



## **Suffolk Moth Group Newsletter**

**Issue 18 - February 2000**

Edited by Jon Nicholls

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### **Editorial**

#### **Moths and Biodiversity Action Plans - Jon Nicholls**

I am sure many of you are aware of the Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) that are being produced at the moment as a response to Local Agenda 21. ( See Newsletter 16 and Tony Prichard's article ). As far as the moths are concerned a list has been produced of National species that are to be targeted for consideration. As the ecology of moths is so poorly understood the objectives of these plans, to maintain population size at known sites, are at the moment very difficult to achieve. All that can be realistically done at the moment is to monitor the species and try to prevent the destruction or degradation of their habitat, possibly through the enforcement of the Habitat Action Plans (HAPs). This is easier said than done with the present crisis in farming where it seems the only profitable area is the industrial production of grain crops. Farmers are likely to be either going out of business and therefore not using grazing stock anymore or converting to arable crops. Both of these eventualities is bad news to what is left of the 'natural' countryside.

As so little is known about so many of these moths a lot of arguments have been going on behind the scenes in producing these lists, and it seems almost arbitrary as to the content of the species chosen. However there is a list and I include it at the end of this article. Most of the survey work done by moth

(or any taxon, for that matter) recorders is random. We either trap regularly in the same place and pick up what ever happens to be in area or we go to 'interesting' places in the hope of finding 'interesting' moths. It is very difficult to actually target a species. If you know it is in a particular area, and you go there and find it, then you have find out nothing that you did not already know. If you go to a likely place and don't find it, as so often happens, then there can be many reasons for this. It could be it is not there or it could be there but the conditions where not right to find it on that night. What you can do, of course, is use methods other than MV lights to find the moths. Searching the foodplants, for example, use beating and sweeping. This feels far more like real 'targeting' but in the case of species like Pale Shining Brown and White-line Snout it is very difficult or even impossible as the foodplant is unknown. However in an attempt to encourage some of us to try and find out a bit more about some of the less well known species in the county I enclose a list of 'Target Species'. This list is my own and is merely a suggested one, if you feel that others should be added then let me know and I will include them in future lists. I have based it on the low occurrence, but none the less inclusion, of these species in the Suffolk records. There are many more I could have chosen and I am sure there are some here that you may feel are not worthy of inclusion however like most things it is a start. It does not include any micros as this would have been far too long a list (and job!). We seem to know even less about the micros and it is noticeable that only one is included in the national list, *Coleophora tricolor* – a Breckland species. Lastly I would encourage all of you to use a variety of methods this year, try some sugar on the garden shed or beating a few shrubs and trees, you know it will make you feel better!

The species on the National Biodiversity Action Plan are as follows;

Argent and Sable, Ashworth's Rustic, Barberry Carpet, Barred Tooth-stripe, Belted Beauty, Black-banded, Black-veined, Bordered Gothic, Brighton Wainscot, Bright Wave, Buttoned Snout, Chalk Carpet, Clay Fan-foot, Cousin German, Dark Bordered Beauty, Dark Crimson Underwing, Dingy Mocha, Double Line, Drab Looper, Essex Emerald, Fiery Clearwing, Four-spotted, Heart, Light Crimson Underwing, Lunar Yellow Underwing, Marsh, Marsh Mallow, Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk, Netted Carpet, New Forest Burnet, Northern Dart, Olive Crescent, Orange Upperwing, Pale Shining Brown, Reddish Buff, Scarce Blackneck, Scarce Merveille du Jour, Silky Wave, Slender Scotch Burnet, Small Lappet, Speckled Footman, Square-spotted Clay, Straw Belle, Striped Lychnis, Sword Grass, Toadflax Brocade, Waved Carpet, White-lined Dart, White Spot and White-spotted Pinion.

If you would like to be actively involved in any work on any of the species listed above then please contact Mark Parsons or David Green at Butterfly Conservation.

Jon Nicholls

(Alternatively contact myself - Tony Prichard - in my role as Moth Conservation Officer for Suffolk Branch of Butterfly Conservation).

