

HERTS MOTH GROUP

Newsletter number 10

Winter 2004/2005

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WELCOME

I am sorry that there has not been a newsletter since last winter. My work commitments continue to tie up all my spare time in the summer and I am but one man (some might say not even that!). We remain primarily a practical group – going out and looking at moths “in the field” and you were presented a year ago with a full programme of trips affecting almost every weekend of the year. Most of you have attended at least one of these trips and, I hope, enjoyed the experience. However, I do appreciate that not everyone is able to get out and about, and that for them the newsletter may be more important. I shall try to be more regular in 2005!

E-MAIL ADDRESSES AND THE TELEPHONE PYRAMID

If you have e-mail address then this is an excellent means of being kept in touch. Members who have e-mail, and who have given permission for me to keep it on file, have received reports of the field trips during 2004, but it is too expensive for a non-subscription group (and too time consuming for me) to prepare paper reports every month, like some other groups do. If someone wants to volunteer AND pay, then do get in touch, but otherwise it is hard to find a way around this problem. A digest of the e-mail summaries is included in this newsletter. If you have an e-mail address and have not been getting these messages please do tell me so I can add you to the electronic mailing list. Some people’s addresses seem to have stopped working – let me know if you no longer get messages from me. We do have a telephone pyramid whereby the more important messages (including any changes or additions to the programme) get passed down the line to members who do not have e-mail. If you feel that you are missing out on this please telephone me and I will ensure that someone is detailed to call you when messages are sent. Remember, I can’t solve a problem if I don’t know that it exists.

THE INDOOR MEETING 2005

The 2005 annual indoor meeting will be held on **Saturday 12 March 2005**. A separate sheet with this mail-out gives more details. This year we will be at a **DIFFERENT LOCATION** – **The Havers Community Centre, Waytemore Road, Bishops Stortford**. The meeting place of the past two years has become too expensive and, after scouring the county, I have discovered that the best place is on my own doorstep in Bishops Stortford, where a new community centre has been opened just a few weeks ago. I realise that this is not a central

location in the county, but it is easily accessed from the M11 motorway, or from the west of the county via the A414 or the A120. Additionally, it is all that is available at a sensible price (there will be the usual request for anonymous contributions on the day – so please bring some change; I expect that the total cost will be between £2 and £3 per person if the expected 75 people attend). This venue has the added advantage that we have the entire building to ourselves and do not share it with other people. There is a large kitchen area with kettles, tea/coffee urns, a microwave etc and the serving hatches open onto the main meeting room. A side room is included for displaying material etc. There are plenty of power points for anything that needs plugging in. There are facilities for people with disabilities. Car parking is on street in the adjacent residential area. A pub is directly opposite and a bakery/cake shop is a mere one minute’s walk away (it may be possible in the morning to order rolls etc for lunch time). Smoking is not allowed inside the building, but there is a covered area outside the door.

As usual, **the whole day will be informal**, with more time wandering and less time sitting down! However, we will have a guest speaker in the morning, in the form of Dr David Agassiz, on the subject of the various new moths that are apparently invading Britain. David knows the moth sites in the south of the county and parts of Middlesex well, having spent many years as the Vicar at Enfield, before moving elsewhere. There will be the usual waffle from me about progress in recording Hertfordshire’s moths and an opportunity for people to bring photo slides/PowerPoint disks/etc to show informally. For the rest of the day, we invite displays of photos, posters, charts, specimens, books, paintings or whatever. I will bring selected items from my moth library again – especially books published since the last indoor meeting. I also hope to bring a selection of the moths caught in Hungary and Slovakia last August by myself, Marcel and Les as well as those caught by Marcel, Rachel and myself in France during October. This will be a chance to familiarise yourself with many species that are considered extreme rarities in Britain, but which are often common in Europe. Jon Clifton (**Anglian Lepidopterists’ Supplies**) hopes to be there with a table full of mothing items for sale, including traps and generators, but if you want to buy anything big and bulky it would be wise to order in advance on 01263-862068. **Advance orders collected on the day also save you postage!** The Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust hope to send someone along to encourage you all to record moths on their nature reserves. **The building is accessible to people with disabilities.**

If you have never been to an indoor meeting I hope you will make the effort to attend this one AND BRING FRIENDS AND FAMILY TOO. They provide an extremely informal chance to chat with other moth enthusiasts, whilst the “experts” will also be there for you to corner and discuss things with. No matter what your level of knowledge or area of interest in moths, I guarantee there will be others there who will be just the same.

