



## **Suffolk Moth Group Newsletter**

**Issue 1 - Spring 1996**

Edited by Jon Nicholls

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### **History - Arthur Watchman**

The origins of the present Suffolk Moth Group go back over twenty five years, when on 17th September 1969 The Ipswich and District Natural History Society organised a "Moth Night" at Sycamore Farm, Swilland. It was presided over by Mr H (David) Chipperfield usually known as "Chip", a Lepidopterists of some fifty years standing.

Yours truly and Jan were two of a group at the light, for whom the subject of moths was virtually an unknown, but we were soon hooked as the moths arrived on the sheet and "Chip" gave them increasing unlikely names - Silver Y, Flounced Rustic, Setaceous Hebrew Character etc. !

In due course a small group acquired the necessary equipment, including an American made dynamo, to run the light. The dynamo was powered by a car battery, but later an old lorry batter was obtained allowing the light to be on somewhat longer. This battery was very heavy and took at least two people to carry it.

Although visits were still made to Sycamore Farm, mothing activities expanded and forays were made to many and varied locations in Suffolk. These included Bradfield Woods, Great Blakenham Quarry, Ipswich Parks, Dunwich Forest and Barham Churchyard.

The nucleus of the group at this time was Colin Bloomfield, Jim Foster and Alan Hubbard, Jan and I. Alan was the warden of Bromeswell Reserve and this became a regular venue, one summer's night yielding our highest total, to date, of one hundred and fifty three species of moths. Another memorable night, this time at Sycamore Farm, was extended into a "Dawn Chorus" at Staverton, where as well as many birds, Red Squirrels were much in evidence chasing around in the trees. Will that experience ever be repeated?

When Mike Wise joined the group we then paid frequent visits to Newbourne Reserve of which Mike was warden. He also owned a Honda generator which considerably improved matters. Over the years various people joined or left the group and for convenience the title of Suffolk Moth Group had been coined by the end of the 1970s. During the early 1980s for various reasons the original members ceased to participate in the moth evenings and within a few years the group was down to two of us. The widespread visits made in Suffolk were reduced and mostly consisted of Moth Nights for various Natural History societies and local Trust Groups. These activities may well have ceased altogether if it had not been for Jan who organised them and had been doing so over the years. In fairness, this situation is no less applicable today!

In the early 1990s there was an upsurge in interest in moths and during 1994 we were joined by Steve Noye, Neil Sherman and Jon Nicholls who became regular participants at the increasing number of moth nights.

It was Jon who suggested keeping people up to date with moth happenings by the production of a newsletter. Here's hoping that it will stimulate more people to become active in recording the moths of Suffolk (*sounds like a good title for a book!*)

## **1995. Suffolk Moth Group moth nights - Jon Nicholls**

Last year we had a varied and interesting series of moth nights. Here are just a few observations of where we went and what we saw.

We started the year, on the 23 June, at Little Blakenham Pits, a small nature reserve inside a hole made by digging for chalk. That night we saw about twenty species of moth, including Clouded Border, Large Nutmeg and Buff Ermine, but the star of the show were a number of glowing female Glow worms found around the edge of the site.

On the 30 June we went to the Purdis Heath course of Ipswich Golf Club, which prides itself on the quality and maintenance of its natural habitats. In fact due mainly to the effort of the course manager and his assistant, both of whom are group members, the club recently won a national award for conservation. On this occasion we noted over sixty species, including Light Arches, Lime Hawk, Common Emerald, Grass Emerald, Light Emerald and an Eyed Hawk.

On the 14 July the meeting was at Bixley Heath, next to the Ipswich Golf Club. Again over sixty species were recorded. Included this time were Scalloped Oak, Suspected, Swallow tailed, Peppered, Miller, Drinker, Peach Blossom and Elephant Hawk.

The 21 July saw us at Darsham Marshes. There we saw well over one hundred different species despite, or because of, the rain, which was very heavy at times. There were many notable moths, including Orange, Gothic, Black Arches, Cream bordered Green Pea, Scallop Shell, Herald, Poplar Hawk, and the impressively primitive Leopard.

On the 28 July at Spring Farm Monks Eleigh we were tortured by a Tortrix, believed to be *Cnephasia longana*, which came to the light in vast numbers. This turned the normally pleasant job of looking for moths into a scene from a Hitchcock movie - It was a brave man or woman who dared approach the sheet to examine its contents, they were soon engulfed in the aforementioned micros which got onto your clothes and into mouths and ears, filling them with tiny discarded scales. Through the haze it was possible to find over seventy other moth species including Vapourer, Scalloped Oak, Sallow Kitten, Iron Prominent, Scarce Silver lines and another Peach Blossom.

On 4 August we went to the garden of Colin Bloomfield at Lindsey Tye - Colin is a long time moth man (well a trier anyway! AW) We saw around thirty species which included Yellow Shell, Spectacle and Swallow Prominent.

