

MOTH MUMBLINGS: AUGUST 2023

WELCOME

My apologies for the prolonged silence (did anyone even notice I was gone?). I got back from Europe at the start of August, but I brought with me over a thousand specimens of pyraloid moths to dissect so I have been a little bit busy sorting these out. The trip was in two parts with part 2 being an intensive study of the moths of the new (declared December 2021) Dinara National Park in Croatia (in the Dalmatian arm of the country, north of Split and near the border with Bosnia). The event was organised by the Hyla Association from Zagreb and the Dubrovnik Natural History Museum. I predicted a tally of 70 Pyraloidea species on arrival; the week's tally was 62, so I was not that far off. Anyway, now that all the dissections are done and dusted I suppose I had better think about a newsletter.

A second reason for my delay was that I was waiting for a formal communication from the Herts Natural History Society concerning funding of our proposed new Herts & Middx Moth Group web site. **I am extremely delighted to now be able to report that the HNHS has agreed to provide 100% funding for the project- a figure of £5800.** We have appointed Jim Wheeler to create the site which will, as already mentioned, adhere to the now widely adopted "Norfolk Model".

My thanks to those many of you who sent me cheques or cash contributing towards the funding of the web site over the past few weeks. Clearly, these contributions are no longer needed. In keeping with my self-enforced policy of total transparency when it comes to other people's money and the moth group, I will destroy these cheques (and refund any cash) next Wednesday, 23rd August 2023 – just on the off-chance that anyone objects! Note that I have not cashed/banked any of these received cheques.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

One thing is pretty certain - I am likely to be spending the next six months updating the species texts that appear on our existing web site. These texts quote from our various past publications and were supplemented by Andrew Wood who added contemporary comments. I plan to retain as much as possible – there is nothing at all wrong with Andrew's texts – but for some selected species a complete re-write may be desirable. I welcome any helpful comments on this.

I am looking for volunteers. I have this fanciful idea that once a format has been decided upon, at least some of you might take on re-writing chunks of text, with me reduced to the role of Editor. For example, you may have a special interest in the "waves" or the "minors"? Or you may have knowledge of an individual species? I am open to offers and ideas. Contact me!

I am also, without doubt, looking for high quality colour images of moths TAKEN IN EITHER HERTS OR MIDDLESEX and for which data (place, date) is available. As mentioned in an earlier issue of this newsletter, Ben Sale has agreed to collate these images, but this is going to be an enormous job.

What I want is – for every moth species in the two counties – sharp, well-focused colour images of live adult moths showing upperside, underside, side view and top view as well as any relevant "specialist" shots such as the labial palps of Gelechiidae, the hairy eyes of members of the Hadeninae and so on.

I also want high quality colour images of set museum specimens showing both upperside and underside.

Sorry – not finished! I also want colour images of eggs, larvae and pupae wherever possible.

And then I want shots showing colour variations, forms, varieties, etc.

Finally, "habitat shots" may also prove useful place for some species.

An in terms of habitats – forget ye not my ongoing quest to gather "before and after" images of moth sites in the two counties as these can be critical in understanding changes in population, distribution and so on.

If in doubt – I want it. If you have to ask then you have probably not understood. As long as it is a good image, I want it. We can always delete it later.

HOW TO NAME FILES

Do not trust me. Make the species name a part of the file name and then include other helpful data. For example "*LaryellunderwingunderHertford31Dec 2024CWPlant.jpg*" Or something similar. We will doubtless re-name it anyway before uploading – but at least help us get the species right from the start.