THE HERTFORDSHIRE MOTH LIST

We continue to add a few more moths each year to the Hertfordshire list; since the last newsletter we have added 14. Most are micros, inevitably, as these are still under-worked in the county. However, we did add one macro – the rare immigrant Golden Twin-spot (*Chrysodeixis chalcites*) – during the autumn, so there is still scope! Sadly, we failed in the early winter to add the very locally distributed Plumed Prominent (*Ptilodon plumigera*) to the county list (associated with maple in woods and hedges on calcareous geology, flying in November) and

we also failed in the spring to find the Barred Tooth-striped (*Trichopteryx polycommata*), which is associated with Wild Privet and flies in March and April. Still, we keep trying. We also did not find the Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth (*Hemaris fuciformis*) at Broxbourne Wood National Nature Reserve, in spite of specific searching; it has not been seen here (its last Hertfordshire stronghold) since 1973 and I think that we must soon face the reality that it is now extinct in Hertfordshire. On a more positive note, the county moth list now lists an impressive 1,540 species of moth, of which 1,121 have been seen since 1st January 2000 and 1,221 species have been seen here since the start of 1995 (the last 10 years). 920 are micros and 620 are macros. That leaves several missing species; these were summarised by me earlier this year (The lost moths of Hertfordshire. *Trans. Hertfordshire Natural History Society* **36**(1): 47 – 68, or read the summary on our web site at www.hertsmothgroup.org.uk.

THE HERTS MOTH DATABASE

Validated (checked and proven) records of Hertfordshire moths are entered onto the Herts Moth Database at my home address. There are now, 77,889 records, with almost all of the year 2004 records as yet un-entered (at 31st December 2004). This is the only valid data source for moths in the county and if there is any discrepancy between the database and other sources then it is the database that takes priority. Members are welcome to make enquiries of the database or else to call here (by appointment) to interrogate the data themselves. A very few records are flagged as confidential – in as much as they are not available to all comers without coming through me first. A copy of the database is held by Andrew Wood, in case of disasters, but enquiries should be directed via me, please.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2004 FIELD TRIP PROGRAMME

Our field trips have one main purpose – for us to see moths! Most people come to learn. Some come to broaden their existing knowledge by seeing species that don't come to their garden traps. Others come for the like-minded company. A very few come to laugh at my extremely bad jokes (though they would never admit to it). The trips are VERY informal and we drink lots of coffee in my camper van! I arrange trips, in most cases, to areas from which I need moth records; thus, the events actively contribute to the distribution maps and help to increase our understanding of moths and their significance in the county. We strive to visit different habitat types at different seasons so that people who come along have the maximum opportunity to see as many different species as possible. We also try to arrange the places at all points across the county so that everyone gets some trips that are close and everyone has some that they need to travel to. All moths are identified – macros and micros. If you have been unable to attend trips this year I would be very keen to hear the reasons, so that if there are problems at this end I can try to address them in the future. We have an event almost every weekend in the summer. Brief highlights of the 2004 season follow:

The year kicked off at **Batch Wood in St Albans on 17th April** and this was not our best night. We managed to catch Scarce Prominent (*Odontotia carmelita*) then a strong wind arose and the vertically arranged moth sheet soon looked more like the topsail of HMS Victory. Later it rained. A few moths struggled in and then there was a loud bang. Investigations proved this to be my camper van window “disappearing”, along with my mobile telephone, radio/CD player etc. We have since discovered that Batch Wood in *en route* to and from a nightclub of ill repute; subsequent meetings here were cancelled! At **Bricketwood Common on 8th May** the

