

MOTH MUMBLINGS: NOVEMBER 2023

WELCOME

Greetings all. First my apologies for the silence in October. A number of things hit the proverbial fan and took my time and attention elsewhere.

Immigrant moths continued to appear in garden light traps – though fresh immigration activity was probably minimal. Meanwhile, the resident species continued with their very poor showings. Now the weather has definitely turned and it will be interesting to see if the cold-weather species are also adversely affected this year or whether they present in “normal” numbers! There are Red-Green Carpets, November Moths, Blair’s Shoulder-knot and several others flying about. We are entering the peak flight period for Plumed Prominent (not yet recorded in our area – but I bang on about it every year nevertheless). Any time now I expect to start hearing reports of Black-spotted Chestnut – which is indeed in our area, even if extremely local in terms of where it is found. We think it is spreading – this could be the year it pitches up in YOUR garden. Eyes open – don’t dismiss anything that is “not quite right” – I am always happy to look at images or actual moths.

A NEW KID IN TOWN

You will all be familiar with the “snail trail” mines on leaves of poplars and willows. These are made by species of *Phyllocnistis*. Those on poplars (*P. xenia* on Grey Poplar and *P. unipunctella* on most other poplars) are recognised in the adult stage by the entirely white wing base; those on *Salix* species (until last week, that was *P. saligna* on leaves and *P. ramulicola* in the stems) have a brown longitudinal streak from the wing base outwards, dissecting the white basal area. In the last few weeks, a paper was published in the *Norwegian Journal of Entomology* in which *Phyllocnistis asiatica* was, somewhat casually, added to the British moth list. The basis of this action is a specimen collected by Stella Beavan at Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve in Cambridgeshire. The new species will be allocated an ABH checklist number in the annual review of the British checklist in the January 2024 *Entomologist’s Record*.

The separation of leaf mines of *P. asiatica* from our allegedly common *P. saligna* seems to be a problem. It is unclear if we really have *P. saligna* in Britain, or if all GB records actually relate to *P. asiatica*; or we may have both? To add to the confusion, careful examination of the *Salix* mines collected in Hertfordshire in the last week (thanks Liz, Helen, Phil, William) suggests that we almost certainly also have another species - *P. extrematrix* and that this may be widespread. This one mines in the stem only, not extending up any petiole and is so far only on *Salix ?fragilis*. However, Bob Heckford may have also found this species in another UK county.

Plans are afoot to try and sort out this confusion. THERE ARE STILL SOME MINES EVIDENT on long-leaved willows (White, Crack, Weeping and others). **I want them!** What I need to do is rear adult moths and then

send these for DNA bar-coding. This latter is being organised by Bob Heckford and Stella Beavan. Peter Hall will be dissecting the genitalia of bar-coded examples and Rob Edmunds will be categorising the leaf mines of species named by bar-coding. Sometime towards the end of 2024 the five of us hope to generate a review of *Salix*-feeding *Phyllocnistis* including a reliable guide to identifying the mines.

Most mines visible now (November) will be vacated, but after feeding in the mine, the larvae usually pupates in a minute fold on the leaf edge. It is hard work searching for these on site – much easier back at home. If you can find me some folded leaf edges then fantastic, but it will be better for you to simply send me leaves to look at. Once you have found a mine (quite easy this year), select the twig that bears the affected leaf, and also select two or three twigs from around it – then snip these off and put in a plastic bags to mail to me. This way, if the larva has wandered away from the mined leaf to pupate we still have a reasonable chance of finding the pupa.

I don’t want individual leaves. As a guide, the bundle of cut twigs/leaves should fit in a standard “Mother’s Pride” type bread bag and still leave room for you to tie a knot in the end – so about 20 – 30 cms (or 8 – 10 inches in real money). Bag them up immediately as leaves (with pupae) do fall off and get lost. Post to me in ordinary second class post in a large, padded envelope or something similar. Please remember to include data (site name, grid ref if know, date collected, your name; if you can name the host plant please do so). I am happy to receive material from anywhere in Britain, though Herts & Middlesex are the priority.

I will eventually examine all received material, but the starting point will be for me to place each sample inside the leg of a pair of ladies tights, tie the end and put this outside until any adults appear. It is expected that several samples will be negative, of course. I am limited only by how many pairs of tights I can muster! I want masses and masses of samples please! If the postie has to hire a van then we are getting there!

