

MOTH MUMBLINGS – EARLY OCTOBER 2022

WELCOME TO ALL

Another two people have joined our circle since the last newsletter – welcome to them and apologies for the poor moths! Indeed, one newcomer put out an actinic trap in a garden about a week ago and caught just 2 moths. Not the best introduction to what is normally a very rewarding hybrid between hobby and science!

WHAT'S FLYING NOW?

In terms of resident species, there are reports of all expected types. For the benefit of newcomers, and those of you who are yet to fully familiar with what might be seen at this time of year, these include **Beaded Chestnut** *Agrochola lychnidis*, **Brown-spot Pinion** *A. litura*, **Brick** *A. macilenta*, **Lunar Underwing** *Omphaloscelis lunosa*, **Satellite** *Eupsilia transversa*, **Chestnut** *Conistra vaccinii*, **Large Ranunculus** *Polymixis flavicincta*, **Brindled Green** *Dryobotodes eremita*, **Orange Sallow** *Tiliacea citrigo*, **Pink-barred Sallow** *Xanthia togata*, **Deep-brown Dart** *Aporophyla lutulenta*, **Black Rustic** *Aporophyla nigra*, **Large Wainscot** *Rhizedra lutosus*, **Vine's Rustic** *Hoplodrina ambigua* and **Frosted Orange** *Gortyna flavago* amongst the noctuids, as well as geometers such as **Red-green Carpet** *Chloroclysta siterata* and **Common Marbled Carpet** *Dysstroma truncata*. One more worth a mention is the **Clifden Nonpareil** a.k.a. Blue Underwing *Catocala fraxini*; recent reports relate to worn examples which helps to confirm that this former extremely rare immigrant is now resident in our area (contrary to popular misconception, most fresh arrivals from Europe are in pristine condition).

This is not an exhaustive list and several other species are also on the wing now. All of these ought to be attracted to almost all light traps in our two counties. However, most of these moths have, this autumn, presented themselves in single digit numbers – in some cases literally only as one or two individuals per trap. I suppose that, on the plus side, it can only get better, but it is a huge concern that the numbers of almost every moth species have crashed significantly at the national level. In many species, populations are known to have dropped by 75% since the 1970s and in a few examples population declines of 90% are documented. The press and general public worry about bees, but moths (and many other groups) are suffering the same problems.

The reasons are unclear. We all instantly blame climate change (and I do not deny that is likely to play a role), but a change in climate is more likely to have the effect of wiping some species out whilst at the same time replacing them with others better suited to the changed conditions. This has happened. We lost the Garden Tiger moth amongst others, and we seem to be in the process of gaining a whole range of new European species, but in terms of the remaining moth fauna what we are seeing is an overall decline in population level of almost every species. In my personal, non-proven opinion, we may be looking at the end-game after decades of habitat loss and

fragmentation, that started with “Digging for Victory” in World War II when we were encouraged to plant potatoes in all those nasty flower meadows. In Europe, where I have been known to seek out the odd moth or three from time to time, there are similar problems in the “developed” areas of the west, but over in the east, in Serbia, North Macedonia, Bulgaria and other Balkan countries, this huge reduction in moth populations is not observed. There are areas of human “development”, of course, but there are also still extensive tracts of unspoiled forests where you can walk tens of kilometres with crossing road (some still full of Brown Bears) and there are huge, extensive flower-rich meadows that have never seen a plough and which extend for tens of miles and connect with other habitat areas.

Perhaps now we can rely on our illustrious government to step in and save the day? Hmm ... let's see. In the last two weeks UK Government has announced that they will be:

- Lifting the ban on fracking in England;
- Removing important laws that protect ecology;
- Considering scrapping plans to reward farmers for managing land in a nature-friendly way.

I think that perhaps answers the question.

Switching to nerd mode for a moment recording the current low numbers is of crucial importance. It was so in the past (that is now our baseline for comparison), it remains so now (as we continue to battle on through this period of ecological paucity) and will continue to be so into the future as changes/losses/recoveries/etc are detected and monitored. So – please don't give up. I know it can be boring, but I **do** want to know if you only caught one moth all night! This is just as important as your list of 30 species from the same date ten years ago.

