

MOTH MUMBLINGS: MAY 2024

THE YEAR SO FAR

Things are *gradually* improving – perhaps. Taking account of reports from people across both Hertfordshire and Middlesex it does seem that almost all expected species for this time of year are now flying. However, numbers of just about every species are significantly low.

To know what to expect, I suggest looking at “Flying Tonight”, accessed via “Arrivals” on the main menu bar of our web site (www.hertsmiddxmoths.uk – for the benefit of anyone who remains unaware). Happily, many of you are uploading sightings to the web site, which is very useful as these records find their way to the scrolling screen on the home page so that everyone can be aware of what’s about in the last few days.

Not everyone uploads to the web site. Some of you prefer to e-mail me direct with unusual records as they arise (which is fantastic); a few of you post such information on our Facebook page (it would help if you also tell me direct about “good” stuff as I almost never go to Facebook). All methods are good as long as you remember to still include these in your annual lists (though please don’t bother with iRecord)!

Based on information received here are a few comments. Some may be a couple of weeks old as have been waiting to fill the newsletter.

Dyseriocrania subpurpurella is reported as having had its best year ever in central Hertfordshire, in particular at Marshalls Heath in April 2024.

An adult *Coleophora otidipennella* was netted by William Bishops in free-flight over *Luzula* in a field at Archers Green NR on 29th April 2024.

The distinctive larval cases of *Coleophora conspicuella* were noted at Harpenden by David Hunt, along with cases of either *Coleophora paripennella* or *Coleophora peribenanderi*, all three on Knapweed. These last two are very tricky to separate and rearing the adults is strongly recommended for correct naming.

A surprising number of 1st instar larvae of **Gypsy Moth** (*Lymantria dispar*) has magically appeared at a large number of sites across our two counties, affecting various foodplants (mostly trees). This even includes my own garden, where I found them on birch and Hazel a few days ago. There is a field of thought that these may have been dispersed from their natal sites by the strong winds a few weeks ago (eggs are laid as a single large mass, so first instar larvae are typically utterly abundant within a few metres or else quite absent).

A mined leaf of Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga crenulata*) spotted by William Bishop at Archers Green a couple of weeks ago was unusual in that the leaf miner web site does not record any moths mining this species. The entire leaf had been hollowed out and then folded over and loosely spun by a caterpillar. About 10 days later a female *Cnephasia incertana* emerged. The moth is in fact known from this foodplant, but is only supposed to mine the leaves in the autumn, making very short tunnels, and then feeding externally after hibernation. A completely hollowed out leaf in the spring is unexpected.

Finally, in the damp of this morning, 23rd May, at first light, goodly numbers of small caterpillars of the **Mullein** (*Cucullia verbasci*) were evident feeding exposed on the leaves of Great Mullein (*Verbascum Thapsus*) on my living roof. They were not there yesterday, nor were the obvious feeding signs they are now leaving behind.

MIGRANT ACTIVITY NEXT DOOR

There are reports of the **Mocha** (*Cyclophora annularia*) and **Portland Ribbon Wave** (*Idaea degeneraria*) in adjacent Bedfordshire on 11th May 2024. The former is a rare vagrant in our area and the latter has not yet been recorded here. It is tempting to suggest that as Continental immigrants they must have flown over our area to get to Bedfordshire! There was also a **Cloaked Pug** (*Eupithecia abietaria*) on the Beds/Bucks border on the same date - so three significant species on the same night as a large magnetic storm, when the aurora borealis was seen across the UK. Additionally, a single *Ethmia bipunctella* was taken at light in Duston, Northampton, also on the night of 11th May. First for VC32, and assumed not to be locally derived.

In our area we have not really detected any migrant activity – or at least, nobody has told me if we have. We do have a few reports of the micro **Plutella xylostella** (**Diamond-back Moth**) but otherwise reports of immigrants are conspicuous by their absence.

ROYAL MOTHS

Meanwhile, “down south” in Middlesex, Tim Freed has finally completed all the outstanding genitalia dissections and as a consequence reports no less than 16 additions to the list for the garden at Buckingham Palace during 2023. These are (if you want English names for the micros look them up on the web site): *Caloptilia honoratella*, *Yponomeuta rorrella*, *Prays citri*, *Cosmopterix lienigiella*, *Athrips rancidella*, *Recurvaria leucatella*, *Epagoge grotiana*, *Epinotia cinereana*, *Grapholita funebrana*, *Uncinus obductella*, *Duponchelia fovealis*, *Satin Wave* (*Idaea subsericeata*),

Dark Crimson Underwing (*Catocala sponsa*), Clancy's Rustic (*Caradrina kadenii*), Rufous Minor (*Oligia versicolor*) and Small Ranunculus (*Hecatera dysodea*).