weather was damp, windy and generally miserable, though actually rather mild (at least at the start). A preliminary wander revealed the presence of lots of mines on the leaves of seedling birches, all of which keyed out nicely to *Eriocrania cicatricella* – the only one of the six birch-feeding *Eriocrania* species that habitually has several larvae in each mine. Later, mines of *Eriocrania sangii* were found on sapling birches; it is not certain if this distinction between seedlings and saplings is significant. The vertical sheet was erected and this, plus two Skinner traps, was run from about 9 pm to about midnight. A black and white tortrix, hastily labelled as “probably *Cochylis atricapitana*” when it arrived was no such thing – it was the far less common *Hysterophora maculosana*, a species whose caterpillars feed of the developing seeds of bluebells. There is an old record from Bricketwood Common in Foster's 1937 county list. A single male Great Prominent arrived just as we were packing up, just to provide a little size diversity! The full list was 22 species. The National Moth Day trip to **Broxbourne Wood on 15th May** was very productive for caterpillars in particular. Almost every tree around the car park was “heaving” with the things. Many were identified there and then, but others have been named as the adult moths emerged at various stages throughout the year (an excellent opportunity for members to get actively involved). Especially interesting was the large number of caterpillars of the Figure of Eight (*Diloba caeruleocephala*) on Blackthorn. National Moth Night (as opposed to Day) was held by us at **Tewin Orchard on 15th May**; it was cold and there were almost no moths. A bunch of “splitters” decided that the lure of the pub was too strong to resist – they missed a thrilling 8 moths of 7 species taken at 3 lights between 9 pm and midnight! **Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 29th May**, on the other hand, was a different story altogether. The afternoon session in daylight produced 15 different species, including last year's workings of Bulrush Wainscot (*Nonagria typhae*) in reedmace stems. The night session, at which we ran 5 lights between 9 pm and 1 am yielded 69 species. Several marshland macros were attracted and a great many of these were “new” for most of those attending. As we packed up the rain started to fall! One of the micros (*Agonopterix yeatiana*) was the first in Hertfordshire since it was recorded by J. F. Stephens in St Albans in 1834. A midweek public meeting at **Brook Farm Open Space, Totteridge, on 3rd June** took us to the very limits of the county – indeed, if we had crossed the stream we would have been in Middlesex! Lights ran from 9.30 to midnight and then rain fell! However, we managed an impressive list of moths in the interim and, although none were that uncommon, it was an excellent opportunity to show moths in general to those members of the public that turned up and to explain their usefulness in the grand scheme of things ecological. **Nomansland Common on 12th June** was another **new venue for the group**. In spite of assurances that we could easily access the Common, there was a height barrier across the entrance and its top bar was firmly welded in place – no lock, no key, no camper van access! No matter, however, as we easily walked three traps and a sheet across the lane to run along the edge of the oak woodland in the acid grassland strip that is the best site on the county for the Mottled Grasshopper (we didn't see any in the dark!). In warm, humid conditions with 100% cloud cover we set up the lights and turned on at 10.10 pm, settling down for what we hoped would be a good night. However, for the third trip in a row the skies opened and we all got slightly moist! Of course, after the rain there were no clouds left, and so the temperature immediately plummeted (around midnight) and the moths simply stopped flying. We still managed 95 species, of which 59 were macros. Amongst the micros the highlight was *Pseudotelphusa paripunctella* — a spotty little thing that was last seen in the county in 1890. It is an oak feeder. Several Small Elephant Hawk-moths were no real surprise here, especially as bedstraw plants seem to dominate large areas of the turf. Fan-foot and Small

Fan-foot together allowed us to compare the two. A single, rather worn Nut Tree Tussock was rather a surprise. They are usually double-brooded from late April until about now and then again from July. Back to **Bricketwood Common on 19th June** and another good macro – in the form of the Four-dotted Footman (*Cybosia mesomella*) – not seen in the county since 1968. We caught several. We ran traps between 10.15 pm and 1.15 am, but it was cold, falling to 7.6° C and almost all moths were recorded as singles. The trip to **Rickmansworth Withey Beds on 23rd June** was cancelled because of the torrential rain and strong winds (not to mention the very low overnight temperature), but we more than made up for it back at **Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 26th June**. Lights were turned on at 10.30 pm and though most people drifted away at about midnight or soon after, a couple of us stayed until dawn at 4.30 am. The marsh is noted as a site for the rather rare pyralid *Nascia ciliaris*, which is associated with reeds. It is pleasing to report that it is still doing very well here, with around 50 or so in the traps by morning. Another speciality of here and also other sites on both the Stort and on the Lea down as far as Walthamstow Marsh and the Lea Bridge Road in London is the Dotted Fan-foot (*Macrochilo cribrumalis*). This really is a rather scarce wetland moth – but we caught around 100 examples. Other good wetland species included *Phlyctaenia perlucidalis*, *Donacaula mucronellus* and *Chilo phragmitella*. The pyralid *Elegia similella* is also a Nationally Notable species – associated with oak trees, of which there are a few veteran examples near the marsh. The tortrix *Phalonidia manniana* was last recorded in the county here in 1997 and we were able to update that species as well. **Blows Down, near Dunstable on 10th July** is in the Hertfordshire vice county in spite of, now, being in administrative Bedfordshire; the boundary is the disused railway line – a superbly varied calcareous/ruderal habitat with Small Blue Butterflies (*Cupido minimus*) that is about to disappear under concrete as a part of the Dunstable to Luton Translink. We were looking, in particular, for Chalk Carpet (*Scotopteryx bipunctata*), which is associated with chalk grassland sites, but it does not seem to be there. However, after dark we did attract a few Reddish Light Arches (*Apamea sublustris*) – another moth of this habitat type. At our meeting at the National Trust's **Ashridge Estate on 17th July**, the general public were also in attendance. It was pleasing, therefore, to catch a reasonable number of moths, the highlight of which was a pyralid – either *Pempeliella dilutella* or *P. ornatella*. I still have not yet got around to dissecting it to establish which, but either would be good – *P. ornatella* was last seen in Hertfordshire in 1945 and *P. dilutella* would be entirely new for the list. An even longer list of species was recorded at **Aldbury Nowers on 24th July**, where we ran 4 traps from 10 pm until 3 am. Amongst the macros we were delighted to catch Garden Tiger Moth (*Arctia caja*) – a once very common species that is now all but extinct in the county (and elsewhere in the south-east). Representing the micros we had *Sorhagenia rhamniella* – a minute species that feeds on alder buckthorn and another new species for the county list. There are two other *Sorhagenia* species, both of which could also be present, and the only way to separate wild caught adults of the three is to dissect and examine the genitalia of males. Another new site for the group was the **Redbourne Meadows**, not far from Harpenden, which we visited on **31st July**. Rush-dominated damp grassland, mostly grazed by cattle (though not in our field) is not the best habitat for moths, but to find the less frequent, specialist species we need to look in all kinds of areas. We ran 5 lights, in two map tetrads, from 10 pm to 3.30 am and a total of 129 species, including 76 macros, was judged “respectable” and although there was little terrifically exciting nearly all the records made added new dots to the county distribution maps. Hoping to stay dry this time we went back to **Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 7th August**. Since some of us were driving to Slovakia the next day for a two week mothing trip there, we did not overstretch