Many species of moth in our area arrive as primary immigrants from Europe or beyond. Of course, their arrival is a consequence of whatever made them up sticks and migrate in the first place and their presence has little bearing on ecology at their arrival sites in Britain.

Late August and September 2022 have been busy periods for many immigrant species, though in the last two weeks, fresh influxes seem to have all but stopped. One notable exception is the **Vestal** (*Rhodometra sacrarria*), a smallish rather delicate geometrid moth

which seems to pop up almost everywhere and the formerly seldom seen **L-album Wainscot** (*Mythimna l-album*) which also has become a frequent beast across our entire area. Many of you have caught one or the other (or both); I will not list names, as I know from past newsletters that if I miss anyone off the list (which I am bound to do), I will be in deep doo-doo! The example shown below was caught by Roger Millard in north Herts.



I like this moth – it emphasises the silliness of English names!

There were also several **Convolvulus Hawk-moth** (*Agrius convolvuli*), though most of these were well over a week ago. Barbara Mulligan found a caterpillar feeding Greater Bindweed in Middlesex, so clearly a freshly arrived female must have laid eggs. However, there is no evidence of residency in this species at the moment (as a minimum, that would require proof of surviving over winter).

Another interesting one is the crambid *Duponchelia fovealis*. I am sure there might be an English name in Manley's latest book. The specific name of "*fovealis*" refers to the fovea (= a deep pit") on the forewing.



Normally, this species is presumed to be accidentally imported with potted plants, but there seems to have been rather more reports than usual this year and often in association with known immigrant species. The image above shows one caught at Cowley, Middlesex, by Roger Morton.

Most recently – as in yesterday, 3rd October – there were two examples of **Clancy's Rustic** *Caradrina kadenii*. One was in Harpenden (David Hunt) and the other at Royston (Phil Jenner). There were also a few others in the last fortnight, but I mention these two as it suggests that there is current immigrant activity – it could be well worth putting the traps out tonight!

Leaf-miner season is almost with us (expect a pep talk in the next newsletter), but a few early autumn species are already evident. In particular, one to look for is the minute *Phyllocnistis saligna* – the mines of which can be spotted easily by the naked eye on the upper surface of leaves of long-leaved willow species (Crack, White, Weeping and others). I snapped the one below near Little Hadham on 3rd October.



These mines are still occupied, though soon the larvae will mature. When fully fed, the larva will exit and then pupate in a minute fold of the leaf edge.

Another one to look for now and add to your garden list is the tortrix *Grapholita janthinana*. Look for hawthorn berries that have been spun together with silk (which tends to trap the frass from the larva).



The image above was snapped by Phil Barron in the Hitchin area this last week. Here are other moth species inside hawthorn berries (e.g., a single unhealthy looking berry with a hole in it might be *Blastodacna hellerella*), but no other British moth spins hawthorn berries together with silk, so you can tick this as a positive record if you find examples.

OLDER STUFF

Thanks to the naff weather, I have been dutifully sitting indoors at my desk starting down my new microscope at various genitalia dissections that I have performed in the last several days. This is frequently a thankless task – mostly adding extra dates to the flight time charts for poorly recorded species and just occasionally adding a dot to the maps, but now and then, I find a good one! An example of such is the male *Tinea columbariella*, which was amongst the material caught by William Bishop in Welwyn on 16th June 2022. Technically, this is only the second Herts record, but the first (Harpenden, 2021), needs re-examination as there is no evidence that it was critically examined (genitalia dissected). Consequently, this is the first **confirmed** record for Hertfordshire. There are a few reports from Middlesex where it is evidently more widespread.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE GOOD MOTHS GONE (long time passing - with apologies to Peter Seeger).