One outstanding specimen is possibly *Coleophora prunifoliae*, but remains undissected at the moment.

The Buckingham Palace Garden list now includes 6 Red Data Book species, 6 Nationally Scarce 'A' species, and 14 Nationally Scarce 'B' species. Also found for the first time were Marbled White and Essex Skipper butterflies.

ANOTHER SURVEY TO TAKE PART IN

I have received the flowing. I have done the survey myself – it is quick and painless.

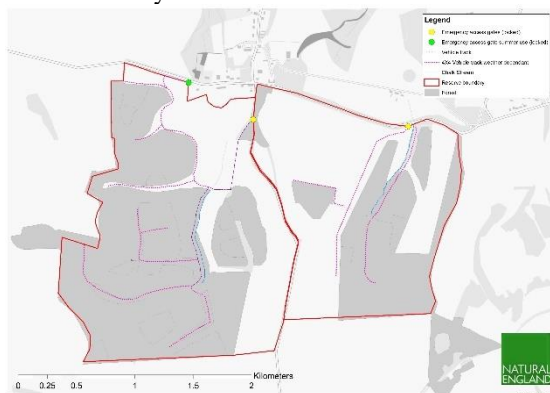
I am a PhD student at the NM and UCL and I am currently running a research project aiming to understand **how people who run moth traps interact with the insects that can be found in their traps**. We have designed a survey specifically for moth trappers that aims to assess this. We expect it should take around 10 minutes, and definitely no more than 15. The survey is entirely anonymous and cannot be traced back to anyone. The aim is that the results of this survey will be published and shared and will hopefully highlight the skills of the UK's community of natural historians. In an era of biodiversity loss, it has never been more important for us to understand our entomological knowledge base.

The link for the survey is below.

https://qualtrics.ucl.ac.uk/jfe/form/SV_55a5pdokmWZ1WS2

MOTH SURVEYS AT HEXTON ESTATE

We are asked to take part in an initial "bioblitz" this coming Thursday (30th May) and then ongoing moth survey work at this newly acquired area which now forms a part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Grid reference TL 1030 – northern Hertfordshire but positioned north of the eastern edge of Luton (Beds). In the above image, the cross roads on the B.655 Barton-le-Clay road at the top are at Hexton village.

The yellow spot at the access point is more or less directly opposite the gate to Hexton Chalk Pit nature reserve – a site now an island, completely surrounded by the new nature reserve area. This map below (of the western part of the site only) shows woodland and grassland (yellow is arable). The western margin of the site is also the county boundary between Herts and Beds.

I am still awaiting details for this Thursday's event. If you are interested please let me know and assuming I get details in time I will pass them on to you immediately.

For the longer haul, I **will** be making a few visits so again if interested do let me know.



CONFUSING ENGLISH NAMES

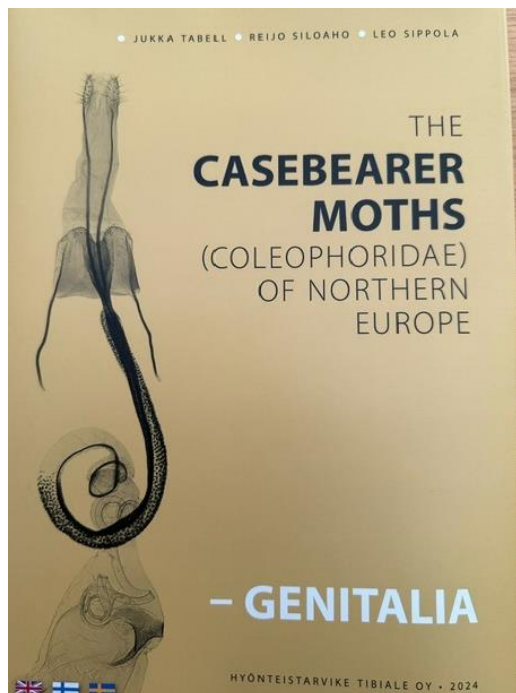
I am not known for my love of English names for the micros. However, if you *must* use them **please standardise**. There are several lists out there and many individual species seem to have different English names. At the moment I am struggling to work out what is meant by "Orange Beauty" - a name that seems absent from all the lists that I have to hand. I know that some scientific names have changed over the years, but these are all formally published and can be looked up (it helps to know the author of the name – e.g., Linnaeus). The application of English names seems totally random ... people should consider adding author names to them in the same way as the scientific names. In the present example, "Orange beauty of Porter" would send me straight to Jim Porter's list of micro names. "Orange Beauty of Heslop" would direct me to Heslop's 1950s list. Or better still get properly into micros and learn the scientific names!

