

# MOTH MUMBLINGS – JANUARY 2021

## WELCOME

Some may say it is too cold for moth catching. Others might disagree. I shall remain neutral and merely report facts. Liz Goodyear e-mailed me on 10<sup>th</sup> January to say that she had run the trap in her garden in Ware on all ten available nights this year, with moths presenting themselves of three of them (a nice neat 30%). Over at Bengo, Simon Knott waits for the air temperature to exceed a critical threshold before putting the traps out – and catches moths! Simon also reports Common Quaker already flying! I have not specifically heard from too many other people, but it does seem that on warmer (whatever that means in January) nights the moths are active and garden trapping is worth a go.

Of course, you are less likely to be successful if you plonk the trap out in the middle of the lawn or some other exposed area. Best to pick marginal areas, under or near bushes where a potentially more favourable micro-climate gives slightly raised temperatures and less of a breeze.

## BLACK-SPOTTED CHESTNUT

This evidently extremely-localised moth is still on the wing! In his garden at Bengo, Simon Knott caught yet more examples on the night of 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021 (that's yesterday, as the crow flies). Simon comments that this species appears to be a "true" winter noctuid, since whilst many species become torpid or feign death at the low temperatures we are currently experiencing, adults of the Black-spotted Chestnut are fully active and make repeated attempts to avoid the collecting pot.

I find this interesting. In combination with the fact that the moth rarely enters the light trap, but is more often than not found under the trap or in nearby bushes, this might explain why we rarely see it. The preferred habitat is unknown, but it is hard to believe that none exists (and thus the moth is absent) in the gap between Bengo and the nearest other populations in the southern parts of Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. The Covid-19 restrictions (which should be adhered to), and the associated likelihood of a raid from the rising Police State (not always to be agreed with), makes it impossible to drive along the country lanes dropping off battery-powered actinic traps at one-mile intervals (which had been my plan). The virus, it seems, is lurking in the isolation of rural Hertfordshire, waiting to pounce on unsuspecting entomologists working in total isolation! However, if you happen to actually live in the great void between Hertford town and the Bedfordshire border please do make an effort to run a light trap in the local shrubbery tonight, and every night for the rest of the month, taking great care to look outside the trap as well as inside, for Black-spotted Chestnut.

## FIRST AND LAST MOTHS

The last *Mumblings* stimulated a significant response. It is pleasing to know that someone actually reads what I write! It looks like John Murray's time at the top was short-lived! Sorry John. Rachel Terry's last moth of 2020 (at Barnet) was a melanic Pale Brindled Beauty on 26<sup>th</sup> December; her first moth of 2021 was a Chestnut on the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> January. Henry Ellis (Bricketwood) also had a Winter Moth on New Year morning. Not in the trap but resting on the house wall. That just beats John Murray's moth by 24 hours and so is currently the first "official" moth of 2021. Unless you know better?

However, David Howdon, "down south" in darkest Middlesex, has the best claim so far for the last moth of 2020. He e-mailed to say that he had a couple of winter moths on the wing early evening (around 6pm) on 31st December.

Can anyone beat these!

## ANNUAL LISTS

I am delighted, in a peculiar sort of way, that I have been metaphorically buried under incoming annual moth lists. Please do keep them coming; I am about to start going through them this week. There are several of you whose lists are conspicuous by their absence – please use the lockdown to sort these out and send to me. If I get time I will plot the locations for lists already received on a map (probably only to 5Km square level). This should give a guide to areas of the counties that are poorly recorded, although I would like to get a few more lists first, please.

One point of clarification seems important (having been asked). That is, unless I have specifically told you otherwise, assume that any moths (including photos) that you sent me to look at and name for you during the year were **not** recorded by me at the time and **should** be included in your annual lists to me.

Similarly, unless you have a formal agreement, you should assume that moths named for you by other people, including any genitalia dissections done for you, will **not** usually be reported to me by these people. It would be unfair of you to rely on them to do so! Please make sure that YOU send those records to me in YOUR annual lists.

That's all for now.

Do let me have details of anything you think worth sharing in this newsletter.

Summer's coming!

Colin

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