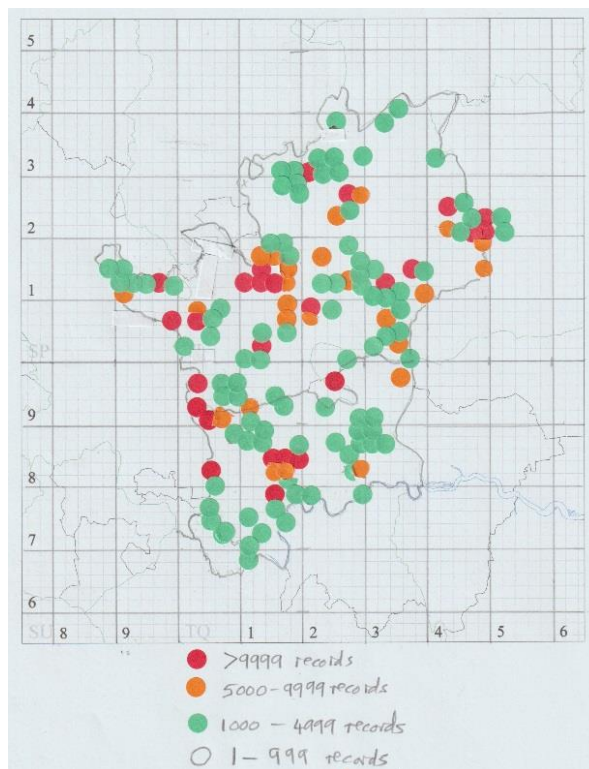
Of course, it is too early for your 2022 data to be in the database. That said, it does take six months for the previous years' data to finally “settle” and so it is, in fact a reasonably good time now to look at how we have been doing to the end of 2021. This will in turn allow us to set some targets for 2023.

Opposite are two, fairly self-explanatory maps, showing:

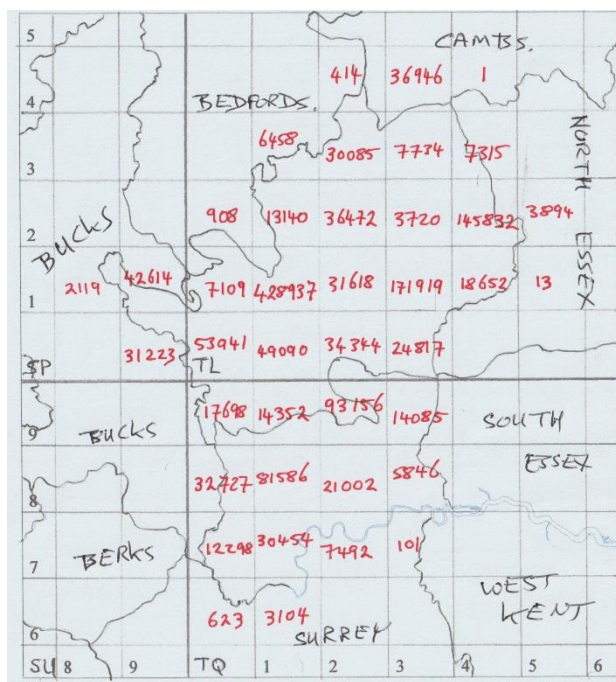
1. **Number of moth records in the database (all species, all time) by tetrads (2km x 2km squares).** Blank tetrads have less than 1000 records, but in most of these the number is probably less than 100 – with most being records of leaf-miners. These blank tetrads should be regarded as “**un-recorded**” and will form our targets for 2023 onwards.
2. **Number of moth records in the database (all species, all time) plotted by ten kilometre squares.**

For clarity, a “record” is a report of *a species at a place on a date by a person*. It is independent of the number of individuals involved.

Two of our 10Km squares have over 100,000 records:



Number of moth records in the database (all species, all time) plotted by tetrads (2km x 2km squares)

