

Suffolk Moth Group Newsletter

Issue 19 - June 2000

Edited by Jon Nicholls

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Editorial - Jon Nicholls

The poor turnout in this years traps is so far is an disappointing if expected one. The last few years have seen reduced numbers of spring species and, even with good weather at this time of year, it is only to be expected that they will take time to recover. Some nights this year I have wondered whether the moths in my area have learnt to avoid my trap as the catches have been so low. It has been a similar story elsewhere it seems.

On a positive note the SMG Friday night sessions are now in full swing with an interesting and varied set of venues organised by Tony. So far these nights have been well attended, usually with at least six, often more, around the light. If you have put of coming along then now seems to be as good a time as any to meet up on a Friday around the sheet and see what goes on. Also many people seem to be trying a variety of methods this year to hunt down the quarry, including beating, lamping, sweeping, sallowing and sugaring. These activities have met with varied success but have not failed to increase the assembled participants knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of the proceedings. Hope to see you all sometime this year.

SMG Checklist now out - Jon Nicholls

The Suffolk Moth Group first produced a checklist in 1997, gathering records and opinions from active

moth recorders in the county. This list was an attempt to make sense of the vast local knowledge of experienced moth recorders. The new checklist is a much needed update, with many new species included in it that were not found in the first checklist.

The number of people recording moths in Suffolk has increased over the past five years and this has produced far more records. These records, along with the considerable historical records in the county, have led to a much better understanding of the status and distribution of many of our moth fauna. The new checklist reflects this knowledge by giving each species a score for the number of tetrads that the moth has been recorded in over the past ten years.

Thus the relative "importance" of each species can be gauged. Along with this each species is placed in one of four recording categories, starting with '1' for moths that are easy to identify and widespread to '4' are rare or not yet recorded, needing a voucher specimen for verification. With guidelines for the submitting of moth records and contact details of Suffolk recorders this is an essential item for all recorders working in Suffolk.

If you have not received a copy and want one then please contact Tony Prichard.

Essex Indoor Meeting – Saturday 26 February - Jon Nicholls

Several members of the Suffolk Moth Group attended the popular meeting of the Essex Moth Group at Tendring Hundred Water Services again this year. There was a room with many interesting exhibits in it, including comparison of Sandhill Rustic with Flounced Rustic and Common Rustic with Lesser Common Rustic. However the day consisted mainly of several interesting slide shows of a variety of Essex moths, including Fisher's Estuarine Moth, and talks by invited speakers.

One of these speakers was Paul Waring who gave a talk about the work he has done on the conservation of various moth species. As he sees it there are two priorities, recording and conservation. He illustrated his talk with slides of many of the moths that he has been involved in conserving such as the Black-veined moth, Essex Emerald, Reddish Buff, Barberry Carpet, New Forest Burnet and Viper's Bugloss. The latter moth was added to the protected list after it became extinct (!), showing the importance of up to date recording and knowledge of habitat requirements. Paul claimed that species recovery was in the ascendancy with the initiatives generated by the National Biodiversity Network – although he admitted they had absorbed a lot of money and as yet produced little valuable output. Much of Paul's work is fed back through his articles in 'British Wildlife' as it is difficult to get material published by JNCC due to their long publication queues. Paul is now getting help with his work from the two new Moth Conservation officers — Mark Parsons and David Green. Other moths that were mentioned included the Fisher's Estuarine Moth which last year had one of its protected sites destroyed by the Environment Agency while they were cleaning out a blocked drainage ditch. This problem illustrated the not uncommon problem of species being wiped out by the very people who are supposed to be protecting them, the conservationists. When you don't know the ideal conditions for a species it is all too easy to damage a site to the point where the very species under protection can end up disappearing (reminiscent of the Large Blue). In the case of the Fisher's Estuarine Moth damage, the site foreman seems to have been to blame for sanctioning work without consulting with the people back at head office, but how often has this happened in the past? Untold damage has been done to so many sites through poor management by people with little or no fieldwork experience and with the increase in career conservationists this is only likely to get worse.

Paul finally talked of his vision of the brave new world of electronic communication, when all these problems would be overcome by the power of the 'Net'. All the information for a species would be available on the 'World Wide Web' so that we could instantly access maps, pictures, information and video. Any local problems could be instantly relayed, via the web, to interested parties before they happen using digital cameras. I am yet to be convinced. What is without doubt is Paul's enthusiasm and commitment to all things 'moth', a genuine passion that inspires others to get involved.