UPDATE ON DUSKY CLEARWINGS

I am pretty sure that the adult flight period is now over for the year, but it is perhaps worth mention here before we lose sight of things that the numerous negative results which I obtained using pheromone lures across much of Hertfordshire at the end of June are likely to reflect a genuine absence rather than an out of date pheromone lure. In early July, I took the same TAB lure that I had used in Herts on my trip to Croatia. On day one, I pulled into a garage in Belgium to get tanked up with diesel, and espied a poplar plantation by the slip road. I attracted two male Dusky Clearwing to the lure

almost immediately. A few days later, and following at least two days of temperatures in excess of 30 degrees in my Land Rover with no air-conditioning, I used the lure again in the garden of my friend Andrea in eastern Budapest. Within half an hour I had caught two moths. Conclusion, the lure is fine and the negative Hertfordshire result is likely to be genuine.

That said, my European experience now more or less confirms that Dusky Clearwings don't fly until around 4 – 6pm, so some of my surveys are likely to have been destined to fail as I undertook them at lunch time!

INTERESTING REPORTS

I observe that the Hornets are now flying – and causing grief in many a woodland moth trap! They used to be very rare! It is worth recording “Hornet” on at least one night's moth list so I can make sure that a record makes it to the relevant database. It will be interesting to see if they affect the entire London area or just the outer edges of Middlesex?

Back to the moths and in no particular order, other than that of working through my e-mail in-box for July 2023, here are some highlights:

As I type this in mid-August 2023 the **Jersey Tiger** *Euplagia quadripunctaria* seems intent on staging a *complete* take-over. Every year I get “lots” of unsolicited e-mails from the general public reporting this species; it seems that a great many people own out of date moth books, as these e-mails almost always indicate excitement at finding such a rare species! In a way it is a shame to tell them the truth. I now have a pre-typed response that I send – so numerous are the reports!

For the record, you can expect to see a Jersey Tiger in **every** 2 x 2km map tetrad in both Herts and Middlesex.

The record held for largest number in a single moth trap still rests with Liz Goodyear, who writes (from Ware, Hertfordshire) “... if you really want to see some Jersey Tigers you should have been in my garden when I checked the trap this morning [14th August 2023]. All 280 individuals!!!! It started on Friday with 166, then after a night off as we had to go to Wales, Sunday morning 177 and then this morning 280! 177 was a record. I reckon they are nearly all males – no mating pairs and possibly a ratio of 1 in 10 being yellow hindwing. Looks like my garden light has become an assembly area for the local population! Currently if I look up into my apple tree – there are countless JTs perched there.

Dark Crimson Underwing *Catocala sponsa* is reported from several localities in the last couple of weeks in both Herts and Middlesex. It is unclear if the moths are primary immigrants or locally bred individuals following the spate of autumn sightings in the last couple of years. Either way, a cracking moth to discover in your garden moth trap in the morning!

Udea fulvalis is reported for the second year running in the Cowley area of Middlesex, by Roger Morton. It seems probable that this once rare crambid moth, presumed to persist only as a primary immigrant, is breeding somewhere nearby. The larvae feed on *Salvia*, *Nepeta*, *Ballota* and *Melandrium*, amongst others and is also known on the leaves of potato plants.

Argolamprotes micella is a small but attractive member of the family Gelechiidae, apparently called the “Bright Neb” by some! An example came to George Fowler's light trap on 10th July 2023 in the Broxbourne area and is **new to Hertfordshire**. The ID has been confirmed by Steve Palmer of the National Gelechiidae Recording Scheme).



Argolamprotes micella, Broxbourne, 10 July 2023

Normally restricted to the south-west of England the nearest known other sighting to us is at the RSPB headquarters at Sandy in Bedfordshire. It is associated with brambles!

The Fig-leaf Skeletoniser *Choreutis nemorana* is now well-established in the London area, but until now does not seem to have “escaped” particularly far northwards! One at Broxbourne on 19th July 2023 by George Fowler appears to be the first report from Hertfordshire (though I have a few hundred e-mails yet to examine). George reports seeing several individuals – oh, and his Fig tree has been “eaten”!