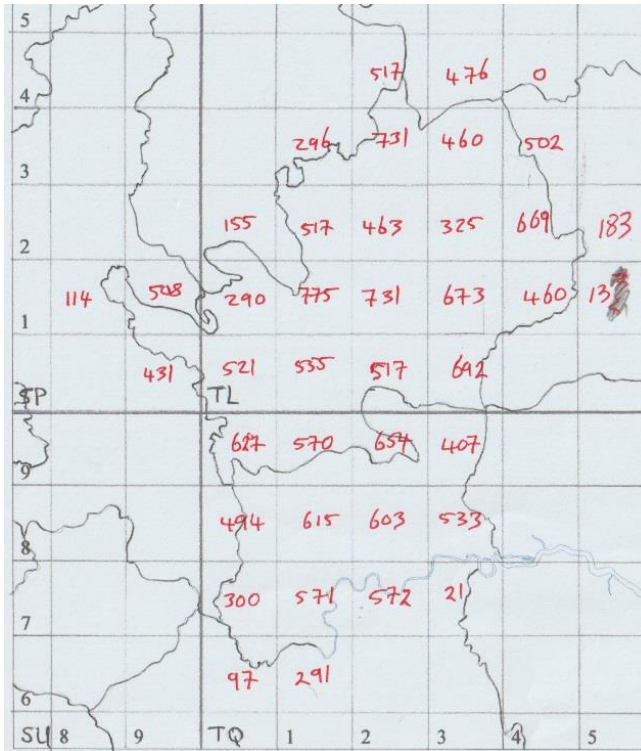


Number of moth records in the database (all species, all time) plotted by ten kilometre squares

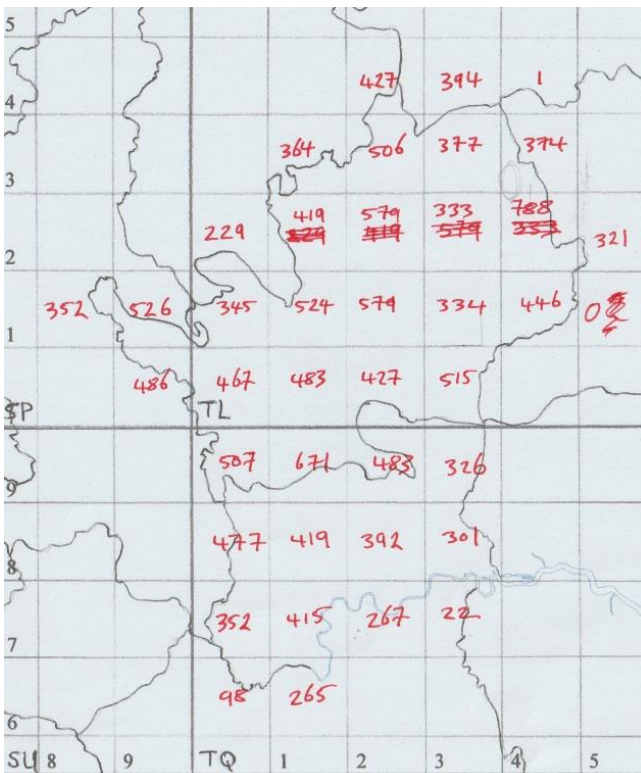
The total of 428,937 in TL11 reflects data from the Rothamsted light trap at Harpenden, operated since 1932 (except during WWII).

The total of 145,832 in TL42 includes my garden and those of Jim Fish, Julian Reeve, Graeme Smith, Geoff Senior, David Wilson, the late Charles Watson and several others over many years.

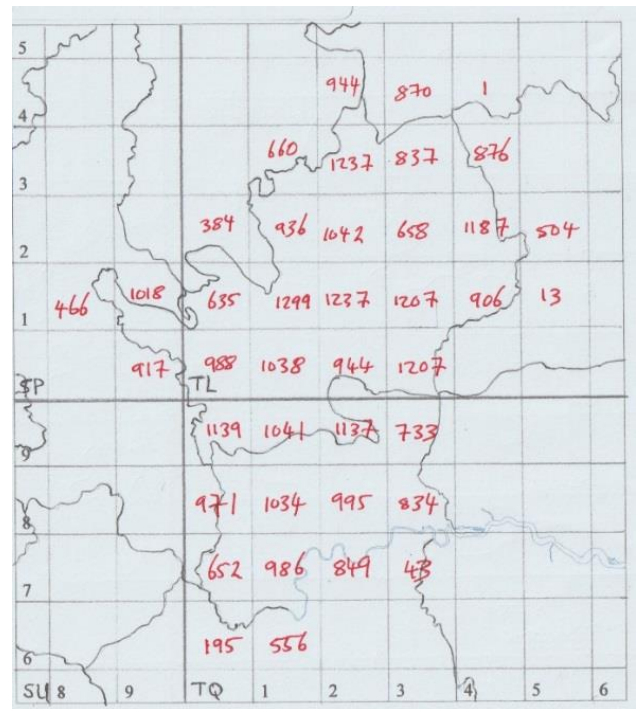
The next three maps show numbers of recorded **species**.