Mark Parsons then gave an illustrated talk about the BAP species he felt could be looked for in East Anglia this year including; Buttoned Snout (common enough in Suffolk), Chalk Carpet - on any chalk

remnants left, Toadflax Brocade - on shingle beaches, Double Line, Olive Crescent, Heart, Lunar Yellow Underwing (common over most of Suffolk in the last two years), Scarce Merveille du Jour, Bright Wave, Marshmallow, Small Ranunculus, Straw Belle, Blair's Wainscot, Bordered Gothic and Square-spotted Clay.

INVERT. The newsletter of the Essex Invertebrate Forum - Jon Nicholls

If your horizons cover more than lepidoptera then the recent formation of Invert will interest you. It is envisaged as a "forum for sharing and disseminating knowledge of all invertebrate groups". Although the forum is centred around Essex, Suffolk was well represented at the inaugural meeting at Tendring. The groups principal aim is to promote recording and there will be organised indoor meetings, workshops and field meetings. General enquires can be directed to Jerry Bowdrey.

Records from recorders around the county

Location : Felixstowe. Recorder : Jon Nicholls. Jan-May 2000.

As I said earlier many moths have shown up in much reduced numbers this year as the following table illustrates;

Species	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Early Grey	51	58	56	123	55
Hebrew Character	136	281	259	372	209
Common Quaker	12	25	24	147	79
Shuttle-shaped Dart	8	31	7	18	23
Garden Carpet	10	30	38	13	3
Total number of species	21	34	48	62	28

After a steady rise in the numbers of many common spring moths up to 1999 it is sad to see a dramatic drop in their abundance this year in Felixstowe. The lack of variety of moths has also shown a dramatic drop, with only 28 species so far this year, the worst number since 1996, and less than half the number found by this time last year. Opening the trap this year has been a disappointing affair most days, with few surprises, and on several occasions no moths! There has, however, been one new species this year with the Tortrix *Phtheochroa rugosana*. Lets hope that things improve in the summer!

Location : Monks Eleigh. Recorder : Arthur Watchman. February—May.

After the Early moth on the 11th February, no moths were seen until the 22nd when an Early moth and Pale Brindled Beauty were noted. On the following night the first Angle Shades of the year came to light and two days later an Oak Beauty. This lovely moth was then seen on several occasions but only as singles until 1st April. On 28th February Dotted Border and Hebrew character put in an appearance. The 2nd March brought a Clouded Drab with an Early Grey on the 5th. Although the latter was the first for the year at "Onchan" one had been noted at another house in the village a few weeks before on 16th February. A surprise was in store for the 9th March when the first ever Small Brindled beauty, a male, came to our light. Although over the last year or so this species had been found to be quite common and widespread in Suffolk woodlands or wooded areas, around Oaks, because the female is wingless it is usually sedentary. This moth was accompanied on the 9th by a twin-spotted Quaker with Shoulder Stripe and Small Quaker on the 10th. Engrailed or should it be Small Engrailed? appeared on the 11th with Common Quaker two days later a Lead-coloured Drab on the 14th. The latter species seems to have become more common and widespread over the last few years or has it been overlooked amongst the various forms of Clouded Drab? Early Thorn on the 16th and Red Chestnut the following evening

completed the new additions for March.

There is invariably a lull in new species in late March and early April, before the build up to the yearly "rush" begins and the next addition to our list was not recorded until 20th April when a Scarce Tissue came to light. This moth appears to be far from scarce unlike its cousin the Common Tissue. A name swap would seem appropriate! During the following weeks moths noted at the light included Water Carpet, Streamer, Purple Thorn, Waved Umber, Scorched Carpet, Herald, Pale and Pebble Prominents and Red Twin-spot Carpet. On the last day of the month the light was graced by one of our favourite species, the very attractive Chocolate Tip.

May got off to a good start when yet another new addition to the garden list appeared on the 1st, namely a Poplar Kitten in pristine condition. This species seems to be scarce in the county and has only ever been seen on three occasions by the writer.