If you wish to examine *Phyllocnistis* mines in long-leaved *Salix* species yourself, please use the following guide; in due course, your notes might get translated into species (Note: I have seen example of all of these categories from Hertfordshire in the last week):

- Upper surface of leaf blade only - not entering petiole;
- Upper surface of blade only - also entering petiole;
- Lower surface of leaf only - not entering petiole;
- Lower surface of blade only - also entering petiole;
- Affecting both upper and lower surface of leaf blade - not entering petiole;
- Affecting both upper and lower surface of leaf blade - also entering petiole;

- In leaf blade first then down the petiole and up a second petiole to complete in the second leaf but no other direct involvement of a stem;
- In both leaf blade, petiole and also feeding in the stem (passing by at least one opportunity to turn and attack a petiole).
- Entirely within the stem, not entering petioles or leaf blades.

Beyond this, it would be really useful to know whether the course of the mine was straight or winding, following the midrib or leaf edge, or whatever. Photographs would be ideal – and if rearing adults please cross reference breeding cage and photo of the mine with the same number.

Whether rearing yourself or collecting to send to me, it really will help if you can name the *Salix* species that the mines are on, though it is accepted that this may not be possible. It is likely that at least one of the species in the group is confined to purple willow with the rest preferring white/weeping/crack willows. **If you have access to purple willow in particular** (local parks, larger gardens, whatever) do please look for the mines.

AND ANOTHER NEW KID IN TOWN

I have received for publication in the *Entomologist's Record* notice of another new moth for Britain – this time in Middlesex (London N22): *Acalyptis platani* (Nepticulidae). Useful additional information can be found at:
<https://www.mapress.com/zootaxa/2007f/zt01436p048.pdf>.

I am limited, quite rightly, by editorial “pre-publication privilege” on how much I able to report at this stage. However, people ought to be looking at leaf mines on London Plane trees in London (and probably elsewhere) and should not assume that all gallery mines are made by a *Stigmella* on the wrong foodplant. I welcome bags of leaves, as long as data are included. I rather expect that it might be widespread and common, but simply overlooked. Please keep me posted (or send me mined leaves to look at).

OUR NEW WEB SITE

Good progress is being made. I am about a third of the way through re-writing all the species texts.

Jim Wheeler, who is building the site for us has reported:

“...I had a look on your old website, unfortunately all the photos are way too small to use on the new site.... with modern HD and 4K screens, everything needs to be huge... min 1280px wide”.

Consequently, Ben Sale has been drawing on his own amazingly comprehensive stack of photos (those taken in our area) and uploading these so that there is at least one picture for each species (though there are many gaps).

So, it is now time for you to make a contribution. If you have any decent images of moths, or larvae, pupae, mines, galls, parasites, habitats or whatever **that were taken in either Herts or Middlesex**, we have created a link specifically for you to upload these ... all of them.

<https://hertsmiddxmoths.uk/uploadpic.php>

This is a public link; anyone can use it, but it does not give access to admin tasks!). The photos will appear in the “uploaded photos” section of admin (so you will not yet be able to see them), from where they will be either accepted or rejected by either myself or Ben.

I do hope you will support this. It is not possible for us to have too many photos. And please do consider all those aspects other than full-on shots of adult moths. Remember too, many species have sexual differences. Then there are the undersides. For some groups the labial palps are useful in side view). Antennae can be weird! If you think it is any good please upload it.

NEW WEB SITE – THE LEGAL STUFF

I need to get this out there – so here goes. **The following is a draft: comments welcomed.**

hertsmiddxmoths.uk
 Data Policy / Privacy Policy

This policy concerns the collection, use and sharing of records and photographs by HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS (hertsmiddxmoths.uk). We believe that everyone involved in the transmission of a record, from the field observation to the end user, should be aware of, understand and agree with the following terms and conditions that govern the collation and dissemination of HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS data. This data policy may be subject to revision at any time in the future after due consultation. Please review the latest version of this policy regularly.

First principles

- HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS aims to maximise the use of records and data to promote understanding, recording and conservation of moths and their habitats. HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS records will be made available in a controlled and managed way to fulfil this aim.
- By agreeing to this policy, recorders supplying records and photographs to HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS, will be considered to have granted permission for HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS to use the records and photographs as outlined in this policy.
- Nevertheless, recorders will retain ownership of their records and photographs and, of course, are free to use them as they wish. HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS will own the dataset and use it in accordance with this policy.
- Recordors may request removal of records or personal information from the HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS dataset by contacting HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS here - hertsmiddxmoths.uk/help.php (note: this is not yet “live”)

- HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS will promote this data policy on the website so that recorders can make an informed choice about submitting records and photographs.