Number of **species** of “micros” (all time) plotted by ten-kilometre squares



Number of **species** of “macros” (all time) plotted by ten-kilometre squares



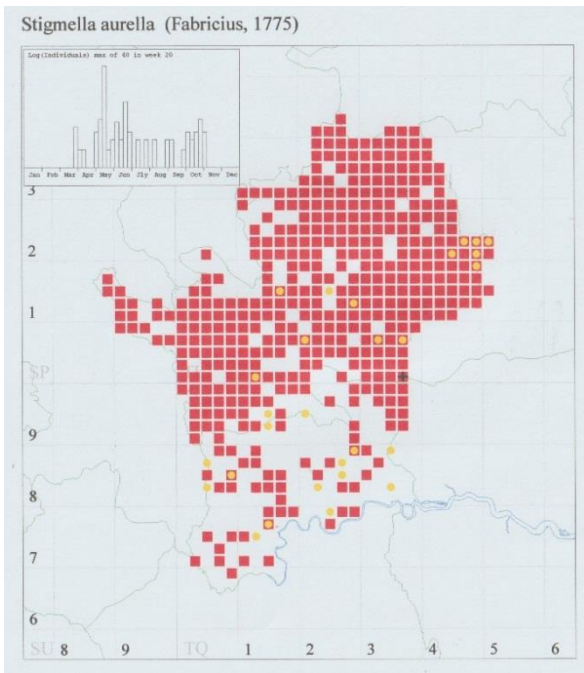
Number of **species** of all moths (macro and micro combined), for all time, plotted by ten-kilometre squares

Hopefully these maps might motivate some of you to wander further afield from your gardens during 2023. Of course, if you don't have some sort of portable light trapping gear then you will be limited in what you can do. Nevertheless, there are plenty of day-flying species that are under-recorded. Typing this made me look at the map of **Cinnabar Moth *Tyria jacobaeae*** – a species that we surely all can recognise both as an adult and as a caterpillar on ragwort plants. It is widespread and common and expected everywhere (there are even reports of larvae from the City of London) yet the map dots are patchy and around one third of the map tetrads in the two counties combined lack any record of this species. Then, of course, there are the leaf-mining species:

PREPARING FOR LEAF-MINER SEASON

I shall be “encouraging” you all to get out and look for leaf mines in the next issue of this newsletter. For now, I just want to suggest areas where you might visit during these searches. The map below shows the current, completely up to date, distribution of the **Bramble Leaf-miner (*Stigmella aurella*)** in Herts and Middlesex. Red squares indicate records in the years 2000 – 2022; yellow spots are pre-2000 reports.

This is a species that is likely to be found in every patch of bramble in the two counties; it is also very easy to spot (though November is better than early October). Almost every leaf-miner expedition records this species – the blanks reflect places where no moth-er has ever tread!



Given that bramble grows just about everywhere, the map above is considered to be a moderately faithful representation of the coverage we have achieved for leaf mines in general – at least the common ones. Most blank squares probably have zero moth records in any category. If you can visit any of the blank squares (or the yellow ones) in the next two months then almost everything you find is likely to be a new tetrad record. Get your O.S. maps out ... some of these might be very near to where you live!

DAVID MANNING R.I.P.



David Manning (on the right), with Ian Woiwod (using a hand lens). Photo taken in 2010.

I am sad to have to report that David Manning passed away, peacefully in his sleep, on Friday morning, 30th September 2022.