Having talked about the scarcity of the Powdered Quaker while at Assington on the 5th, we arrived home to find four sitting on the house wall together with Frosted Green, Swallow Prominent and Common Carpet. On the 7th Garden Carpet and Buttoned Snout were recorded. The latter is on the National Biodiversity Action Plan list but as it seems relatively common and widespread in Suffolk and apparently also in Norfolk, it seems a strange inclusion. In the next few days Brimstone and Green Carpet were attracted to light both of which will surely be noted down on many more occasions and at other places in 2000. *Alucita hexadactyla*, *Nascia ciliaris*, Common White Wave, Pale Tussock and Clouded Border were seen on 12th May with Iron Prominent the following night. No more species were added during May and surprisingly no moths were seen at light after the 18th.

In the last newsletter the Editor seemed rather dismissive of our claim to membership of the human race. Well, on 3rd May we paid a visit to 'The Dome'. Surely this proves we are members? (I rest my case! Ed.)

Location : Eye. Recorder : Paul Kitchener. January – March.

Paul comments that there has been a poor start to the year so far with numbers very low.

In January and February only seven moths were recorded; Dark Chestnut, Chestnut, Winter, March, Hebrew Character, Satellite and Early. In March seventeen species were found including; six *Orthosias*, Dotted Border, Early Thorn, Oak Beauty, Red Chestnut, Shoulder Stripe and two micros – *Acleris cristana* and *Diurnea fagella*.

Location : Ipswich Golf Club. Recorder : Neil Sherman. Nov 99 - April 2000.

Bad weather meant the light was only put out on one occasion in November (on the 25th), when December moth (in low numbers), Yellow-line Quaker and most unusually a Common Quaker were recorded. Also seen below the clubhouse security lights on the 29th were Scarce Umber, Mottled Umber and the common Winter moth.

No new species were seen in December, in fact very few moths were seen at all!

First moth of the new millennium was the Winter moth on the 10th January. Very little else was seen until the very last night (31st) when warm conditions (8°C) tempted me to put the trap out. Over fifty moths were caught, including Spring Usher, March and Chestnut.

February was a very wet month, and it rained on the only night (24th) I put the trap out. It remained mild though, and I caught a good number of moths. Nine species and over fifty moths were present. Highlights included two Small Brindled Beauty (seen at a number of woodland sites this year), the first *Orthosia*, the Clouded Drab and *Agonopterix umbellana*, a streaky species associated with Gorse. On the 29th the first Oak Beauty was seen, perched on the clubhouse wall.

Numbers of moths picked up in March, with 27 species recorded, some in large amounts, notably on the 6th when 140 March moths were attracted to light. Other interesting sightings have included; Small Brindled Beauty (in very good numbers), Yellow Horned, Pine Beauty, lots of Oak Beauty, Shoulder Stripe, Early Grey, Grey Shoulder-knot (all single sightings) and various *Orthosias*, including a new site record, the Lead-coloured Drab (two on the 14th with two more on the 17th).

Micro moths have also begun to appear with large numbers of *Tortricodes alternella* seen, along with *Diurnea fagella*, *Agonopterix umbellana*, the pretty *Acleris cristana* with its tufts of scales and also birch feeding *Eriocrania semipurpurella*.

Twenty eight species of macro moth were recorded in April, most in reasonable numbers. As usual Common Quaker, Small Quaker, Clouded Drab and Hebrew Character were abundant, with smaller numbers of Brindled Pug, Chestnut, Red Chestnut, Pine Beauty and Purple Thorn. Highlights seen were; 2 Early Tooth Striped (on the 8th and 24th—first ones were recorded here last year), Narrow-winged Pug (on the 24th and 28th), Knotgrass (an early one on the 24th), Powdered Quaker (on the 30th : a new species for the site). Towards the end of the month good numbers of Great Prominent, Lunar Marbled Brown, Frosted Green and Brindled Beauty all appeared, bang on time.

Few micros were seen this month, of note were 10 *Eriocrania semipurpurella* (on the 1st), *Acleris cristana* and large numbers of *Eriocrania subpurpurella* (with a peak of 98 on the 28th).

The most impressive discovery this month was the larva of a Goat moth, found while digging up weeds along a pathway, (the second site record) they definitely live up to their name as it did absolutely stink!

