

# MOTH MUMBLINGS – MID-DECEMBER 2020

## NOVEMBER MOTHS

Huge thanks to everyone who has tried to bury me under november moth material for critical examination. Two interesting little factoids have emerged:

- 2020 numbers of all november moth species combined is significantly lower than in the last few years.
- All sent material this autumn has been the ordinary November moth (*E. dilutata*).

The first point fits with the downwards trend in the graph in the last newsletter suggesting that november moths generally may be in decline.

The second made me check the database, where I found to my surprise that there are no acceptable records of Pale November Moth this year, or for 2019. For Herts & Middlesex combined the numbers of Pale November Moth records in the database are:

- 2020: zero records (so far);
- 2019: 4 records;
- 2018: 5 records
- 2017: 9 records.
- Pre-2017 apparently quite frequent (at least in the teens).

It is possible that Pale November has declined. Question – is this responsible for the overall decline in the November moth aggregate indicated above? Or have we already lost Pale November? Or, of course, is this all because I got stropoopy about you all checking genitalia this autumn? I do still want to see ALL your november moths please – they are still flying. People with specimens please check the genitalia of your material and make sure your IDs are correct. Remember, it is NOT POSSIBLE to segregate November/Pale November by wing pattern – no matter how experienced you are (or how much you disagree with me).

## THE END OF THE YEAR IS NIGH!

The lock-down has been a confusing time for me. Staying in all day and playing with my moths with no time-related restrictions means that if it was not for the regularity of the dustbin collection I would have no idea what day it is. Add to that the fact that the dustmen have started coming earlier (and I have started to sleep longer and later) and the result was a rather large shock a couple of mornings ago when I realised that I had overlooked a key family birthday! Further investigations reveal that we have reached that part of the year when we should all probably be starting to knock our annual moth lists into shape, ready to send to the appropriate county recorders. Most of mine are already done, but this message is, of course, intended to remind all you chaps (and chapesses) that I am ready and waiting to receive YOUR moth records from both Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

Of course, there is no rush just yet. I do encourage each and every one of you to continue recording moths in all their life-cycle stages through to the end of 31<sup>st</sup> December. In some areas there are still moths flying, mostly in the first third of the night – before it gets too cold for them. Simon Knott reported to me yesterday that he had in excess of 200 male Winter Moth in and around (mostly around) his garden mv trap that morning. He also had the first Black-spotted Chestnut of this winter season, providing pretty good evidence that it is indeed an established, breeding resident in his area of North Hertford (Bengeo district). This moth must surely be elsewhere. It is present at the “top” of our area in southern Bedfordshire and southern Cambridgeshire and also to the bottom left just outside Middlesex in Buckinghamshire. Very poorly known, but most records have been end of December to start of

January, so it is not too late to put the traps out again. It is reported coming to lights elsewhere at temperatures below zero. It is also recorded as flying AFTER midnight. It is only rarely inside a trap – it seems to rest on adjacent vegetation, or the sides of the trap or, very frequently, UNDERNEATH the trap.

None of you is likely to overlook a Shark moth caught in December, but PLEASE don't ignore it. A second person needs to see it (ideally me!). There is only the one species of shark moth that flies in December - the Marigold Shark has only been reported on a couple of occasions (and nowhere near us) but it would not be the first surprising species to colonise Britain. Eyes open.

### LAST MOTH OF THE YEAR

Since we are not allowed to party this coming New Year's Eve, I think we should extend the usual fun and totally informal competition to see who gets the first moth of the year, to seeing who gets the last! As they say on my favourite radio station – “not for gain; just for the brain”.

As we will all be sitting/standing by our garden traps at the stroke of midnight to observe the first moth action of 2021 (or is that just saddos like me?), how about we see who can catch the LAST MOTH OF 2020. Synchronise your chronometers whilst still light at the 13.00 hours Greenwich time signal on Radio 4 (remember – it's the last, long beep that marks the time – the first 5 are warnings). Can anyone achieve a new moth in at 23.59 hours? No – you cannot count moths already sitting on the trap– they need to be flying, crawling or otherwise active, even if not making for the light.

