

RANDOM HERTS & MIDDX MOTH STUFF - EARLY AUGUST 2020

HOT WEATHER, IMMIGRANTS AND OTHER INTERESTING STUFF

As the mercury threatens to explode the glass thermometer tube, I thought it worth summarising some recent moth sightings. There can be no doubt that last night was a migrant night, Down in darkest Dorset there was a non-British pug called *Eupithecia breviculata* at Portland Bird Observatory. Yes – I know – pugs! But even I could recognise this one (I am told it is on something called Twitter). Anyway, with tonight predicted as being even hotter setting up the moth trap in the garden (or elsewhere) is nigh on compulsory!

DARK CRIMSON UNDERWING *Catocala sponsa*

In the last week I have heard of several in the southeast, including Herts. Not all details are available so I just mention it here. Not really confusable with Red Underwing but do a double-check if anything is not right! It is unclear if these are primary immigrants of the progeny of last year's female immigrants. The more records we get in the clearer things should become.

TOADFLAX BROCADE *Calophasia lunula*

Certainly a resident, the fact that there is active immigration is probably just a coincidence. Toadflax Brocade now affects the entire area of both Middlesex and Hertfordshire, with a record in the last few days in the top right hand corner at Royston.

GYPSY MOTH *Lymantria dispar*

Males are reported all over Herts and the north of Middlesex, and might include primary immigrants. However, most will represent dispersal from known breeding areas such as the Watford area. Interestingly, I am also now getting reports of females, including pairs *in copula* and adult females creating egg masses on tree trunks – the latter at Borehamwood (Clive Butchins) and Baldock (Dough Heath). An interesting report of behaviour of a male Gypsy Moth comes from Judy Lustigman. She writes "I live in a top-floor flat (third floor) in Edgware, Middlesex. On Thursday morning [30th July 2020] I was on my roof terrace when a moth "chased" me for several minutes; it sat and fluttered on my toes, my sparkly shoes, my dull greeny-brown trousers and my bright tee shirt. As I moved away it followed me. I'd been exercising before that, so I wondered if it detected the salt in my sweat. It didn't seem interested in the brightly coloured flowers in the pots - only me. Hours later, I noticed what I presumed was the same moth on my living room floor". This is new to me. I did wonder if she had trodden on a female earlier in the day and got her shoes covered in pheromone, though this seems unlikely.

BEAUTIFUL MARBLED *Eublemma purpurina*

Simon Knot caught this attractive species in his central Herts garden at Bengoe, 5th August 2020. This is certainly an immigrant. He also caught six examples of White-point *Mythimna albipuncta* which might also be immigrants but which is also now resident in parts of southern Britain.

COSMOPTERIX PULCHRIMELLA (if it has an English name I neither care nor wish to know!)

This staggeringly attractive micro moth was noted at Stoke Newington on 21 July 2020 by Matthew Gandy. There is a single earlier Herts record, from Marshall's Heath during 2019 (John Murray). In Middlesex larvae were recorded mining leaves of Pellitory-of-the-Wall at Westminster in 2019 by Mark Parsons. There is also a recent report from Essex, 5th August 2020, Robin Barfoot.

TREE-LICHEN BEAUTY *Cryphia algae*

Former rare immigrant – now a widespread resident in Herts. Abundant at the moment so clearly having a good year. Numbers are likely to be boosted by immigrants.

LEAST CARPET *Idea rusticata*

Also having a phenomenally good year – I had almost 50 in my garden trap a few nights ago. I remember getting my first when trapping in East Ham (London, Essex) when I lived there in the early 1980s; it had a very restricted distribution and was known only from the Thames Estuary area.

***ISOPHRICTIS STRIATELLA* (probably has an English name)**

One at Harpenden, 30th July 2020, David Hunt. Not unknown, but somewhat scarce and seldom seen in our two counties. Evidently more common in the Breckland district.

***Coleophora adspersella* (also probably has an English name)**

Harefield, on the Middx/Herts boundary. A male on 18th July 2020, found by me whilst dissecting some unknown micros for Simon Buckingham. This is a good record – see web site for distribution. Simon’s micros also included *Syncopacma taeniolella*, for which there are rather few county records.

OUT OF COUNTY STUFF

Andy and Melissa Banthorpe tell me that **Striped Lychnis** is doing well in Bedfordshire this year. On 29 July 2020, with the farmer’s permission, they checked the same private site as last year and found 116 larvae on Dark Mullein in arable reversion strips. We could do far worse than look for it on these plants in north Hertfordshire. Any volunteers?

BAR BAR BAR, BAR, BAR, BA ... STELLE? (with apologies to the Beach Boys).

Iain Barr, Senior lecturer in Ecology and Conservation at the University of East Anglia contacted me for data on Ear Moths in Herts. He is working on Barbastelle bats in Norfolk. FACT: Norfolk Barbastelle bats breed around 10-12 days after those in Hertfordshire. THEORY: Barbastelle bats, when it comes to haute cuisine, are especially partial to **Ear Moths (*Amphipoea oculea*)**. DISCOVERY: Herts Ear moth fly around 8-10 days earlier than those in Norfolk [I did not know that!] and the peak of both bats and moths displays around the same difference. I am delighted that our moth data can be used this way in the conservation of other groups. This info exchange was only possible because you lot keep on sending me your annual lists. Long may it continue.

SAM KNILL-JONES

Older moth group members may have come across Sam, who was one of the “old guard” of moth collectors. Sadly, he passed away on 3rd August 2020 in his home in the Isle of Wight. This was completely unexpected and was only noticed because someone saw that his light traps had been left on. Our condolences to his brother, Robin Knill-Jones, who is a member of this moth group.

Keep stuff coming.

Colin W. Plant
Herts & Middx Counties Moth Recorder
14 West Road
Bishops Stortford
Herts CM23 3QP
01279 – 507697