Choreutis nemorana, Broxbourne, July 2023

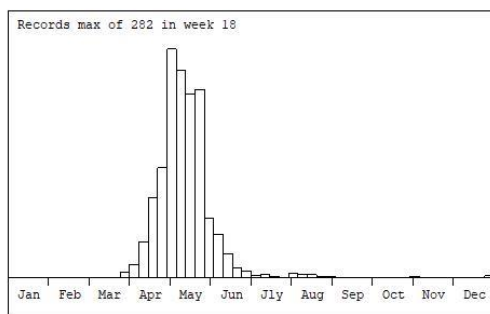
People should be looking for this moth and “mature” feeding signs now – the second half of August.

Nine-spotted *Amata phegea*. This most unexpected species was noted in a garden in North London (TL1888) on 27th June by Ms Frederica Patmore. A photograph was posted on social media and was overlooked by me but I am grateful to Martin Honey for drawing it to my attention. View the image at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10227606950933640&set=gm.2841071379361786&idorvanity=140023566133261>.

The species is almost certainly *phegea*, but there are lookalikes and one of these is at least as unlikely in London as is the true *phegea*! Either way it is quite **new to Middlesex** and is also, as far as I can tell, only the third British record.

Jersey Mocha *Cyclophora ruficiliaria* has been reported a couple of times, but I don't have immediate access to the details other than for one captured at Muswell Hill, Middlesex on 11th August 2023 by Henry Wyn-Jones. Most likely an immigrant example, although as with some other species this one is perhaps establishing itself as a resident.

Waved Umber *Menophra abruptaria* is, of course, a widespread and common moth in our two counties. However, in recent years it seems to have switched from being single-brooded, flying in April/May to having a second generation of adults in August. At the moment,



Waved Umber flight period of in Herts and Middlesex

The autumn generation is small (see chart above). I can now report one at Bricketwood, Hertfordshire, on 15th August 2023 by Henry Ellis. I cannot over-emphasise the need for us all to record all sightings on all dates of even the common species so that these changes can be detected and monitored.

Gem *Nyctosea obstipata* is a rather infrequent immigrant macro moth from overseas into our area. I am aware of reports of a few in the last ten days or so but in most cases details are still awaited. Apparently, all reports relate to females (the species is sexually dimorphic so recording sex is easy).

The Locust Bean Moth *Apomyelois ceratoniae* was caught in a light trap at Bengoe (northern area of Hertford town), on 23rd July 2023 by Andrew Wood and is **new to Hertfordshire** (and is also absent from the Middlesex list). It was an extremely worn male and

identification proved a problem. Several names were suggested until Ben Sale suggested *A. ceratoniae* and I was able to confirm that as correct by dissection of its genitalia. It is too late this year, but if you have a Locust Bean tree in your garden, make a note in your diary to gather a pile of the seed pods in about June 2024. Tie these in a cotton pillow case or similar and leave them outside (but not in direct sunlight) – checking them occasionally. You might just make the first breeding record!

The Plumed Fan-foot *Pechipogo plumigeralis* is reported from Willesden, Middlesex, 28th July 2023, by Barbara Mulligan. There was also one at Dagenham, South Essex on 4th July 2023 (Andrew Self). I suspect that there may well be others?



Plumed Fan-foot, Willesden, 28th July 2023, B. Mulligan

The species is resident in a restricted area of London (Middlesex) centred on Buckingham Palace Garden and is considered likely to spread.

Ethmia quadrilella is a distinctive, black and white moth – technically a micro, but not as small as many! One captured at Bishops Stortford on 9th August 2023, in the trap in the adjoining gardens of Jim Fish and Julian Reeves, is only the second for Hertfordshire, the previous report being from Hatfield on 16th July 2014 (Tony Bristow). There are just two Middlesex records – from Willesden, 9th August 2020 (Barbara Mulligan) and Sunbury, 14th April 2022 (John Maxen).

