

AUGUST ADDENDUM

NATIONAL MOTH NIGHTS

Reminder ... UK National Moth Nights are this week, 27 – 29 August 2020.

The original meaning of this event may have been diluted over time. Originally, it was designed to encourage people into mothing by organising public events – as well as boosting moth-recording around target species. I still support the event, though its contribution to moth recording is perhaps minimal in a county like ours (Herts and Middlesex equally) where people are already trapping on a regular basis, often weekly and in many cases every night. Nevertheless, the scientist in me sees great value in a nationwide database of results from a single short period of time, so do please try to trap and count moths on at least one of the three nights in this period (ideally all three). From my point of view, the records should come, as usual, with records from other dates, ideally in one go at the end of the year. I can then easily extract dated lists and send them on to the Moth Night team. If, however, you wish to play a more active role, you can submit lists from these nights direct to the event organisers. Please remember to also include them in your annual returns. Normally, Moth Night data ends up with the *National Moth Recording Scheme* who then “repatriate” records to the various County Moth Recorders. However, in the wake of Covid 19 there is a measure of uncertainty; please make sure that NMN data is sent to me in the normal manner as well as to the event organisers.

FACEBOOK

I keep finding the odd bod who thinks that our Facebook page, skilfully managed by Ben Sale, is all we offer. It is not. It is just one of our many offerings. To belong to the Herts & Middx Moth Group, and to get this e-newsletter, you must be on my formal list. If you are not, and assuming that you want to be, please e-mail me at cpauk1@ntlworld.com with a request to be added. Data protection regulations mean I cannot add you without your prior permission.

GUBBLECOTE

A new member who lives in the far west at Gubblecote, has joined us and wonders if there are any other moth enthusiasts in his area. Data protection means I cannot tell him without your permission. If you are anywhere near Gubblecote and might be willing to help out a beginner, please e-mail me to say so and I will pass you on.

LATE AUGUST HIGHLIGHTS

Well – that was an interesting August. I think the last time I recall a year with such a variety of “rare” and otherwise “unexpected” species in the traps was in 1983 (when I was living and trapping in East Ham, London = South Essex). However, it is worth looking “between the lines”. Amongst all the phenomenally good stuff, the background level of resident species was pretty much abysmal. Most people will be aware that moths such as **Uncertain**, **Large Yellow Underwing** and our old friend the **Heart and Dart** –can sometimes exceed a hundred individuals in the trap, but during 2020 none of these have even made double figures in my garden trap. Of course, my experience might differ from yours, though several of you report similar results. Is this just a “flash in the pan” (in which case, why?), or is it a portent of some impending environmental change? Things such as this are precisely why it is important to keep on recording – even if the moths are poor. It might be boring for you, but the numbers, even if they are low, are critically important in the longer term analysis of data across the two counties. I am delighted to learn, from occasional telephone conversations and other means, that the majority of you are soldiering on in spite of depressingly poor results. Corona virus may have limited the number of trips out to the local woods, but I get the definite impression that garden lists are going to dominate my work load in January when you send these in to me! I welcome this. A first task will be to build a list of ALL the species that are poorly represented during 2020 and scrutinise this for any common

factors. I have a gut feeling (but no serious evidence) that moths whose caterpillars feed on or in the rootstock of plants might be disproportionately represented?

There were a few good moths. This list is not exhaustive and I apologise to anyone whose moths are not included. It simply means I forgot – your records are either safe (if that is the agreement we have) or expected at the end of the year with your annual return (almost everybody). The night of 11th August 2020 was especially productive – it was a “migrant night”, with an almost unprecedented number of moth species affecting at least the southern half of Britain. This, of course, renders interpretation of some species numbers problematic. Male Gypsy Moths (*Lymantria dispar*) are regular primary immigrants these days – but they are also resident in much of the two counties. Likewise, the **Tree-lichen Beauty** (*Cryphia algae*) and the **White-point** (*Mythimna albipuncta*) – residents or immigrants? Perhaps an analysis of all our data at the end of the year might help out?

In no particular order ...

White-spotted Pinion *Cosmia diffinis* was caught at light by David Hatton at Echo Hill, Royston on 12th August 2020. Newcomers to the game may be unaware that we almost lost this moth in the 1970s as Dutch Elm Disease swept the country and changed the visible landscape for ever. There's quite a bit of elm behind his garden, so this capture could indicate a local population? There is a need to search for caterpillars at the appropriate season.