MOSQUITO LIGHT TRAPS VERSUS MOTHS

A new paper by Josep **Ylla** and Ramon **Macia** examines the effect of two actinic traps designed for outdoor use to attract and kill mosquitos. The traps were permanently connected throughout the summer months of 2023 [we are left to assume that this was done in north-eastern Spain]. The paper concludes that the traps may have a great negative impact on moth populations. Not sure if it translates to the frozen wastes of England, but worth a read. The text is in Catalan and the full citation is:

Ylla, j. & Macia, R., 2024. Impacte del parany de llum domestica (o assimilables a domestics) sobre les poblacions de papallones nocturnes (Lepidoptera: Heterocera). [Impact of household (or household-like) lighttraps on populations of moths]. *Bulletí Societat Catalana de Lepidopterologia* **114**: 57 – 65.

NEW BOOK OUT



Not cheap – but I have seen a copy and consider it important if you already dissect micros. Search the web to see the pages and find cheapest source.

ROTHAMSTED LIGHT TRAP NETWORK

I think the following position has now been filled, but Rothamsted are always looking for identifiers so if you are interested do get in touch with Tracy and register an interest.

The Rothamsted Insect Survey is looking for a moth identifier volunteer for one of the light-traps that form part of the nation-wide Rothamsted light-trap network. These light-traps which run 24/7, are operated and identified by

a large group of amazing volunteers who ensure that this network has been able to continue since the early 1960's. Anyone interested in becoming a moth trap identifier should be confident in their ability to identify dead moth specimens, though assistance with verifying particularly tricky specimens can be given. They do not need to identify micro-moths apart from *Nomophila noctuella*, *Anania perLucidalis*, *Plutella xylostella* and *Udea ferrugalis* if they would prefer not to. Samples will be sent to the identifier on a regular basis via the post from the trap operator. The sample boxes will then need to be posted back to the operator. We will reimburse the postage costs of the boxes on a semi-annual or annual basis, as the identifier requires.

More information about our network can be found here: <https://insectsurvey.com/moth-data>. Anyone who thinks they might be interested can contact us on the above email address light_traps@rothamsted.ac.uk

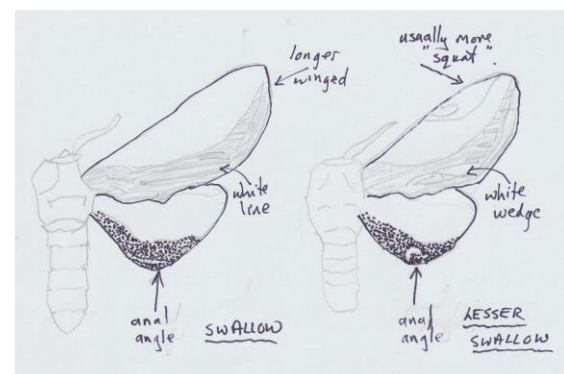
Tracey Kruger
Rothamsted Insect Survey, Rothamsted Research, West Common, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 2JQ, UK

ID CORNER

This item is in response to a specific request. If I get more such requests I will do more such items.

SWALLOW & LESSER SWALLOW PROMINENT

These are on the wing now. Some moths might show an intermediate forewing character. If there is an obvious white wedge then it is a Lesser, but others are less clear. However, the hind wing character drawn below works in all cases. In **Swallow** the thin white line follows the wing margin; in **Lesser** it forms a vaguely crescent shape – usually slightly basal to the anal angle.



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

Colin W. Plant
Herts & Middlesex Counties Moth Recorder
14 West Road
Bishops Stortford
Hertfordshire, CM23 3QP

Landline telephone: 01279 507697
E-mail: colinwplant@gmail.com
