

MOTH MUMBLINGS – LEAF-MINER GAPS

Over the last three weeks I have received just over 100 separate packets of mined leaves from you chaps, from large padded-envelopes delivered by the (somewhat mystified) postie to carrier bags left in the box by my front door. This is excellent and as a result many dots have been added to the micro-moth distribution maps for our two vice-county areas of Hertfordshire and Middlesex. On average, an hour of searching/collecting seems to generate a list of between 20 and 27 species, depending on habitat diversity, in the studied area.

Of course, some leaf-mining moths are hard to identify just from the mine and adults are required. This is done by putting the mined leaves inside a cut-off foot section of a pair of ladies “tights” and tying this out in the garden, on the ground, for the winter. In May, these can be brought indoors to await the emergence of the adults. My “living roof” (the flat roof area over the extension – for those who have never been here) is awash with lady’s tights at the moment! Happily, being on the roof rather than in the ground level garden the neighbours can’t see and so don’t complain – plus the foxes can’t get up there to destroy all my hard work! Hopefully, next May even more dots can be added, reliably, to the distribution maps.

[As an aside, if anyone fancies a go at this themselves, an alternative to annoying the missus by raiding her tights drawer is to use those white bags that supermarkets now use instead of plastic for fruit and veg. These have an incredibly fine weave and thus prevent escape by even the smallest of micros. They come complete with a draw string that both closes the bag and allows you to tie it to a bush.]

The good news is that (as usual) I have been proved wrong. I said last time that the leaves would soon all be gone, but whilst leaf-fall is indeed much advanced in rural areas of Hertfordshire apparently, in the Middlesex/London area where the ambient temperature is up to 2 degrees higher, many trees do in fact still have many of their leaves. **This is good news** for us, because the leaf-mining moths are late this year and if you were all to go for a wander this coming weekend it is likely that you would be able to find several species.

Compared with Hertfordshire, many areas of Middlesex appear neglected by moth enthusiasts and especially by those who like leaf-miners. Just as an example, I am attaching a Word file that shows the updated map for the Bramble-leaf Miner. This clearly suggests that the moth is probably present in every single map tetrad of Hertfordshire (in spite of being hard to find this particular year), yet over the border in Middlesex it is only very patchily recorded. It may well be absent from the cities of London and Westminster as well as the eastern bit towards the Isle of Dogs, but surely it is present in the rest of Middlesex?

This leads me to the main point of this short newsletter. Our maps now clearly show that **leaf-mining moths are extinct in the London Borough of Hillingdon!** We have no records for that westernmost borough of London from Harefield in the north to Heathrow in the south. This includes the entire valley of the River Colne. The area falls entirely within ten-kilometre square TQ08 and can be discerned on the attached map (the two yellow dots are historic records).

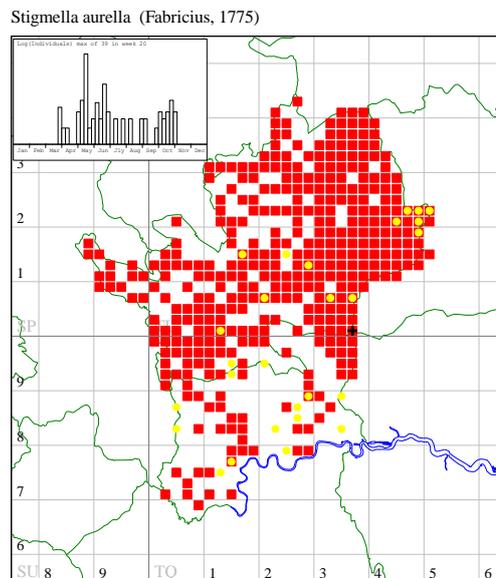
I can already hear the cries of “rubbish” but in my defence it takes me an hour and a half just to drive to that part of our area and as the days are now rather short it gives me little time on site. It would be great if anyone who lives a little more locally could get out there this weekend

and **prove me wrong** (again), so leaving me free to fill in some of the “white holes” on the map nearer to home.

If you can't reach the leaves on trees, there are always those on the ground to examine. Mines in poplar leaves, in particular, might be spotted by looking at fallen leaves that still have isolated green patches (“green islands”). These are created when the caterpillar chomps through the veins of a leaf so that nutrients in the leaf have no route by which to travel down to the roots – and so retain their summer colour.

Don't forget to pick up and examine fallen Plane tree leaves for the big pucker mine on the underside. Also Lime trees for the usually rather small and compact tunnel mines. Don't ignore the Horse Chestnut leaves which are bound to have the miner. Also, check out Firethorn (*Pyracantha*) bushes for the silvery-white upper surface blotch mines. Oh, and *Hypericum* (Rose of Sharron) plants in gardens for the untidy mines of *Ectoedemia septembrella*. Remember, also, that many herbaceous plants may have mined leaves. **Leaf-mines are like the proverbial London rat – you are never more than a few paces away from one!!!**

Revised map for *Stigmella aurella* – Bramble-leaf Miner – at 17th November 2021



If you are not sure that what you have is a mine, send it to me anyway – I want to see it!

Over to you. If anyone needs/wants specific help or direction do feel free to get in touch by e-mail or telephone, as suits.

Good hunting,

Colin

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