ourselves and ran just 2 lights from 9.45 pm until midnight. In spite of this we had 114 species including some marshland specials such as The Crescent (*Celaena leucostigma*), Brown-veined Wainscot (*Archanara dissoluta*), Fen Wainscot (*Arenostola phragmitidis*), Small Rufous (*Coenobia rufa*) and Webb's Wainscot (*Archanara sparganii*). I will tell you all about the eastern Europe trip at the indoor meeting, but for now I will just say that 507 species from 8 nights of trapping was not bad! Unfortunately, whilst we were away you all did something to the weather and at the next group trip, to **Nomansland Common on 28th August**, the temperature was so low by 11 pm that we see our breath and the moths had stopped flying! Before then, the Old Lady (*Mormo maura*) represented the larger end of the scale whilst at the other end we had several of the small gelechiid *Teleiopsis diffinis* – last recorded in the county in 1997. The poor weather continued at **Bricketwood Common on 4th September**, when we were joined by a huge number of hornets (*Vespa crabro*). Nobody got stung, but packing up the traps was “interesting”. Many moths had been eaten by the hornets and a pitifully small list of 17 macros and 7 micros was made – none of which was especially interesting. Hornets spoiled the evening totally at **Northaw Great Wood on 11th September**, an extra trip added to the programme to replace the cancelled outing to Batch Wood. Six macros, 2 micros and several hundred hornets – one of which stung me twice on the thumb as we were packing up the sheet in disgust. I can report that it was extremely painful, and my hand swelled up to resemble a blown up rubber glove. Hornets again ruined the evening at **Whippendell Wood on 25th September**, leading us to seriously question the future of autumn moth trips in woodland. Hornets were extreme rarities only a few years ago, but in the past two years they seem to have become common and are in every woodland in at least the south of Hertfordshire, as far as I can tell. One even flew across my garden in Bishops Stortford in October. On our final trip to **Sawbridgeworth Marsh on 2nd October** we felt confident that there would not be any hornets. After all, it is a marsh – not a woodland. Wrong again! The small, very wet, alder carr at the north end produced 4 of the little darlings during the course of the evening. Happily, these were resting, quietly, in one of the traps and did not give us any concern. The highlight of the moth list was, for most people, the Large Wainscot (*Rhizedra lutos*). The final trip of the year should have been to **Bricketwood Common, again, on 16th October**, but a combination of the earlier hornet experience, the poor weather, general lack of moths and the fact that I was driving to the south of France that day (yes – another moth trip!), caused us to cancel.