An unknown *Coleophora* from Nuthampstead Marsh in the north-east of Herts, light trapped by John & Jenny Chainey on 15th July 2020, has now been dissected and proves to be a female *Coleophora adpersella*. Apart from an adult at light in 2007, coincidentally also on 15th July, caught at her garden in Barnet by Rachel Terry, there are no other records of this species for either Herts or Middlesex. The larvae feed on Orache (*Atriplex* spp.) and Sea Purslane (*Halimione portulacoides*) from a case.

Two rather distinctive, yet infrequently recorded micros, in the form of *Chrysoclista linneella* and *Ethmia quadrillella*, were caught in light traps on 7th August 2020 in the Ealing area of Middlesex by Barbara Mulligan.

Cosmopterix pulchrimella – a rather attractive micro – has been reported by three or four separate people at different locations. Details not immediately to hand, but interesting that this mot has suddenly appeared “from nowhere”.

There were a few reports of **Beautiful Marbled** (*Eublemma purpuralis*), but I can't find the piece of paper that I wrote them on! I can recall with certainty reports from Simon Buckingham in Harefield, just inside Middlesex, on 11th August 2020 as well as one only just over border into North Essex at Stickling Green, also on 11th August 2020 by Ted Ponting. I also recall one at Bengoe, but I think that was a phone message and it will be on that piece of paper I cannot currently find.

The all white crambid *Palpita vitrealis* was noted on a wall above the moth trap on 12th August 2020, by William Bishop and there was another, a male, in Ian Gamble's light trap at Berkhamsted on 13th August 2020.

The pyralid *Ancylosis oblitella*, is a rarely seen beast in our area. Simon Knott noted one in his garden at Bengoe on 11th August 2020. The larvae feed on goose foots (*Chenopodium* spp.) usually near the sea.

Bedstraw Hawk (*Hyles gallii*) was noted twice. An adult was caught on 11th August 202 at Cuffley, by Alan Bolitho, who also had over 70 **Jersey Tigers** (*Euplagia quadripunctaria*) in the same trap – a staggering number! Of enormous surprise was a fully mature Bedstraw Hawk larva walking the streets

of Bishops Stortford (just down the road from my house, as it happens) – presumably looking for somewhere suitable to pupate.

Convolvulus Hawk-moth (*Agrius convolvuli*) was noted at Harpenden on 11th August 2020 by Alan Jackson, and in Little Hadham, to the west of Bishops Stortford, on 22nd August 2020 by Jono Forgham.

A male example of the **Breckland Plume *Oxptilus distans*** from Little Hadham, caught on 8th August 2020 by Jono Forgham was identified by genitalia dissection (by Graeme Smith). This is not the first report from this site and we think that this species might be breeding in the area. The extremely well-camouflaged larvae feed mainly on Smooth Hawk's-beard (*Crepis capillaris*) but are also reported on Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*).

OFF-PISTE REPORTS ...

A **Marbled Clover** in Woodford Green [Essex], 9th August 2020, Robin Barfoot.

The **Minsmere Ant-lion *Euroleon nostras*** (O.K., it is not a moth, but it is seriously interesting in terms of immigration) was noted in North London at Highgate on 11th August 2020, by Alan Stewart. In Europe this species breeds inland (in Britain it is restricted to sandy coastal areas), so is worth looking out for in moth traps.

GEOFF SENIOR

The group sends its best wishes to Geoff Senior, one of our more senior members, who suffered abuse from some angry Hornets (*Vespa crabro*) whilst inspecting his moth trap in his garden at Little Hadham. Apparently, Geoff collapsed and had to be hospitalised for two days, but I am told that he is now on the mend. Hopefully his flow of records from the village, begun in 1977, will continue.

IT'S LEAF-MINER SEASON

As we prepare to enter September, thoughts should be turning towards leaf-mining moths! This year, I am hoping that people will also pay special attention to Coleophora species, whose larvae feed from cases on various plants. I am preparing a "Coleophora Crib-sheet" which I will circulate very soon. Meanwhile, throw the switch in your head to turn on the Coleophora section. Those who have no real idea what I am babbling on about have a few days, at least, to work out what a Coleophora is.

If the combination of Covid virus and my non-functioning legs permits, I might organise a couple of Leaf-miner/Coleophora recording walks in the coming weeks.

That's all for now.

Do keep stuff coming.

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