Suffolk Moth Survey

Groton Wood - 26th February 2000

With temperatures around 5oC it was not going to be a bumper night but after a couple of hours thirteen species had been attracted to light. The only micro was *Tortricodes alternella*, one of the earliest species to emerge, and quite abundant in all its different forms. The macros included ; Oak Beauty, Pale Brindled Beauty, March, Engrailed, Hebrew Character, Small Quaker, Dotted Border, Spring Usher, Chestnut, Clouded Drab, Small Brindled Beauty and both the orange and white form of the Satellite.

Wolves Wood - 7th April 2000

Another cold clear night around the light in the muddy hollow next to the pond by the Hadleigh road. Three traps were set up and a sheet. Some early larvae searching for the Sloe Pug on the flowers of Buckthorn produced only one small larvae that needs to be grown on to see what species it is. Ten species came to the lights including; six *Orthosias* – Small Quaker, Common Quaker, Clouded Drab, Hebrew Character, Twin-spotted Quaker and the Aspen feeding Lead-coloured Drab. Another Aspen feeder, the Chocolate-tip, showing clearly why it got its name also made an appearance. The Brindled Pug was the smallest species found and an Early-tooth Striped was the final species probably feeding on the abundant Honeysuckle found in the wood.

Assington Thicks - 5th May 2000

The track leading into the wood seemed firm but the paths were wet and boggy and two of us had to be pushed, ignominiously, out of the mire before we had even switched on a light. Temperatures started at 13oC and gradually got worse as the night progressed, however, we still had over thirty species including; Pebble Hook-tip, Least Black arches, Iron Prominent, Purple Thorn, Purple Bar, Sallow Kitten, Scalloped Hook-tip, Spruce Carpet, Engrailed, Lunar-marbled Brown, Broom-tip, Birch Mocha, Birch Mocha, Swallow Prominent, Oak Nycteoline, Grey Birch, Frosted Green, Chocolate-tip and the Blackthorn feeding Sloe Carpet. Only a few micros appeared including; *Agonopterix arenella* and *Eriocrania subpurpurella*.

Little Blakenham Pit - 12th May 2000

This old chalk pit is run as a reserve by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and contains a wealth of wildlife interest with specialist habitats for Roman snails, Bats, Badgers and orchids. Previous visits have always produced interesting moths and this night was no exception. Over sixty species were attracted to the lights including; Mullein Wave, Campion, Pretty Chalk Carpet, Seraphim, Rivulet, White-pinion Spotted, Lychnis, Clouded Silver, Shears, Purple Bar, Chinese Character, Yellow-barred Brindle, Pale Prominent and Swallow Prominent. Micros found included; *Agonopterix alstroemeriana*, *Pseudoswammerdamia combinella*, *Stenodes straminea* and *Scoparia ambigua*lis.