## **National Moth Night 1999 and 2000 - Jon Nicholls**

### **National Moth Night 1999**

The first ever National Moth Night, jointly organised by Atropos and InsectLine, attracted a great deal of interest, and the results provided a fascinating insight into what was on the wing on the night of 17 July 1999. Data was collated by Brian Goodey of Essex.

The results can be summarised broadly as follows:

Total number of records :	13048
Total number of species :	773 (358 micros and 415 macros)
Total number of sites :	301
Total number of traps :	459
Number of vice counties from which records were received :	70

Some interesting resident species were recorded, including several new county records. Highlights included Triangle at a new site in Essex, Double Line on Wimbledon Common, Crescent Dart in Dumfries and Galloway, Six-belted Clearwing new to Powys, Bleached Pug and *Melissoblaptis zelleri* new for the Channel Islands, *Phyllocnistis xenia* new to Essex and *Anania funebris* new to Lincolnshire.

The ten most common macros were Dark Arches, Common Footman, Large Yellow Underwing, Uncertain, Smoky Wainscot, Riband Wave, Common Rustic, Bright-line Brown-eye, Rustic and True Lover's Knot. The ten most common micros were *Agriphila straminella*, *Chrysoteuchia culmella*, *Pleuroptya ruralis* (Mother of Pearl), *Acentria ephemerella* (Water veneer), *Stenoptilia pterodactyla*, *Crambus pascuella*, *Eurrhyncha hortulata*, *Endotricha flammealis*, *Crambus perlella* and *Phylctaenia coronata*.

A full account of the night will appear in January 2000 issue of Atropos.

## **National Moth Night 2000**

This will take place on Saturday 23 September 2000. The aim of the event is as follows:

- To encourage widespread moth recording and to gather useful data.
- To stimulate wider interest in moths and raise their profile amongst the public.
- To raise funds for moth conservation projects.

If you want to take part then send your records to Brian Goodey, 298 Ipswich Road, Colchester, Essex CO4 4ET. Brian will be collating the information.

1. Recorders name.
2. Site name and six-figure grid reference.
3. Local weather conditions.
4. Brief habitat description.
5. Number and type of traps used.
6. How long the traps were operated.
7. A full list of species identified, and where possible, numbers of each species.
8. Numbers of migrants.

## **A species to look out for in 2000 - Sloe Pug - Neil Sherman**

During 1999 caterpillars of this species were found at several sites (Newbourne Springs - TP and Burgh churchyard - NS). They can be easily obtained by beating boughs of blackthorn (sloe) which are in full bloom at the end of March through to the latter part of April.

The larvae feed on the flowers, so are similarly coloured, being white with a dull red line along the back and are 10-12 mm long. They are not immediately obvious on the beating tray, but soon give away their presence by moving in the typical Looper fashion. When taken for breeding out the adult will feed up rapidly and pupate among the plant remains. The adult moths hatch out after about a month.

Try beating your local blackthorn bushes, and report your findings to the county recorders, to help discover the distribution of this species.

## **Catkins collecting - a case study - Neil Sherman**

Another method of obtaining certain species of moth is collecting the catkins of willow (pussy willow) after they have fallen. I tried this technique along with several other people in 1999, and had some interesting results.

During March I collected numerous male catkins from Ipswich Golf Clubs' areas of woodland. I placed

them in a large container, and awaited the appearance of frass, which would indicate the presence of larvae. I was sceptical that there was anything in the catkins I had obtained, but was surprised to find droppings the following day. Searching the catkins revealed some brownish red caterpillars, varying between 10-15 mm long, some with pale stripes and some without. They fed up rapidly on the highly nutritious flowers, so I provided more for them to eat. Once in the final instar, I was able to use the caterpillars guide by Jim Porter to identify them. I had the larvae of the Chestnut, the Brick, Pink-barred Sallow and Sallow moths. Reading more about these species revealed they all fed up at first on catkins but switched to other low growing plants (e.g. dandelions) after they had fallen, so next time I will not have to provide them with more flowers.