### SEND ME YOUR ANNUAL LISTS PLEASE

Notwithstanding anything typed above, it is now time to send me your annual moth data for Hertfordshire and Middlesex for the year 2020, plus data for any earlier years that was not previously submitted. **Not all of what I have typed below will apply to everyone. Don't be frightened off by any technical stuff – if it doesn't apply to you then simply ignore it!** Then again, if it does, please take note!

### EXTRAS AT THE END OF DECEMBER

If you send a list and then afterwards find that there are a few more records to get to me, SEND THESE AS A SEPARATE, EXTRA FILE. Do not add them to the same spreadsheet as before and then send a revised version. I cannot possibly spot the additions so either the whole lot gets duplicated (which seriously messes up the flight period graphs) or else I throw a wobbler and simply ignore it!

**ACCURACY:** Only valid records will make it to the database. I will go through your lists and reject anything I judge to be unlikely. Unless it is utterly ludicrous, I will then get in touch with you and ask about the dodgy data. In many cases you might then be able to convince me that it is correct.

### DETERMINER

To help with the process it is utterly crucial that the name of the highest level of identifier is put in the “Determiner” column. **For example**, if you named it as unexpected species “A”, but then sent it to Graeme Smith for confirmation by dissection, and he then reported back to you that it was indeed “A”, then it is Graeme's name that goes as the determiner, even though you were right, as he is the higher authority in this scenario. You can add comments in the “Comments” column if you wish (these will be retained in the database so please make them brief).

The name of the Determiner acts like a “tell” to a poker player. If I look down a list and spot a moth that cannot be named without checking its genitalia, then the first thing I do is look who named it. If it is you, and you are a self-confessed non-expert, I am likely to doubt it and either contact you or simply reject it. If another person's name is given, then my opinion on validity will be based on THAT name rather than yours. In any case, one should always give credit where credit is due. Always acknowledge the identifier (= Determiner).

**MOTH NAMES:** Try to use the ABH checklist names (if you have no idea what this is then it there is just still enough time to ask Santa Claus. I know he is stopping off at Pemberley Books, though he may

also do pick-ups elsewhere). This applies to both scientific and English names. Try not to misspell names. Andrew Wood has written me a really useful “macro” (for Excel files) to convert misspelled names to correct spellings, but of course he cannot predict every single spelling error. I shall continue to seek the death penalty for anyone who:

- puts a double space between genus and species names;
- puts a space at the end of the line AFTER the moth name.

Spaces are invisible – but the computer treats them as a valid character. It can take me hours to seek and destroy so that the computer accepts the name.

**AGGREGATES:** If you don’t know the true ID of a moth but know that it is one of a pair, record it as the aggregate. Examples include:

- Marbled/Tawny Marbled Minor – minor agg.;
- Common Rustic/Lesser Common Rustic – common rustic agg.;
- Grey/Dark Dagger – dagger agg.;
- November/Pale November/Autumnal – November moth agg.
- Most Ear moths (usually – though in our area 99% will be *A. oclea*).

These all REQUIRE genitalia examination to identify the actual species. If this has been done then great – but remember to put the actual determiner’s name as discussed above, of the record might simply be ignored and thus lost.

This list is not necessarily complete and you should also aggregate any other pairs or groups that confuse you – for any reason. Quite apart from contributing to accuracy, this will also help me spot areas that cause confusion so that these can be flagged for attention. Examples might include:

Rustic/Uncertain; Treble-bar/Lesser Treble-bar; Sloe/Green Pug; Common/Dark Marbled Carpet etc .

**SECRECY (between you and me):** General Data Protection legislation applies to your lists, so if you do or say something really stupid it has to remain private between us. I cannot advertise it from the roof tops in any way that might identify you as the source. So – don’t be afraid to look silly as it is only me that will see this – and my role is to advise, educate or otherwise inform you. Record what you believe to be correct, annotate anything that is a problem and allow me the opportunity to get back in touch to help you to learn.