THE 2005 FIELD TRIP PROGRAMME

Of course, the point of the above report is to whet your appetite for the 2005 programme – a copy of which is included in the mail out with this newsletter. Because I am finding it increasingly difficult to commit myself in December to being at a particular place in Hertfordshire on every Saturday night between May and September, several of the 2005 outings will be led by Andrew Wood. I hope to attend most of these myself, and to bring along extra traps, but I do not guarantee this. I will, of course, be at all those that are marked in the programme as being led by me. Doing things this way means that we are able to offer you a moth event on most weekends throughout the period from April to October without me cracking under the strain! The habitats we will visit during 2005 are very varied and include chalk grassland, woodland of three different types and two very different wetlands. You are invited to bring guests to all meetings and there is no need to book. Apart from the final trip on 29th October – for which you should confirm that it is still on before attending – the leader will

be at the appointed place at the appointed time regardless of weather. If you are reading this over someone's shoulder on the train/bus/tube/etc you are also welcome to come along. However, please note that dogs are not permitted and that for legal reasons any person under the age of 18 **must** be accompanied and supervised by a responsible adult.

SENDING IN YOUR YEAR 2004 MOTH RECORDS

Yes – it is that time of year again! Read on ...

Recording forms:

We have 4 different format recording forms to make it really easy for you to send in your records. Using any one of them also makes my life easier because the data is already ordered for computer entry. The four formats are:

English names (Alphabetical)	Latin names (Alphabetical)
English names (checklist order)	Latin names (checklist order)

PLEASE use one of these forms wherever possible (though all records are wanted even if you can't use a form for some reason). The forms can be downloaded from the web site or obtained from me at the address at the head of this newsletter (a stamped addressed envelope would be greatly appreciated as the group has no source of funding). There is no limit to how many forms you can ask for – the more you fill in and return the happier I shall be.

If you already have your lists of moths, or can generate them from your computer, in any one of the sequences given in the recording forms, then you can send these and do not need to use recording forms. Everyone else please use the forms unless there is a good reason not to.

Garden lists: Please use the recording forms to report to me your complete garden moth list for 2004 as soon as possible. Dates are only required for species printed in bold type on the recording forms (rarer species and immigrants).

If you trap every night (or nearly every night) in your garden (or some other site), and have kept notes on the numbers of each species on each date, then please get in touch to discuss how to get this data to me. Such information will be very useful in assessing any changes in flight period or number of generations per year associated with climate changes. The best way would be to use a separate recording form for each night (and if doing this during 2005 please send them in monthly so my work load is spread out). Excel spreadsheets with 365 columns are not at all easy for me to handle and I always have to print these out and tape the pages together so the data can be re-entered manually!

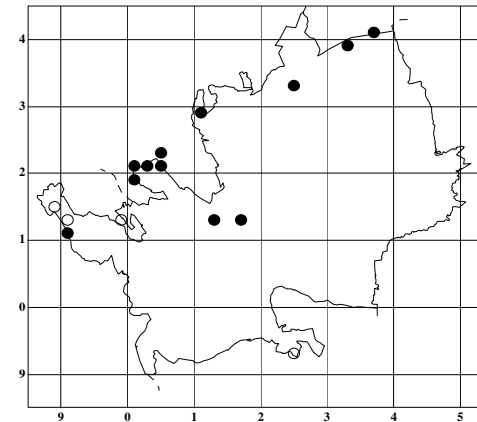
Occasional trips out: If you have been out to other sites please let me have a complete list for each date on one of the recording forms. Have you been out walking the dog and seen a Cinnabar Moth caterpillar on ragwort? Or perhaps you saw a leaf mine on a plane tree leaf lying on the pavement outside the supermarket. Or a Humming-bird Hawk-moth in a friend's garden? These, and all other casual records, are often overlooked, but they are all extremely important and are warmly welcomed.

Computerised records: Talk to me first about the best way – I am a dinosaur of the first order! Paper lists are always welcomed. The Herts Moth Database is in Lotus Approach format.

Butterflies: We do not record these (though we will pass on lists containing butterflies amongst the moths). Butterfly lists are wanted by John Murray, Field End, Marshall's Heath, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8HS.

MYSTERY MOTH

Here is the Hertfordshire distribution of a moth. Dots 1995 to present; circles pre-1995 records. Just for fun (no prizes) can anyone guess the species?

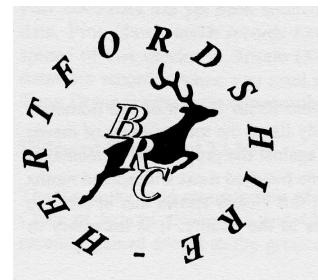


NEXT NEWSLETTER

Probably next winter, unless someone volunteers for the job! Contributions welcomed.

Note Colin's new e-mail address ... see the front of this newsletter

This newsletter is generously printed and distributed for the Group by the



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