All pupated successfully in soil, and hatched out in the autumn, confirming my identifications. Other species can also be found by this method, the Slender Pug being one example (TP noted this species). The larvae feed internally, the moths hatching out of the catkins themselves. Unfortunately, I had thrown away all my catkins after my larvae had pupated, probably disposing of the Slender Pug caterpillars!

I shall be out again in the spring of 2000 trying out this method again (to find the Slender Pug hopefully) not only with sallow, but also black poplar, whose catkins harbour the Pale-lemon Sallow.

## **Moths in Felixstowe in 1999 - Jon Nicholls**

The weather at the start of the year was quite mild and this produced a good start for the *Orthosias* such as Common Quaker, Clouded Drab, Small Quaker and Hebrew Character. The latter moth has shown a gradual increase over the past five years and, with 372, made up nearly 10% of the moths trapped in 1999. Also the Early Grey had a good year reaching three figures (123) for the first time. A new *Orthosia* to the garden was the Twin-spotted Quaker, one of the more typically woodland species.

Shuttle-shaped Dart made a good show this year after a poor 1998, with more than three times as many recorded. Another moth with a three-fold increase in numbers was the micro *Blastobasis lignea*. This species feeds on various trees and shrubs such as Yew, Juniper and Spruce and is among a trend of increasing numbers of these evergreen feeding species in my area, including Blair's Shoulder-knot, Pine Beauty (a new species in 1999), Scalloped Hazel, Grey Pine Carpet and this year, for the first time in Suffolk, Cypress Pug. It will be interesting to see if the Cypress Pug progresses through Suffolk, as the Blair's Shoulder-knot and Least Carpet have done in previous years.

Although I had 74 Silver Y the numbers of migrants was poor with only seven Pale Mottled Willow, three *Plutella xylostella* and no *Nomophila noctuella*. Even though total numbers were down to their lowest in four years, this was partly due to the complete lack of recording in September. Even so nineteen new species were found including; Lime Hawk, Pale Tussock, Shears, *Tortrix viridana*, *Eucosma hohenwartiana*, Wormwood, Swallow Prominent and *Cochyliis hybridella*. *Tachystola acroxantha* had another good year with 23 specimens, indicating a thriving colony somewhere nearby.

Species that have done less well this year are Lesser Yellow Underwing, *Crambus pascuella*, Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing, Square-spot Rustic and *Agriphila geniculea* which, after being the second most common grass veneer last year, failed to make an appearance at all. It remains to be seen whether any of these observations will turn out to be more than part of the normal ups and downs of natural cycles. To find that out we need to see what happens in the twenty first century...

## **Records from recorders around the county**

(Please note that the records listed here have not necessarily been confirmed by the Suffolk Moth Panel - TP)

**Location : Southwold. Recorder : Alan Cornish. 1999.**

Alan reports an interesting mix of species from this poorly recorded part of the county including; Buttoned Snout, Coxcomb Prominent, Feathered Ranunculus, Frosted Orange, Larch Pug, Sallow

Kitten, Small Elephant-hawk, Svensson's Copper Underwing, Toadflax Pug, Argent and Sable and a Six-spot Burnet being wrapped up in silk by a spider on hardhead.

**Location : Eye. Recorder : P J Vincent. 1999.**

An interesting list of moths from this north Suffolk garden including; Lilac Beauty, Magpie, Purple Bar, Pearly Underwing and September Thorn.

**Location : Monks Eleigh. Recorder : Arthur Watchman. September 1999 - February 2000.**

The Common Wainscot continued to be the commonest moth at light the last being noted 23 September. Thirty one were recorded twelve days earlier but this figure is very low compared to years gone by. At the moment this situation is not unusual as most moths seem to be down in numbers. Three species that would normally be classed as abundant, the Large, Lesser and Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwings have become scarce along with most of the "autumnal" species. No Lunar Underwings were seen and only one Brown-spot Pinion was recorded (11 September). Blair's Shoulder-knot was seen as singles on only four occasions and the attractive Canary-shouldered Thorn was attracted on three evenings only. The Barred Sallow, Centre-barred Sallow and Pink-barred Sallow were also seen in low numbers. The Beaded Chestnut which used to be one of the commonest species in the latter part of the year has become very scarce generally. However it seems to be making a recovery and one appeared at light on 11 October. It was also nice to record the Streak on two occasions in October. Red-line Quaker and Green-brindled Crescent were in their usual numbers but the December Moth was 'thin on the ground'. The Feathered Thorn and Plumed Prominent were in reasonable numbers, nine of the latter being noted on 24 November. This moth was found to be present in the County as long ago as 1937 and still seems to be relatively restricted in its distribution. Red Underwings were seen on four occasions.