## CONFIDENTIAL DATA

In my role as the formally appointed **County Moth Recorder (CMR)** I wear two hats. For all of Vice County 20 (Hertfordshire) I am appointed annually by the Council of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society (HNHS). For all of Vice County 21 (Middlesex) I am appointed annually by the Council of the London Natural History Society (LNHS). Re-election is not automatic. Thus, although I have not had a challenger so far, the mechanism exists to get rid of me and replace me if I go doolally or otherwise become incapable of performing the task. This means that these two bodies are the legal owners of the moth dataset – I am merely their humble servant. **I must obey their rules.**

In reality, I am ignored and left to get on with stuff – as is the case for almost every other CMR. However, a recent incident affecting the LNHS obliged them to report a “breach” to the Data Protection Registrar. It affected the dissemination (inwards to the LNHS) of unsolicited data flagged as “confidential” by the source body. Details are not important, but all LNHS Recorders have been reminded of their obligations in law. I therefore take the opportunity to offer a short summary of how the data protection legislation affects this moth group. Note, of course, that these are my personal opinions and so might be legally dubious!

You receive occasional newsletter from me (this present text is an example of such). In accordance with the legislation you must have requested or otherwise made it clear that you wish to receive this newsletter. Other than in private and personal communications, I cannot send it to anyone who has not asked for it. It is taken as legally binding, therefore, that recipients of this mailing are “members” of this moth group. Those who disagree should tell me and they will be deleted from the mailing list immediately.

The primary purpose of this moth group is Biodiversity Recording and Analysis. As a member of this group you agree with and support this activity and agree to submit moth data to me. It is clear that these records when they reach me are not unsolicited – they are submitted voluntarily.

Once validated, these records are added to the computerised database. This is stored on a stand-alone PC with a single back-up copy on my laptop. On an more or less annual basis the database is copied to Andrew Wood, partly as a further back-up but also for him to create the maps and associated material on our web site at [www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk](http://www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk). People’s names and specific locations of moths are NOT published on the web site. Validated records are also shared annually with the National Moth Recording Scheme, who have the same legal responsibilities.

We do not provide data to commercial concerns. We may, at my discretion, supply an overview of data (lacking people’s names) to relevant Wildlife Trusts for biodiversity conservation reasons. We do not charge for data in any situation.

### **WHAT MIGHT BE CONFIDENTIAL?**

Please be aware that the default position is, whilst I will, of course, exercise judgement, that no moth records submitted to me as the CMR are “confidential”. Therefore, if you do send me confidential data you must make sure that I am aware and state the level of confidentiality required. Don’t just add the word “confidential” at one place in an entire spreadsheet – I’ll never spot it.

I am not allowed to dispute a confidential status, BUT I am at liberty to delete your confidential records or otherwise ignore them so that they are not accidentally disseminated.

The chances of a moth record from our area being confidential for sensible reasons of conservation or species protection is remote in the extreme (and in any case the information is likely to be more widely known already). If you do have confidential data send it to me separately, clearly marked as such and, ideally, TALK TO ME.

It is customary to credit people against their records (e.g., Simon Knott is acknowledged above in this newsletter for his Winter Moth record). This is the default position for this moth group and as members you agree to it. You can, however, ask for anonymity (a request with which I am obliged to comply). For example, if your records were made whilst you were trespassing in the local nuclear bomb factory then you might prefer the database not to record that fact that it was you. If there is a valid reason for anonymity, then may I suggest that you enter your name as “*known to CMR*” in the Recorder column. However, it is always a good idea for me to know who you are and you should be aware that such knowledge is stored within my recording system (though not linked to your records in any way that might identify you).

Another worry might be your home address where this is the locality for your records. Be aware that I almost always remove house numbers from records so that your precise location is not available. So my data would be from “West Road” not “14 West Road”. I only need a grid reference to an accuracy of 4 figures (= one x one kilometre square), so this does not by-pass the anonymity. Whatever grid you supply for your home is what I will store.

Of course, NONE of the received data is published or otherwise released to the wider public (other than crediting the names of recorders and identifiers as mentioned above) and it would take a Court Order to make me do so. And then, guess what? They might just find that there were no records after all!

### SO WHAT IS A MOTH RECORD?

A basic record consists of:

Moth name  
Life history stage (usually Adult, but can be Egg, Larval, Pupal, Mine, Gall, etc)  
Place where found  
Date when found  
Person who found it  
Person who named it

This is my minimum requirement. A better record will also include:

Grid reference to 4 figures of place where found (saves me looking it up)  
Numbers of individuals (allows data to be used to plot flight period graphs)  
(ideally give numbers of each sex on separate lines – i.e., 2 records)

**DATA FORMAT:** As CMR it is my job to accept records in whatever format you can manage. Compliance works down the chain – not up. If you cannot send electronic lists, then paper will do – though do try to structure it in a readable manner. HOWEVER, if you *can* comply with my wishes, it will make my life significantly easier as well as speeding up the process.