One of the more up market moth nights was at Shottisham on 11 August. Where we enjoyed silver service on the lawn of a modernised mill. Here we saw well over fifty different species. These included a

Sallow Kitten, Red Underwing, Peacock, Elephant Hawk, Canary shouldered Thorn, and an Oak Processionary. (More of that later)

The 18 August took us to Wolves Wood. A fairly quiet night brought in forty or so species. Moths of note were Centre barred Sallow, Coxcomb Prominent, Small Phoenix, Yellow barred Brindle and Blood Vein.

On the 1 September we went to the Cornard Meadows at Sudbury. Here we were understandably mistaken for a rave! we had the bright lights and only lacked the loud music hoards of young dancers and mind altering substances. None the less PC and WPC Plod still paid us a visit and were baffled at why apparently sensible adults, some wearing sunglasses, should be staring, as if transfixed, at a white sheet in the middle of a field. What they didn't know was that we had seen a Vapourer and Poplar Hawk to name but two - it takes all sorts!

On 8 September we joined up with the Suffolk Young Naturalists at Alder Carr Farm, home of Joan Hardingham. Unfortunately it was not a night to impress the young and impressionable. We only saw 12 species with the Herald being the pick of a poor bunch along with a Buff Tip caterpillar. On this disappointing note the meetings came to an end.

I hope this gives you an impression of the varied, but always memorable, moth nights. I look forward to meeting many new faces this year at the nights already organised by Arthur and Jan Watchman.

## Proposed Moth Nights for 1996

17 May Priestley Wood.

24 May Purdis Heath.

31 May Hollesley Common      If you wish to attend any of these meetings please phone: Arthur Watchman on ....

7 June Sizewell.

14 June Blaxhall Heath.

21 June Tiger Hill.

28 June Darsham Marsh.

5 July Eye.

12 July Groton Wood.

19 July Monks Eleigh.

26 July Holywells Park.

2 August TBA

9 August Raydon

16 August Halesworth

23 August Aldeburgh

30 August Little Blakenham.

## 1996. Suffolk Moth Group Moth Nights - Jon Nicholls

### Priestley Wood. Friday 17 May.

Mentioned in the Bishop of Ely's estates in 1251 Priestly wood is an exceptional pocket of ancient woodland that still retains its original boundary bank and ditch. Contained within the wood were lots of spring flowers, several of them indicator species for ancient woodland, such as herb paris, dogs

mercury, carpets of bluebells, spurge laurel, early purple orchid, wood anemone, yellow archangel, ground ivy, wood dog violet, cowslips, primroses and false oxlips. It is now owned by the Woodland Trust who allow access at all times to its many rides and paths. The weather had been poor all day with rain and cold north easterly winds. The evening was not so bad with a cloudy sky, no rain and temperatures around 6°C. A. W. set up his M.V. light on the path that runs along the western side of the wood and Roger Kendrick placed three smaller Skinner style 'Heath Robinson' traps, using small UV lights, on the sloped path through the centre of the wood. Not surprisingly there were few moths about and the final total was only ten. These included;

- Water Carpet and Red Twin spot carpet both Bedstraw feeders.
- Several Purple Thorns. Streamer which feeds on wild rose.
- Plus Hebrew Character, Small Waved Umber, Clouded Drab, Pale Prominent, Brindled Pug and Common Quaker.

## Home trap - Jon Nicholls

I run a heath trap on a picnic table in my modest 5M by 10M garden in Felixstowe. This year I had in the region of 127 different moths. My most abundant species was the Feathered Ranunculus, which reached over 900 caught. In an attempt to ascertain the size of the local population I started to mark them with a small felt tip pen. It was found that on average I seemed to recapture about 30% each day, giving a population estimate of 180. Some of these were clearly caught again and again, though I did not re-mark those already caught. Has anyone else looked into this, or know of any reported publications of this type of study, if you do then please let me know. There were many impressive moths throughout the year but the ones I remember most are Netted Pug, Vapourer, Swallow tailed, Magpie, Phoenix, Poplar Hawk, Red Underwing and an Oak Processionary moth. This moth was a first for Suffolk and five were recorded in Felixstowe during the summer. It is normally only found in central and southern Europe where it lives gregariously on oak. What this illustrates is that even a small trap run in a small garden can pick up the most unexpected of moths.

One of the greatest pleasures I get is opening the moth trap first thing in the morning, you just don't know what you are going to find.

1996 got started for me on 7 April, as prior to that I failed to get a single moth. Since then I have had the following early species:

- Grey Shoulder Knot. Hebrew Character. Early Grey. Common Quaker.
- Silver Y. 23/iv (An early migrant?) Bright line Brown eye. Garden Carpet.
- Double striped Pug. Angle Shades. Clouded Drab. Red Chestnut.
- Scarce Tissue. Muslin. Shuttle shaped Dart.

How are you doing What have you seen? Let me know. In the next newsletter I hope to have news from around the county but that's up to you. If you want to receive the next newsletter then could you send me £2.50 to cover photocopying and postage, and also any of your records for the year up to the end of May. What I would also be interested in doing is to visit your trap, so that I can gain a bit of first hand knowledge about your conditions. If you could let me know when this is convenient we can try to arrange a visit.