Combs Wood - 19th May 2000

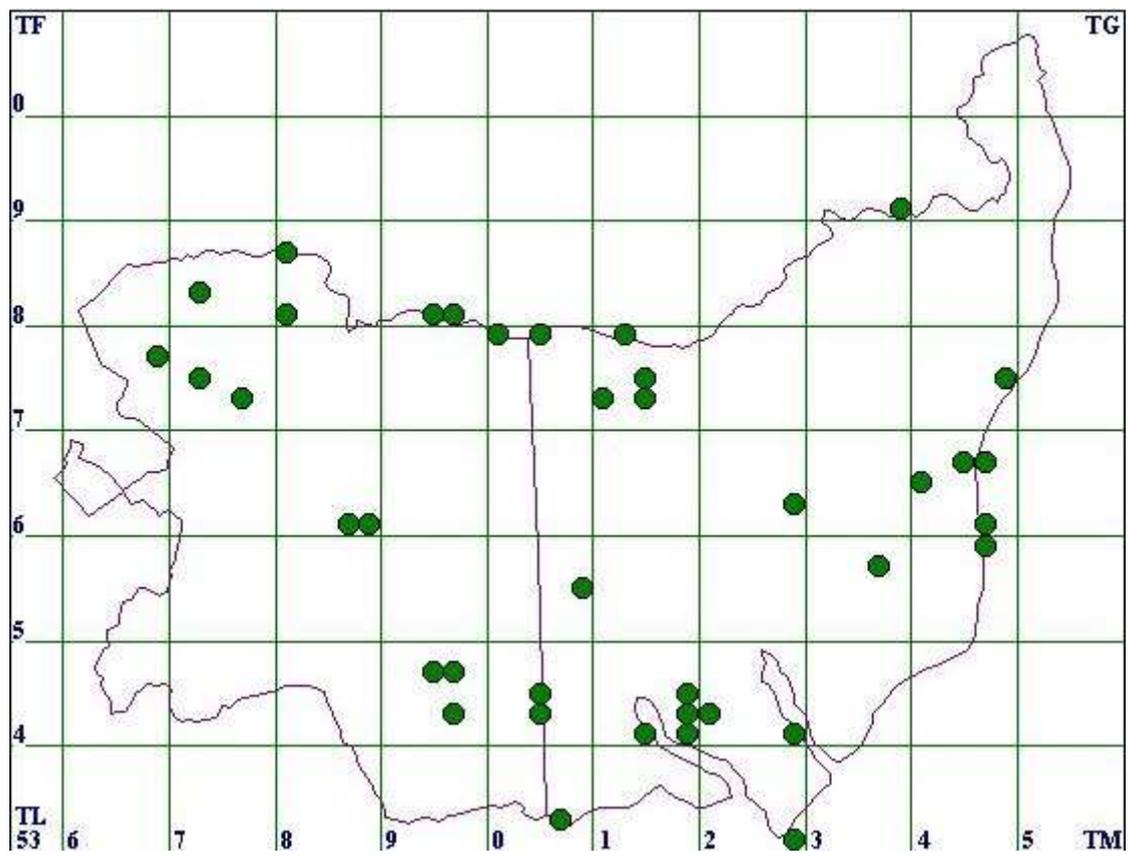
Combs Wood is small pocket of chalk woodland looking down on Stowmarket. As the Hazel and Ash is undergoing a coppicing overhaul, the interior of the wood has a devastated look about it but its medieval origins have produced a rich variety of flowers. The weather leading up to Friday had been poor and so we were not too enthusiastic about trudging across the fields with our equipment to this wood as it has no road access. There were only about a dozen species found including; Ingrailed Clay, Small Phoenix, Green Carpet, Flame Shoulder, Scalloped Hazel and the micro *Syndemis musculana*.

Phlyctaenia perlucidalis in Suffolk - Jon Clifton

Phlyctaenia perlucidalis was first discovered at Woodwalton Fen, Hunts in 1951 and is a distinctive and easily recognisable pyralid moth. It has expanded its distribution from its stronghold in the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire fens into all areas of East Anglia from the 1960's onwards and is now currently well established in Suffolk in wetland habitats, woodlands and even back gardens of some recorders. Its change in status from Notable A assigned by Parsons in 1984 to its present status as 'scarce' reflects its spread throughout Britain from a line east of the Humber estuary to south Devon.

It was discovered in Suffolk in 1960 when Mr D.W.H. Ffennell took a specimen from Southwold with the next record in 1967 occurring less than a mile away at Walberswick. It was not until 1980 that any more records came forward, from Freston and Monks Eleigh, both taken by Arthur Watchman. Its rise came in the following years and from 1987 *P. perlucidalis* has been recorded annually (except for 1994) peaking with records from eleven sites in 1997 and nine in 1998 although this could be a reflection of the Suffolk Moth Groups increased efforts over the last two years trapping over the region. Most wetland sites in Suffolk now seem to have a fair population with the four main areas being along the coastal fringe from Thorpeness through Minsmere and Dunwich upto Walberswick and Southwold, suggesting that the 1960 records were not of migrants. The second is along the Waveney valley area around Redgrave & Lopham to Thelnetham Fen, the third from the Brecks around Mildenhall/Lakenheath and Santon Downham and the fourth from scattered sites around the south and east of Ipswich from gardens of local recorders to the golf course, Bourne Park and Bridge Wood areas.

Although essentially a moth of wetland habitats with the larvae feeding on thistle (*Cirsium* sp.) and believed to prefer wet loving varieties. Some of the captures from drier habitats such as woodlands far from water raises the question that the moth is most probably exploiting other thistle species as its larval food plant.



Distribution map for *Phlyctaenia perlucidalis* in Suffolk based on records received