**IDEAL FORMAT:** I think most of you have a copy of the IDEAL DATA FORMAT file (an Excel spreadsheet). If not, e-mail me for a copy. Please use this format.

**HATED FORMATS:** Please try not to structure the spreadsheet with names down the left and 365 date columns. I cannot use these – they require a lengthy conversion process. If sending Word files or similar do as if on paper – list of moths per site on date and with separate lists per site per day. I have to enter these manually, so the format really does matter.

**SEX:** Yes, please. But apart from that, please record it. All dissected specimens must, by definition, have a known sex! For other things use your skill and judgement. All winged Winter Moths, Vapourers and quite a few others **MUST** be male, as the females are wingless and don't fly. So please record the sexes. People who find flightless females tend to record the sex, so that means the rest of us who only find males are just plain lazy. Many species have feathery antennae in the male and plain filaments in the female. If you are sure you can see the antennae (not always easy in species that tuck them under the wings), then record the sex for such species (though do remember this does not apply to all species). Gypsy Moth, Emperor and one or two others have completely different-looking males and females. Record the sex. I do still very much want records if the sex is not included – it's just that we really ought to maximise the data as much as possible.

**NUMBERS:** Those who count the moths every night, mainly in garden traps, should please include the numbers in the spread sheet. Hopefully this is everybody, these days? Numbers are critical for the correct calculation of the flight period graphs. I do still want lists where you did not count – again, it is a case of maximising the data input.

**MAPMATE SYNC FILES:** These are **not acceptable** in most cases, sorry. The reason is that Mapmate registers you as the owner of the records and attaches your *cuk* number to each one. This then works like a password, so that on someone else's system, like mine, with a different *cuk*, these records cannot now be edited. I can delete, but not alter. So, I can only accept records via SYNC if both parties have agreed in advance that **all** aspects of **all** records are satisfactory and will never require changing – ever!

This applies to all fields, not just the species name field. An unlikely scenario. Please export your Mapmate data into Excel.

**Note:** Mapmate has a bad habit of not exporting the “Determiner” name with records – and I do need that name. In most cases, Determiner and Recorder will probably be the same (you) so it will be easy to copy the entire Recorder column to a new column. I have some SQL that will export all data for a given VC including determiner, but sadly this does not allow me to select a year. If there are any SQL experts out there who know how to refine the code, please get in touch.

**In the unlikely event that you have a data set that is too large to export into Excel,** please get in touch so we can discuss.

**NOTE FOR EXCEL USERS:** One of the several bad habits of Excel is to fail to properly convert dates that do not follow the strict format of dd/mm/yyyy. As far as this concerns imports from Mapmate, date spans (e.g., 01/06/2006 – 30/06/2006) or single years (e.g., “2020”) might appear in Excel as “1905” (I have no idea why, but 1905 seems to be some sort of default date). SOLUTION: After exporting from Mapmate to Excel, **IMMEDIATELY** (even before saving) do the following:

Highlight the date column;  
Hold mouse over highlight area and Right click the mouse;  
Select Format cells;  
Select Format as date;  
Select the format as dd/mm/yyyy;  
Save and exit.

This should solve any unseen issues.

**I-RECORD:** Data submitted to i-record is **NOT** in the system and will be ignored. I-record is probably quite a good system, but it is for people who are not part of the moth group and who have no idea who to send records to. The country recorder network is the ultimate (and only) way that records can get into the national recording system – regardless of the current campaign by certain people to change things. The fact that you are on my mailing list means that you should NOT be using i-record – you should be dealing direct with me so I have the opportunity to discuss the records with you (and you can ask questions of me, of course). Most i-record data are highly suspect and often impossible to back track and check as data protection rules may prevent me from getting contact details. For this reason, I DO NOT LOOK AT I-RECORD except when specifically directed there and so records posted there will remain in limbo.

**FACEBOOK:** Facebook, and other social media sites (including various “blogs”), are on the same level as what we old folk call “conversation”. Some of you might remember that from the old days? Records posted on Facebook or any other social medium are NOT in the system and you need to send them to me direct, please.