Some specifics

- **Use of HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS data.** Records will be used to provide feedback to moth recorders and to stimulate further recording, as well as to inform conservation decision-making, the planning system, research, education, policy development, increasing public awareness and other uses in line with the stated aims of HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS.
- **Use of Images.** All images remain the exclusive copyright of their respective owners. Each photograph is credited with the owner's name. Permission to use any photographs must be sought from the copyright holder themselves. By submitting/uploading images to HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS, you will be considered to have granted permission for them to be displayed on hertsmiddxmoths.uk/ and HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS newsletters.
- **Sharing HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS data.** Summary distribution information (at tetrad & monad grid square resolution) will be made available to members through maps and listings on the HERTS & MIDDLESEXmoths.co.uk web site. This is to provide feedback and information to moth recorders and to support not-for-profit decision-making, education, research and other public-benefit purposes. Data will be exchanged directly with Butterfly Conservation and select National moth recording schemes.
- **Restrictions.** HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS reserve the right to refuse requests for data. Access to data may be restricted if making data available increases the risk of damage to moth populations and habitats or undermines in any way the collation of volunteered records through HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS. Records of an agreed list of species (shown in Appendix 1) are considered to be sensitive and will not be made openly available. (Note: List not yet created).

Personal details

- **What personal data do we hold?** We hold personal data consisting of your name, address (only if provided), e-mail address and phone number (when provided). This is stored electronically and securely on a stand-alone computer that is not connected to the Internet and is managed in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) or subsequent legal provisions.
- **What personal data do we share?** We only share your name. You are considered to have granted permission for HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS to publish your name on the HERTS & MIDDLESEXmoths.co.uk web site unless otherwise informed.
- **What data don't we share?** Your address and contact details will not be published on HERTS & MIDDLESEXmoths.co.uk or any HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS affiliated web sites, social media or HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS newsletters without your permission. Your postal address and contact details will not be made available to the general public or third parties without your permission.

- **Can I see my personal data?** You have the right to request a copy of the information that we hold about you. If you would like a copy of some or all of your personal information please contact us here - hertsmiddxmoths.uk/help.php You may also request the removal of personal information.
- **Are you happy?** GDPR states that all personal data held should be on an opt in basis. We want to be sure you wish to remain on our system, if you wish to opt out this can be done by contacting us here - hertsmiddxmoths.uk/help.php (it is a statement of the obvious, but if you refuse permission for us to store your contact data it might not be possible to send you newsletters etc).

Website

You agree to use the hertsmiddxmoths.uk website only for lawful purposes and in a way that does not infringe the rights of or restrict or inhibit anyone else's use and enjoyment of the Site.

The website may contain material, views and opinions that are not representative of HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS.

You agree that all content is provided on an "as is" basis and that the Website is intended for general use without any specific purpose. You accept that this Website is not guaranteed to be free of errors and may not be available uninterrupted at all times. Under no circumstances will HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS be liable for any of the following losses or damage (whether such losses are foreseen, foreseeable, known or otherwise): (a) loss of data; (b) loss of revenue or anticipated profits; (c) loss of business; (d) loss of opportunity; (e) loss of goodwill or injury to reputation; (f) losses suffered by third parties; or (g) any other loss indirect, consequential, special or exemplary damages arising from the use of the Site regardless of the form of action.

Cookies. Cookies are small pieces of information left on your computer that identify you. HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS may set cookies on your computer. In most cases the functionality of the website will remain whilst logged on if you choose not to accept cookies. Whilst logged off you may experience some limitation of services if you choose not to accept cookies.

- For more information please read our Cookies Policy - hertsmiddxmoths.uk/cookies-policy.pdf (note: this is not yet "live")

When you submit contributions, you warrant that:

- they are your own work or you have the right to make this contribution available,
- they are not defamatory and do not infringe any law, and that
- you indemnify HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS against all legal fees, damages and other expenses that may be incurred by the HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS as a result of your breach of the above warranty.

The HERTS & MIDDLESEX MOTHS reserves the right to remove or edit any material considered inappropriate.