As the year approached its end the only moths noted were Mottled Umber and Winter Moth. One of the former was the first species to be recorded in the year 2000, on 2 January with three of the latter in the following evening. A Pale Brindled Beauty came to light on 18 January and has been seen in reasonable numbers up to the end of the period under revue. The first of what will probably be many March Moths was recorded on 6 February and an Early Moth came to light on 11.

P.S. On Christmas Day we had a 'twitch' and went to Aldeburgh to see the Ivory Gull. "What has this got to do with moths?" I hear you cry. Nothing at all, but it shows that we are human after all! (Debatable! Ed.)

**Location : Ipswich Golf Club. Recorder : Neil Sherman. August - October 1999.**

August was a pretty indifferent month for weather, with a few warm days and nights but also lots of heavy rain. Numbers of moths caught in the trap were generally down on previous years (apart from last year!)

107 macros were recorded this month, with the best night early on (the 7th) while the weather was still good – 113 species were noted (72 were macros). The only new macro for the site also appeared then, a Webb's Wainscot (one of the furthest inland records – mainly found on the coastal strip in recent times).

Other notables seen included; Grass Emerald, Birch Mocha, Large Emerald, Oak Nycteoline, White Line Dart, (in much smaller numbers than last year), and Yellow Belle from heathland, Twin-spotted Wainscot and Brown-veined Wainscot from the wetlands and also the migrant White Point.

The trend of common species down in numbers continued this month; Flounced Rustic, Vine's Rustic

and Large Yellow Underwing were scarcer than normal but the Setaceous Hebrew Character reversed this trend being very common, appearing most nights with a peak of 39 on the 19th.

Micros began to decline in numbers of species but were still of interest with *Acrobasis consociella*, *Pediasia contaminella*, *Swammerdamia caesiella*, *Argyresthia albistria*, *Pammene regiana*, *Evergestis extimalis*, *Ypsolopha dentella*, *Platytes alpinella*, *Argyresthia goedartella* (in very good numbers) and *Blastobasis lignea* (peak of 55 on the 7th). Most interestingly was a single *Sitochroa verticalis* on the 1st – a migrant?

Also seen during the day this month at two locations on the site were Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillars, feeding on great hairy willowherb. Warm weather in September did produce some good nights, but the decline in species had begun; 46 macros were trapped with one new one for the site – the Pinion-streaked Snout on the 23rd. The other notables this month had an autumnal feel; Hedge Rustic, Feathered Gothic (in good numbers), Brindled Green, Feathered Ranunculus, Deep-brown Dart, Autumnal Rustic, the colourful Frosted Orange, Heath Rustic (on the 1st) and two overwinterers the Oak Nycteoline and the Chestnut (on the 27th). Strangely a Blotched Emerald was trapped on the 18th – a second brood?

Numerous, both in the trap and during the day, was the Vapourer – has this been seen elsewhere? Micros were few and far between with; *Nomophila noctuella* (on the 24th), *Ypsolopha sequella*, *Crambus hamella* (one found during the day on the 2nd) and *Agriphila geniculea* (down in numbers on last year)

October was a much quieter month with some cold frosty nights making the running of the trap unprofitable. Only twenty macros were noted on the three nights the trap was run and included; Satellite, Sallow, Deep Brown Dart, Barred Sallow (on the 7th and 15th), Green-brindled Crescent, Streak and the first Mottled Umber (also on the 7th). Very few micros appeared only *Alucita hexadactyla*, a late *Argyresthia goedartella* (on 7th) and *Diurnea phryganella* (at the end of the month).

The most interesting find this month was a Festoon caterpillar (on the 1st) found on a fallen oak leaf – it looked like a bright green Woodlouse!