Clepsis dumicolana is a fairly recent addition to the British moth list and is a resident in central London. Yesterday, 19th August 2023, the two in the image below were snapped at Kings Cross by Richard Bashford. It is pleasing that this species is still with us and potentially spreading northwards. It is of especially interest that the Kings Cross insects were associated with Ivy that had been recently planted – i.e., not “long-established”. I would suggest that searching Ivy anywhere in our two counties NOW might prove rewarding. Current thought is that the moth likes Ivy on vertical surfaces.



Clepsid dunicolana Kings Cross, 19 Aug.2023, Richard Bashford.

FROM OUR NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOURS

Eyes open! Les Evans-Hill captured **Oak Underwing, *Catocala nymphagoga***, at Richmond Par, south-west London for the second year in a row. Maybe immigrant; maybe resident? Not quite on our patch but very close.

FROM OUR "FOREIGN" CORRESPONDENT

Well outside our area, but I could not resist showing such a good moth. Our member Gerry Rawcliffe snapped this Netted Carpet at a known site near Keswick in the Lake District. Very rare and protected under English law, this species is down to less than a dozen sites in Britain, where the larva feeds on Orange Balsam. We can only dream!



Netted Carpet *Eustroma reticulata*, Keswick, Cumbria, July 2023, G. Rawcliffe

OAK PROCESSIONARY MOTH

I have received the following communication, presented here in full.

"We are working with Fera Science Ltd/Forestry Commission on the second year of a project to develop alternative Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) controls at Becroft Wood and Broxbourne Wood.

*"Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) *Thaumetopoea processionea* is a non-native, invasive species that was first detected in London in 2006 and has since established in London and some surrounding counties. OPM poses a threat to native oak trees through defoliation, which could increase*

the detrimental impact of other threats to oak, and to human and animal health because allergic reactions can be caused through contact with small hairs produced by older larvae (caterpillars)." "Management is important and methods that are currently available for managing OPM in the UK including physical nest removal and insecticide sprays (foliar applications) against the larvae. However, concerns about the impacts of insecticides necessitates the development of alternative methods to manage OPM populations which have more favourable non-target consequences and environmental profiles."

Becroft Wood and Broxbourne Wood are part of Hertfordshire's only National Nature Reserve (NNR), owned by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and managed by Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) for biodiversity and public access. Currently both of the woods have OPM present and this is managed through an FC approved risk-based management plan for OPM. These woods will be at the forefront of investigating controlling OPM populations by disrupting mating using a pheromone. The trial will continue in July 2023 with the deployment of pheromones to disrupt mating of OPM. The pheromone is harmless to humans and other animals and will be dispersed high in the canopy in paintball spheres twice between July and September each year. Surveying of OPM and other moth species will also be carried out during the trial period.

For further details on the project please see the attached information from Fera Science Ltd/Forestry Commission. Please use my contact details below if you have any questions.

*Kind regards
Elgan*

Elgan Adlard

Land Management Projects Officer | Countryside and Rights of Way | Environment and Transport

Hertfordshire County Council

Address: County Hall, Pegs Lane, Hertford, SG13 8DN.

Postal Point: CHN101.

T: 01992 588935 (28935) E:

elgan.adlard@hertfordshire.gov.uk

MOTHS AT DINARA NATIONAL PARK, CROATIA

As mentioned in my introduction, I just spent a week catching moths at a site in southern Croatia. Unfortunately, I was there slap bang in the middle of that circum-Mediterranean heatwave we saw on the telly. Luckily I did not encounter any wildfires. On most days, the temperature had reached 40 degrees by lunchtime rendering the moths *and me* completely inactive. So, we had to adapt. Traps were set out in the evening in the last hour before darkness and then abandoned. Working the traps would have been extremely difficult in any case since, typically, we would set out 10 lights along a linear distance of two or three miles through the karstic grassland. Traps were then collected in at first light (around 04.00 hours) and returned to the field centre where the catch was examined. Breakfast followed at around 08.00, followed by more examination of the catch then bed by midday as it was too hot to do anything else!

