

MOTH MUMBLINGS – MARCH 2023

WELCOME

Little has happened since the last newsletter and there is nothing much to report in the way of news. Two people have indicated that my silence had them worried that I may have popped off to the great collecting ground in the sky! Not so – it will take more than that to get rid of me! I did take life itself in my hands by upgrading my computer to Windows 10 – an action that passed relatively smoothly, although for some reason my word processor now defaults to the current blue type that you are looking at and absolutely refuses to allow me to make it black again! In a presumably related incident, my male and female symbols have changed from the desired nerdy format to the exuberant ♂ and ♀. If anyone knows how to correct these issues do PLEASE telephone my landline and talk me through it.

SUMMER HITS THE COUNTY

In the last few days it looks like many moths have woken up. All the usual suspects, including Common Quaker (*Orthosia cerasi*), Small Quaker (*O. cruda*), Hebrew Character (*O. gothica*), Clouded Drab (*O. incerta*), Twin-spotted Quaker (*Anorthoa munda*), Chestnut (*Conistra vaccinii*), Early Grey (*Xylocampa areola*), Pine Beauty (*Panolis flammea*), March Moth (*Alsophila aescularia*), Oak Beauty (*Biston strataria*) and Yellow Horned (*Achlya flavicornis*) amongst the macros. Of particular note was a fresh-looking Dark Swordgrass (*Agrotis ipsillon*) caught this morning (20th March) by William Bishop. Although this species is not particularly rare, our examples are often here as primary immigrants. Is this one a fresh-out-of-the-nest resident or a harbinger of migrant activity to come! Interesting, then, that Peter Bygate rescued a live Humming-bird Hawk-moth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) from a spider's web in his garden near Tring on 19th March. Again – usually an immigrant, although has been showing increasingly frequent signs of successful over-wintering in our two counties.

Micros so far include the Common Brown Plume (*Emmelina monodactyla*), *Diurnea fagella* and *Acleris literana* all in light traps. Rather better, Roger Morton attracted his first male *Pammene giganteana* (Tortricidae) of the year to the “MOL” lure, 18th March 2023, at Cowley (Uxbridge). To that point, the best I could offer was a mass emergence of **Case-bearing Clothes Moth *Tinea pellionella*** inside my house (Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire) between about 10th and 19th March 2023. However, I decided to take a lunch break and I used the opportunity to hang out several pheromone traps in the garden. By mid-afternoon (20th March) there was a fresh-looking male *Pammene giganteana* having come to the “correct” lure.

PLEASE RETURN MY LURES

That reminds me, would the person to whom I loaned some of my pheromone lures last year please return them (or at least make contact so I can possibly collect them). I distinctly remember loaning them to someone, but stupidly I did not make a note of who it was! In particular, you have my “MOL” and “FUN” lures which are now becoming needed.

I have no problem if you would like to use these in the next week (as long as you DO use them), but I need them back soon after. Please get in touch anyway.

GETTING THE WRONG LURES READY

It is well-known that many of the artificial pheromones lures that are available frequently attract the “wrong” species, in addition to those they are designed for. With this in mind, consider trying the “POM” lure (designed for the Codlin Moth (*Cydia pomonella*) to look for the closely related *Cydia interscindana*. This latter arrived in Britain about 5 years ago and has its UK headquarters in the Ealing area of Middlesex. From here, it has spread out to Bucks, Essex and elsewhere. A recent paper in a European journal discussed the arrival in Hungary and labelled it as a potentially problematic fruit pest that is highly invasive. It seems that this attractive tortrix is



copying others such as the Box-tree Moth *Cydalima perspectalis* in invading the entire of Europe. **Expect to find this anywhere in both Herts and Middlesex in 2023.** It will be most interesting to monitor its spread across the two counties.

I am also told that the lure designed to attract the tortrix *Adoxophyes orana* is good at attracting **Small Yellow Underwing *Panemeria tenebrata***. The tortrix is evidently scarce in our area, though I rather doubt that many people have used lures to search for it; the records are widely spread suggesting that diligent searching might infill the gaps. It flies in July. The Small Yellow Underwing, on the other hand, is widespread and moderately common on our patch – trouble is that it is

small and rarely comes to light; some people may even overlook it as a micro! It is on very few of your garden lists – and I am sure that does not reflect reality. It is most easily found by looking on various yellow-coloured flowers throughout May during the day; it will be interesting to hear results from using the *A. orana* lure.

STUDENT PROJECT

I have received the following request: from a student:

Are you interested in helping to save important flower visiting insects all from the comfort of your garden? As members of a Conservation group, your interests and existing knowledge could be valuable to my study. I am a PhD student at Royal Holloway, University of London. I work on pollinator conservation and citizen intervention. I am looking for participants for my citizen science study 'Optimow'. My research is looking to explore the best way you can mow your lawn to make your gardens a better place for important pollinating insects. The study would only take 15-20 minutes a week, all from your garden, in May.

If you are interested in taking part, sign up using the following link: <https://forms.gle/mhVSH8vO5zqn9eSB7>. If there are any questions, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Morgan Morrison
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ONE TO LOOK OUT FOR

I recently read a paper in the Belgian journal *Phegea*. This discussed *Synanthedon theryi* Le Cerf, 1916 – the **Tamarisk Clearwing**. A central and southern European moth, it was found (breeding) in the northern coastal areas of France & Belgium in 2021 ... new to Belgium and the furthest north (so far) records for Europe. It is very obviously expanding its range northwards and could very easily arrive in the south or south-east of England in 2023. The caterpillars feed in the trunks of mature *Tamarisk gallica* and *Tamarisk tetrandia*. I have no data on any pheromone lures that attract it – yet!