**The only way a moth record from Herts or Middlesex can get into the system is through me** and it is a no-brainer that this will work faster and smoother if I receive data direct. This gives me the opportunity to discuss any odd records with the observer and reach mutual decisions. The observer might also, occasionally, learn something from me! So, if you have already posted it on Facebook or logged it on i-Record, you do now need to report it again to me.

## **A NEW BOOK ON PUG MOTHS**

Any ID guide to moths is merely the opinion of the author(s). Other books might either present things a different way or even completely disagree with some points. Thus, it is a foolish person who limits him/her self to a single book. How many times have I heard someone say “*I prefer book x*”. What they are really saying, subconsciously of course, is that they are familiar with book x and don’t really want

the challenge of being told that they might have got the ID wrong! Silly billies! (and silly Bessies!). Anyone with reasonable experience will tell you that it is almost always a good idea to use more than one book to name a moth that you are not already familiar with; this is especially the case with pugs. We have the BENHS pug guide; we have Adrian Riley's pug book; we have volume 4 of the *Geometrid Moths of Europe* by Mironov; we have some excellent pictures in the second edition of Chris Manley's book "*British Moths*"; and we also have general tomes such as Waring, Townsend & Lewington – the latter name being the artist in that work. So – pugs must be easy – yes? Are they 'eck as like! So let me now introduce to you "*Magyarország Eupitheciini faunája*" – **The Eupitheciini of Hungary by Imre Fazekas** (if ordering it is Fazekas Imre – Hungarians always put their genus name first!). Imre kindly sent me a copy and I am pleased to tell you about it here because it is, simply, excellent. Of course, the text is in Hungarian and incomprehensible to most Brits, but as I said to him – the pictures are in English! Frankly, we don't need the text as it is mostly concerned with distribution of the species in Hungary. But the pictures are both superb and accurate. In order of presentation we have:

- Illustrations distinguishing the 4 genera of Pasiphila, Chloroclystis, Gymnancyla and Eupithecia;
- Illustrated glossary of terms of wing pattern (only really useful if using the Hungarian language keys);
- Hungarian language keys accompanied with large black and white illustrations with right fore and hind wing with important features arrowed;
- Large size colour illustrations of right fore and hind wings of all species (14 pages at 6 per page);
- Hungarian language keys to genitalia illustrated with black and white drawings with males and females alongside each other (including anal plates, valva shape and aedeagus).
- Male genitalia in larger size;
- Female genitalia in larger size. These latter two might be the preference of many as the drawings are all in a single section whilst those above are dotted throughout the keys.

The illustrations are all crisp and clear as well as, importantly, original (i.e., not slavishly repeated from existing books). This provides an inevitable new perspective. I am intrigued to see that confusion between White-spotted and Golden-rod Pugs is recognised. I am currently addressing this actual problem in relation to a moth caught by Roger Millard. I considered it to be *tripunctaria*, but evidently Ben Sale thinks it is *virgaureata*. I must (grudgingly) concede defeat – Ben is right! [and you read it here first!]. More importantly, the book has alerted me to an issue that I did not know existed.

I recommend this book, which can only be ordered from the following two e-mail addresses:

[fazekas@microlepidoptera.hu](mailto:fazekas@microlepidoptera.hu)

[fazekas.hu@gmail.com](mailto:fazekas.hu@gmail.com)

I suppose that if you order now, without delay, there is a fighting chance that the order can be despatched by the North Pole office fairly rapidly?

**Price: 35 € (includes postage)**

- Method of payment: bank transfer.
- In the order, please give the following:
- Customer Name:
- Your postal address:
- Number of copies required:
- Your e-mail address:

Fazekas Imre | head | biologist  
Pannon Institute  
7625 Pécs | Magaslati út 24. | Hungary

Tel.: 06 72 249 259  
Mobil: 06 30 93 97 246

\*\*\*\*\*

That's all for now.

Colin

\*\*\*\*\*

Colin W. Plant  
Herts & Middx Counties Moth Recorder  
14 West Road  
Bishops Stortford  
Herts CM23 3QP  
01279 – 507697  
e-mail: [colinwplant@gmail.com](mailto:colinwplant@gmail.com)

\*\*\*\*\*