

MOTH MUMBLINGS – MID-NOVEMBER 2020

Not a lot to report, but this weekend ought to be the peak flight period for Plumed Prominent. I bang on about this every year, but so far nobody has found it in either Herts or Middlesex (or else you all think I am mad and refuse to go out at this time of year). It likes mature (?) Field Maple trees on calcareous ground.

RADFORD'S FLAME SHOULDER

My apologies to Keith Cherry for omitting to mention in the last mail-out his capture of this species. As it happens, in the last week it appears that Britain has recorded several more – though as usual not in my garden.

BLACK-SPOTTED CHESTNUT

I am aware of two separate captures, in two separate areas of Bengeo in central Herts, of the **Black-spotted Chestnut**. There seems little doubt that this species may now be established as a resident in the Hertford area. It is surely only a matter of time before it spreads out – and perhaps meets up with the several spreading populations in southern Bedfordshire and south-west Cambridgeshire. I am looking forward to it turning up in Bishops Stortford – though experience dictates that it will arrive in the better habitat of the river valley before it reaches the flanking hilltops [I will lay odds that Jim and Julian will get it before I do].

Another recent arrival in the county is the rather small-sized pyralid *Musotima nitidalis*. It is associated with Bracken and is established in Broxbourne Wood National Nature Reserve as well as being frequent in the area around Harlow in the North Essex vice county. It is doubtlessly breeding elsewhere and likely to spread to other areas where there is Bracken. In the last week Ben Sale caught it in his garden Stevenage. It is worth looking up on the web (I don't think it is most books yet) and looking out for in the trap.

EARLY QUAKERS

Another goodie from Ben's trap in Stevenage, last week, was a phenomenally early **Common Quaker** (photo circulated and no doubt over the identification: Not that I ever doubted Ben, but the experts must obey the rules as much as the beginners and all unusual moths **MUST** be seen by a second person if I am to be persuaded to add it to the database).

Typically, this species flies from about February to May (peak), but depending on season the full range is from January to very early June. Several June and July (and even August) records are dismissed by me, because those investigated proved to be Vine's Rustic (in most cases). If you feel aggrieved by this, I very much welcome resubmission of such records along with words of justification; if you are right, then these are important records.

In recent years, however, we have started to get END of year records. There are many reports for December in the years from 2015 to 2018 from Ware, Hatfield, Barnet, Hemel Hempstead and Hertford (Liz Goodyear, Stephen Waters, Rachel Terry, Roger Prue and Andrew Wood in that order). This shift might reflect a response to climate? It is clearly important that any further captures are fully documented (when I remember, I add a comment against the record in the database to state that the odd date was recognised, checked and believed ... this, hopefully, stops me or others from deleting these odd records in the future).

November reports are still as scarce as hen's teeth, but perhaps increasing. I have the following:

- Bishops Stortford, 1 Nov 2007, Colin Plant;

- Kings Langley, 3 & 4 Nov 2015, Ephraim Prefect;
- Stevenage, 8 Nov 2020, Ben Sale (present record);
- Berkhamsted, 22 Nov 2011, Ian Gamble.

If I missed any, please tell me (2020 data not entered yet, of course).

BLASTOBASIS

An odd-looking *Blastobasis* caught last week by Trevor Brownsell is now with me and awaiting genitalia dissection.

The story of *Blastobasis* is a weird one. Our two species, then believed to be *B. decolorella* and *B. lignea*, are native to Madeira.

Suddenly they appeared in other European countries and we began to realise that there were more species of *Blastobasis* than we thought. When we checked it was realised that we had neither of these two species – both remain Madeiran residents. Rather we had *lacticolella* and *adustella*, respectively (hence the annoying name change in the British Checklist). Both were probably introduced by the horticultural trade? To these we can also add *B. phycidella* whilst, *B. vittata* is certainly present in Britain (and perhaps in Middlesex?). *Blastobasis rebeli* is present in Hampshire and may spread. I have certainly caught *B. glandulella* in Slovenia (known as the Acorn Moth, it was imported to Central Europe from the USA and there is no reason to suppose that it will not also be introduced to Britain – and perhaps already has been?). In France, I have encountered *B. huemeri* which some regard as the same species as *glandulella*. Other species are also possible. It is impossible to predict which – all the *Blastobasis* species are equally possible in your light traps.

So, ANYTHING *Blastobasis* that is not *absolutely* “right” in every detail should be retained and passed to a “grown-up”. Ideally they will all end up with me (unless you can dissect them yourself), as they will all require full dissection and preparation of a microscope slide. Pop them in the freezer overnight, then (suggested method) place the dead body in a cleaned and dry plastic screw top from a milk, fruit juice or other “bottle”. Add just a minimal amount of cotton wool (tease it out to obtain a very small and fluffy bit), just to stop it moving about in the post (I could do with them being in good condition for identification). Next, invert over a piece of thin card (cornflakes packet) and apply sellotape so it cannot slide out. Write label details on the card and post to me.

NOVEMBER MOTHS

These are still very much wanted – same method of sending is fine. I am less concerned about condition as I am only looking at the genitalia and then (in most cases) throwing away the moth.

WINTER SHARK MOTHS

I am sure you would not overlook a shark in your trap. However, in the unlikely event that you do catch a shark moth **between now and March** please DO NOT just chuck it out. At this season it can only really be *Cucullia calendulae* – not yet recorded in our part of Britain. If there is immigrant activity, especially, then do look out for it.

That’s all for now.

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