Tamarisk Clearwing - pupal exuvia in Tamarisk trunk

Read the full paper, by Ruben Meert, in *Phegea* 51(1): 9 – 17 (2003).

UPDATE ON THE UPDATE TO HERTS MOTH BOOK

In the last newsletter I mentioned the plan to update our book *The Moths of Hertfordshire*, which we published in 2008 and which contained records to the end of 2006. The update will be commenced at the end of 2023 (though production may not be that rapid!).

I mentioned before that I want to include a multitude of “before and after” site photos. These might include 1920s hay meadows that are now housing estates, or open farmland that is now woodland, etc, etc. Small sites, such as ponds or verges are just as important as larger sites. BEN SALE has agreed to accumulate the images for this project. What he needs from you are as follows:

- Ideally, paired “then and now” images of sites, especially if the position of the photographer can be identified on a map. It is recognised that the shots may have been taken from slightly different positions, but if they show the same view we can probably use them.
- In addition, we want old images (with the year) of places that you know have changed **even if there is no modern image**. These can be photos, old postcards or even paintings! Our plan would be to then visit these places and obtain the “now” shot from the same position *at the same time of year*.

In all cases please also tell Ben the date (at least the year) where the image was taken as well as the locality name and, if known the compass direction of the camera.

Please send images to Ben at bensale@rocketmail.com

At the present, we are not looking for Middlesex images for the book, though we will gratefully store any received for future use.

A very modern phenomenon is that the vast majority of moth records relate to domestic gardens. It seems sensible to pre-empt future requirements by saying now that we would also like images of your garden! This applies to everyone who submits his or her moth records to me for inclusion in the database. Try to pick an image that shows the garden as it is. Images set in local context are most useful – e.g., from a drone (or by hooking your left leg behind the cistern and hanging outside the upstairs bathroom window!). Use your imagination.

LIVING OBITUARIES

You will already know (or else be too afraid to admit the fact that you have never read it) that our 2008 Herts Moth Book featured short texts and an accompanying photo of prominent moth-hunters in the county. We will be updating this section as well as the moths. I will be including all those amongst you who have submitted moth data (especially those of you who have sent me records from your garden moth trap on a regular basis.

Use the 2008 book as a guide and let me have a similar length of text about yourself as well as an appropriate colour photo. I WILL chase you if you don't. You really don't want *me* to write the text about you, do you?

GENITALIA DISSECTION TUTORIALS

So far, five of you have been foolish enough to attend my one-on-one dissection tutorial sessions. As far as I can tell, all five of you went away happy. If anyone is still interested, I can probably manage 2 more sessions if you get in touch VERY soon. Once we get into April, the auto-pilot switches my brain to "field mode" and I prefer not to be stuck indoors on moth-favourable dates!

For advance information, my sessions do **not** include photography/photo stacking/image stitching etc. I do now have the necessary equipment and software installed – this is why I needed to update to Windows 10 but whilst the taking of pictures of the genitalia slides is easy I don't do well within ten feet of a computer! If there is anyone out there who is intimate with *Photoshop Elements* that is willing to call round and tutor me I would be extremely grateful.

OUTSTANDING MOTH RECORDS

You have all been so good this year that almost all expected lists reached me well before the deadline. This allowed me to take a break whilst I waited for the few outstanding lists to arrive. With one notable exception (you know who you are), I now have pretty much all data that I am likely to get for 2022. I have already put these extras into a spreadsheet ready for import to the database (around ten thousand additional records) and will now sit on it until the weekend so that if there are any further records out there they can be added very easily. **If you have any outstanding moth records for Hertfordshire or Middlesex from year 2022 or earlier please send these to me now (or contact me to say when you will be able to do so).**

WEB SITE UPDATE

When all the data is finally in the database, I will be able to do some analysis and share the results. The main task, however, will be to provide an up to date copy of the entire database to Andrew Wood, partly as a backup in case Putin invades Bishops Stortford, but also so that Andrew is at last able to update the maps on our web site (www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk). Apologies to those of you that have already moaned to me that your records are not shown on the web site maps. This is NOT Andrew's fault – I have not sent him the 2022 data yet and so the web site maps show only records up to the end of December 2021! As soon as the last of the outstanding data are entered, we can get those maps updated to December 2022.

A WORD ABOUT ULEZ

This is the new *Ultra Low Emission Zone* that has been arbitrarily applied across London by some well-meaning but clearly non-thinking politicians. In spite of me being well-known for supporting efforts to clean up our environment, I have to say that I am anti this particular measure in its present format. Its presence means that am no longer able to enter the London area in my moth-mobile to undertake recording work; soon, it looks likely that I shall not even be able to penetrate the North Circular Road. This is, of course, because the vehicle is a diesel-powered Land Rover and the politicians have decided that there are no exceptions to their rules. They say I should upgrade my Landrover to run on petrol! I wonder if they have any idea how much a Land Rover costs ...even without all my adaptations to make it a moth-hunting base?

It is clear that I can no longer run, or even attend, moth survey sessions in the general area of Greater London. This is, effectively, all of Middlesex. Sorry chaps – you are on your own. Of course, I am very happy to publicise London area events for you and so if you are having a local moth evening this year, feel free to send me the details and I will include them in the next newsletter.

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