For a great many years, David was a leading light in the recording of moths in our next-door county of Bedfordshire VC 30) and was that County's micro recorder up to March 2016. A stickler for accuracy, he was known, in particular, for his expertise in the area of micro moth genitalia dissection – at a time long before it was widely popular for amateurs to do this. Of course, his emphasis was on Bedfordshire material, but he would happily dissect other material if there was a good reason to do so. I remember back in the 1980s I asked him if he would look at around a hundred micros in a tube of alcohol, which originated from a Malaise trap that I was operating at the time within the scrub area in the central area of Luton Airport (an area now covered by buildings!). He immediately agreed. When I also mentioned, in passing, that I had similar material from half a dozen other non-Bedfordshire locations his immediate reaction was that I should send it to him. In all, he found three new county records (for other counties) in the batch! Unfortunately, he suffered a fall three years ago, the outcome of which limited his ability to undertake fieldwork. Our sympathies and condolences are offered to his family.

BIOGRAPHIES OF BRITISH LEPIDOPTERISTS

A self-explanatory document bearing this title is appended to this newsletter. You are invited to contribute – even if just the basic facts with a photo.

THIS NEWSLETTER

We welcome the sharing of this newsletter; other moth groups are free to distribute it to their own members. However, if you use any of the photos out of context, please ask permission from the photographers first.

I welcome contributions to this newsletter – and this can now include photos. Please remember however that this newsletter is informal and by no means includes everything of interest. I cull information from e-mails etc received. Records mentioned here are not necessarily in the database and it remains essential that any of your records mentioned here are also added to your end of year listings to me as County Moth Recorder.

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

Landline: (after midday only): 01279 - 507697

E-mail: colinwplant@gmail.com

BIOGRAPHIES OF BRITISH LEPIDOPTERISTS

Dear Moth Person,

The recent loss of friends John Langmaid, Barry Goater and, in the last couple of days, David Manning, has highlighted a particular problem for me as the Editor of *Entomologist's Record* – that of establishing and collating accurate details of their lives for an obituary in the journal. The older one is at death, the fewer are the people who knew you in your youth that will remain alive and able to remember information from your earlier days. This has stimulated a re-surfacing of my long-term plan to accumulate information on “important” moth people **before** they die. My plan is to get selected people to write their own obituaries – whilst they are still alive! This idea has been floating around in my head for many years, but the recent publication of the biographies of British coleopterists has spurred me into some sort of action.

I am now setting things rolling by inviting text from all the existing County Moth Recorders plus several others whose e-mail addresses I possess. Apologies if you get this twice. This is not an exhaustive list. My emphasis is inevitably on Herts & Middlesex people for the moment and I will need to rely on yourselves to suggest the names of other people to be included. **Feel free to invite them** – I am not interested in taking control and they do **not** need an invitation from me. You will know better than me who in your own county area warrants an invitation (in many cases I will probably not ever have heard of them). I will file all incoming texts/images without question BUT please do ensure that contributors expound their moth-related virtues in the free text section.

If you think that someone who has already died, or who is not able to respond for reasons of health (e.g., dementia) or some other factor, ought to be included please do contribute a text for them. Make sure that you are identified as the author at the start.

Categories of people who qualify for an entry in *Biographies of British Lepidopterists* (initial list – can be expanded)

1. Anyone who has a moth collection (or “had”, if it has already been donated elsewhere);
2. Anyone who has published anything on moths in the literature, scientific or popular;
3. Anyone who has had a moth taxon named after them;
4. Professional moth taxonomists, museum specialists and similar persons;
5. National moth recording scheme organisers;
6. County Moth Recorders;
7. Editors of moth-related journals;
8. Traders in moth livestock or deadstock;
9. Prominent sellers of moth related equipment and/or books and journals;
10. Persons who have made what the relevant CMR deems a “significant” contribution to a county moth database;
11. British persons who have contributed in any way to moth conservation in any other country;
12. Foreign persons who have contributed in any way to moth conservation in the British Isles;
13. Any person who has risen to some level of prominence in the moth world for any reason (e.g., acknowledged experts on a particular group of moths, or specialist in an ID technique, etc);
14. Anyone else who considers themselves important enough to be included (no questions asked – your free text contribution, below, will be adequate justification).

There are, of course, **Data Protection rules** to worry about these days, so let me make it clear what will happen if you participate in this project.