How to contact us

- Please contact us if you have any questions about our privacy policy or information we hold about you - hertsmiddxmoths.uk/help.php (note: this is not yet “live”)

LEAF MINES – REST OF THIS YEAR

I still want leaf mines please .. from anywhere in our two counties. Please send in plastic bags (mixing trees in one bag is fine, but try to remember to write the name of the tree on the leaf, using a biro). Add a label (place name, grid reference if known), date of collection plus your own name). Do not put layers of tissue in the bags. Put in something relatively crushproof (large padded envelopes are usually OK) and send to my address in the “normal” post. **Don’t** use “tracked”, “registered”, “next day delivery”, “signed for” or anything else – just normal second-class postage. My postie is well trained and will dump the lot in the big black box by the door – *regardless of any special service you have paid for*. The norm here is for second-class mail to arrive the day following posting. “First” is a waste of your money. On the off-chance that there is a temp on duty that day (e.g., if the regular postie is ill) and that said temp actually does follow the rules, the items will be taken back to the sorting office, where it may be a week or more before I can collect them.

Leaf-mines made by moths on leaves of trees and some other plants fall into two groups – those that can be named reliably by staring at them and those that cannot be named without examination of the adult. What most people don’t realise is that the vast bulk of map dots for those species that appeared in our 2008 book *The Moths of Hertfordshire* were the result of a significant effort by myself and a few others, notably the late Charles Watson, to rear adults from all the leaf mines seen – both collected by ourselves and received in the post. Mined leaves of a particular plant/tree were placed in nylon net (the foot section of a pair of ladies tights), labelled and staked out in the garden for the winter. As we approached the impending publication of the book, in 2008, there could be over 500 such nets nailed to the ground under bushes in my garden.

In about early March, these were brought indoors and tipped into jam jars that had been carefully cleaned and prepared in advance [the logistics associated with 500 jam jars that each needed to be examined daily is for another day]. Emerging adults were then collected; early on they were carefully set, but as the weeks progressed they emerged faster than I could manage them and so they were simply retained in glass tubes. There followed several weeks of identification work, usually including genitalia dissection.

Unfortunately, as more and more people come to a particular area of field biology (such as leaf mines), the more we start to understand. Previously held opinions are challenged by findings that do not always agree. This is how progress is made, of course, but it does, annoyingly, usually make things harder rather than easier.

And so it is that we come to some specifics. Leaf mines on certain plants have always been a problem, most notably birches, hawthorns, other “rosaceous”

trees and bushes, and deciduous oaks. For some, there is no change. Gallery mines made by *Stigmella* species on birches have always been difficult and still are; there is no change to the rules. However, when it comes to deciduous oak trees there has been a view that some mines can be named by eye (a situation perpetuated by the supposedly definitive ID keys in works such as volumes 1 and 2 of *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*). Here, the rules have changed, in particular for naming the “pucker” or “tent” mines of *Phyllonorycter* species. The current view is that even the very common species cannot be named with 100% reliability unless adults are reared. The consequences of this are worrying – if we have been writing stuff down as, for example, *Phyllonorycter quercifoliella*, could some of these actually have been examples of what we *think* are extremely rare species?

I don’t really think that this is the case, as I have almost always reared adults from oak mines (which partially explains the long delays in getting some lists back to people). However, for the 2023 – 2024 leaf-miner season I am getting serious. I do still want mined leaves of oaks (and everything else), as there are some species that still can be recognised on sight, and I do want mines on rosaceous shrubs and everything else, but you may have to wait until next April before lists are supplied to you.

For interest, the following trees are potentially a problem in our area:

- *Phyllonorycter* mines on Rowan, Whitebeam, Wild Service, and other *Sorbus* species.
- Gallery mines on Hazel and Hornbeam. On these, we have *Stigmella microtheriella* (abundant in 2022) and *Stigmella floslactella* (scarce in 2022). We now realise that to separate these will very often require looking at the larva inside the mine. *Stigmella microtheriella* feeds on its back (“belly up”), whilst *Stigmella floslactella* feeds “normally” (“belly down”). See <https://www.leafmines.co.uk/html/Lepidoptera/S.microtheriella.htm>.
- Galley mines on Alders: The two species of *Stigmella alnifoliella* and *Stigmella glutinosae* cannot be separated by the leaf mines.

That’s all for now. Time to get out there and find me some snail-trails.

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