccifolia
C. hemerobiella

ATRIPLEX

C. saxicolella

BALLOTA SP.

C. lineolea – look amongst debris at very base of plant

BIRCH

C. siccifolia
C. orbitella

BROOM

C. saturatella

CHENOPODIUM

C. saxicolella

CHERRY

C. hemerobiella

ELM

C. limosipennella

GENISTA ANGLICA

C. genistae

GENISTA TINCTORIA

C. saturatella

JUCUS

C. glaucicolella feeding on the seed heads

MUGWORT

C. artemisicolella disguised as a seed in flower head

OAK

C. ibipennella

SORBUS SP.

C. siccifolia

STACHYS SP.

C. lineolea – pupating in case at very base of plants

ROSE

C. gryphipennella – rose

THYME

C. serpylletorum (Not yet recorded for Herts or Middx)

HAWTHORN

C. siccifolia

C. hemerobiella

PEAR

C. hemerobiella

ROWAN

C. hemerobiella

If you find any of these, or others, please try to rear the adults and send them to me for naming. All material should please be fully labelled with date, place name, host plant name and your name. Ideally also send the case as well as the moth.

LIQUORICE PIERCER UPDATE

Progress with our long-term project to reinforce the Hertfordshire population of *Grapholita pallifrontana* progresses. Not all of the Wild Liquorice seedlings that we planted out last winter have survived, with water-logging and slugs being a major problem. However, at one site we have achieved a reasonable degree of success and it looks like the plants are established. That said, we don't want to move too fast. It was always the intention to ensure that the host plants could survive into a second year, without assistance, before attempting to introduce any moths. This is the stage we are at just now.

The moth larva feeds inside the seed pods of Wild Liquorice and uses at least two seed pods, actively moving from one to another. Our current plan, therefore, is to locate (at the donor site) seed pods that are apparently almost completely finished with and to move these to the new plants at the receptor site, perhaps tying them to a particular plant, so that when the larva naturally migrates to a new pod it will do so at the new site.

We are still discussing the methodology. It is utterly crucial that we do not deplete the population at the donor site. One favoured method that has been suggested is to look for affected seed pods with the intention of "harvesting" just one pod out of every ten located, doing this only after we have found a target number. For example, if we find 100 affected seed pods we could harvest ten of these, but only after we are sure that 90 remain on site. We very much welcome ideas and suggestions for this phase.

Please note that this Liquorice Piercer Project is now being managed for the group by David Riddle. I don't currently have his permission to circulate his email, so for the time being, at least, send in relevant comments via me.

COMMUNICATION RECEIVED

I have received the following in relation to Carpenters Wood which sits on our border with Buckinghamshire, just to the west of Chorleywood.

The Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside and Rights of Way Service, on behalf of and in partnership with Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) is currently developing a new Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) for Carpenters Wood. We are contacting you and other relevant stakeholders to give you the opportunity to feed into the engagement process. Relevant points from the document in brief are:

- The regeneration of the woodland after a period of significant thinning works to restore the ancient semi natural areas of Carpenters Wood.
- Ongoing sustainable continuous cover forestry to promote the growth of young trees to form the next generation as outlined in the Forestry Commission approved woodland management plan for the site.
- Conservation of veteran trees in the woodland and along the boundaries.
- Ongoing open space management and enhancement of the rides through the woodland for both public and biodiversity benefit.

For ease of sharing with wider groups the plan can also be found online at: [Current consultations | Three Rivers District Council](#)

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That's all folks – keep me posted of any discoveries.

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