The full list is not yet ready. Although most macros are named I still have a few hundred micros to dissect and examine. However, as I mentioned above, the main target was the Pyraloidea. Having given priority to those species a final list is now available and may be of interest to some of you. There are a good number of “British” species in the list as well as several that are absent from our side of the Channel. An asterisk means genitalia checked on at least one specimen. On the basis of habitat and time of year, I predicted a tally of 70 Pyraloidea species; the week’s tally was 62, so I was not that far off. For interest, the habitat was extensive karstic grassland with areas of invading scrub. The majority of invading scrub was Juniper woodland, but there were also areas of *Quercus* (oak) invasion, a few areas of established ancient deciduous woodland as well as some conifer plantations. The list was made over 5 nights; trap numbers varied, overall equating to around 40 trap nights.

CRAMBIDAE (28 species)

Catoptria falsella
Catoptria pinella
Crambus lathoniellus *
Chrysoteuchia culmella
Clasperia ophialis *
Dolicharthria bruguieralis *
Dolicharthria punctalis *
Ecpyrrorhoe diffusalis
Ecpyrrorhoe rubiginalis
Eudonia lacustrata *
Eudonia mercurella *
Eudonia sudetica *
Evergestis dumerlei
Metacrambus carectellus
Mecyna trinalis *
Metasia corsicalis *
Nomophila noctuella
Pyrausta aurata
Pyrausta casta
Pyrausta despicata
Pyrausta cingulata
Pyrausta nigrata
Pyrausta purpuralis
Synaphe punctalis
Pyrausta sanguinalis
Uresiphita gilvata
Udea ferrugalis

PYRALIDAE (34 species)

Acrobasis centunculella *
Acrobasis fallouella *
Acrobasis legatea *
Acrobasis tumidana *
Ancylosis cinnamomella *
Assara terebrella
Cadra figulilella *
Cadra furcatella *
Dioryctria abietaria *
Cynaeda dentalis
Elegia atrifasciella *
Ematheudes punctella *
Hypsopygia fulvociliialis
Endotricha flammealis
Ephestia elutella *
Ephestia welseriella *
Ephestia woodiella *
Episcythrastis tabidella *

Etiella zinckenella
Hypochalcis ahenella *
Hypsopygia rubidalis
Lamoria anella *
Palpita vitrealis
Pempelia albariella *
Pempelia combustella *
Pempelia palumbella *
Pempeliella sororculella *
Phycita acericola *
Phycita coronatella *
Phycita meliella *
Phycita roborella *
Pyralis regalis
Selagia argyrella ssp. subochraceella *
Stemmatophora honestalis

THE 2023 MOTH SEASON – HERE AND IN EUROPE

Many of us, including me, have been moaning about how poor the moths have been in Herts & Middlesex last year and this, especially this year. Notwithstanding some rather nice moths in August, mostly immigrants, moth populations appear to be depressed.

So what was it like in Europe?

I do not have a baseline of information against which to compare my Croatian list and so it is difficult to comment. However, the week before I was collecting in Hungary with friends Attila Takacs and Csaba Szabóky and they were in no doubt that something was not quite right. They took me to a couple of outstanding sites where we caught next to nothing – and with captured species in low number. So – pretty much the same as in south-east England.

However, moving significantly further south-east to Bulgaria, my friend Stoyan Beshkov tells me that he has not noticed any decline at all in moth numbers or variety and he was surprised by my comments. Clearly there are climatic differences between Bulgaria and Britain; Hungary sits more or less halfway between the two in central Europe. There is a PhD thesis in there for somebody; if any academics are reading this, do feel free to contact me. The rest of you, meanwhile, please carry on counting and reporting moths as this is what provides the raw data for the academics to interpret.

NEXT NEWSLETTER

As soon as I have received enough material of interest to share!

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