1. There is no intention to make the data that you send public whilst you are alive. If at any stage a directory of people is prepared, texts would be greatly edited and would require your absolute approval before inclusion;
2. After your death, the data may be used to prepare an obituary notice about you. This might well happen anyway, so this is your best chance to make sure the facts are correct!
3. Text sent will not be altered (apart from any grammatical, spelling or similar issues) without your express approval;
4. Text will be stored as a word processor file (i.e., not in any sort of searchable database) on a stand-alone computer that cannot be accessed via the Internet. Images will be stored as .tif or .jpg or some other standard format;
5. All the data will be flagged as confidential so that in the event of my own death my Executors will be able to treat it appropriately;
6. Data will not be supplied to **any** third party for any reason without your express permission.

Please note that this is an exclusively not-for-profit exercise.

There are three parts to your submission, should you choose to participate:

- The basic essentials (birth marriage, education, work, awards, publications, etc):
- A free text section;
- Images.

SECTION 1. Basic essentials

The following is a guide only. Feel free to write lots more if the need arises.

Surname /Title (Mr, Mrs, Ms, Sir, Lord, Duke of, Lord x of place-name, The Honourable, The Reverend, The venerable, KC, JP, Lt. Col., or other) / Previous surnames if any / Given names / Favoured name (name by which you are known) or nicknames /Date of birth / Sex at birth (in case I cannot deduce it from your name (e.g., Lesley and Leslie can be interchangeable); if applicable, any gender change can also be mentioned here) / Country and place of birth / Father's full name / Father's occupation / Mother's full maiden name / Mother's occupation / Secondary Education: school name / Relevant comments: e.g., prefect, head boy/girl, started school moth club, etc / Secondary qualifications (school certificate, O or A levels, GCSE etc. / Further Education (if any): name of college or university etc / Degrees etc / Military history if any /Medals awarded / National awards (MBE, OBE, etc) / Marital status[*married is used here to relate to all the non-single categories without prejudice, but please specify] (Single; Married; Civil Partnership; Common Law partner; etc) / Partners full name / Year of "marriage" / Still married / Partner deceased (year) / Divorced or left (year) / Names of offspring with years of birth / Repeat if more than one marriage / Employment history – jobs and employers is date order with years.

Please also list your addresses over time, ideally with years. **I do not need your full address** – just the town, though you may provide extra detail if you wish. If you have a web site, please provide the URL.

SECTION 2: Free text section

This is probably the most important part of the submission. It is where you wax lyrical about your life, but please restrict it to moth-related stuff (but you can also expand to mention wider issues of wildlife and its conservation, general ecology and so on). Nobody will read this, other than me (and I am bound by the usual rules of editorial privilege), so, please, no false modesty (though no exaggeration either). As a broad guide, I would probably hope for one or two A4 pages at 10 point print (same size as these words), but more is encouraged if there is more to say. Remember to give details of any moth collections (specimens, photographs or other) you have and name any final resting places named for these in your Will. Mention important specimens in the collection (e.g., type specimens, country or county firsts, etc). Also include memberships of moth-related societies, your bibliography (please append a full list of all your publications involving moths, whether highbrow or very lowbrow) and please list any moths named after you.

SECTION 3: Images

Please send at least one and ideally more. The standard portrait is desirable, but other images, in particular any showing you in the field or with other entomologists (please name them) would be welcomed. Please always mention the year that each photo was taken. If places are evident in the photos please name them; similarly, if you can name any other entomologists in the images this will be helpful.

If you already have a CV feel free to append it, but please also broaden it to include all moth-related aspects.

Nobody is under any obligation to provide any personal detail whatsoever and if there are sections you are uncomfortable with, do feel free to leave them blank. Since this is all confidential, nobody other than me will ever know if you refused to answer any question! However, I am sure that most people will appreciate the long-term value of this data gathering exercise.

Please send text submissions by e-mail to colinwplant@gmail.com – making sure you have not accidentally copied to anyone else by mistake!

There is no time limit. Perhaps I will look at submissions in January and then make a plan for the next stage?

Best wishes,

Colin

Colin W. Plant
Editor, Entomologist's Record & Journal of Variation
14 West Road
Bishops Stortford
Hertfordshire
CM23 3QP

Landline: (after midday only): 01279 - 507697

E-mail: colinwplant@gmail.com

Web: www.entrecord.com
