

# Essex Moth Group

## Newsletter 4:- Spring 1997

### Goodbye Essex Emerald

Sadly, Dr Paul Waring, who is in charge of the Natural Species Recovery Programme, reports that the captive rearing programme for the Essex Emerald *Thetidia smaragdaria maritime* has come to an end. The last wild larvae were seen in April 1991. A small captive colony was established by Paul in 1987. Reg Arthur and I helped with rearing larvae at St Osyth and West Bergholt. Stock appeared to suffer from in-breeding and attempts to reintroduce the species from reared adults to former Essex sites failed. Only 38 larvae were produced at Paul's Peterborough rearing site in 1995 and in 1996 only 30 eggs were laid by 6 females. None of these eggs hatched, so the captive stock has come to an end. Paul requested information on the distribution of *smaragdaria* in Europe for possible reintroduction of similar races but so far has not had helpful responses. *Joe Firmin.*

### Be alert for a new pug...

Several colonies of the Channel Island Pug *Eupethicea ultimaria* Bois. found in Hampshire and Sussex in July and August 1996 and EMG members should be on the alert for a possible spread into eastern England. Numbers of larvae were beaten from tamarisk bushes by south county lepidopterists - members of the recently formed Sussex Moth Group. There are many tamarisk bushes in several Essex coastal areas so we should make a species search this summer. The first record for the British Isles of this pug was from Guernsey in 1984. *Joe Firmin.*

### Invasion of the Red-green Carpet *Chloroclysta siterata* Hufn.

*The Larger Moths and Butterflies of Essex* (1985) Maitland Emmet and Geoff Pyman listed *C. siterata* as "Resident, rare; no certain record since 1969". This situation is also reflected in adjacent Hertfordshire where the last record was in the 1930s. For the London area, which includes part of south-west Essex, I included *C. siterata* in my 1993 book *Larger Moths of the London Area* on the strength of nine records, all of which were listed. Only two of these were made post- 1979. I was therefore surprised when I found a male specimen amongst material taken at Harrow, Middlesex on 29 October 1996 by John Hollingdale - the first Middlesex record since 1898 - not bad for his first year of recording! Since then, records have been received for 1996 from Surrey and Kent, for 1995 from Richmond Park and, belatedly, for 1994 from Croydon. This moth is evidently extending its British range eastwards, much as did the Black Rustic *Aporophylla nigra* and the Grey Shoulder-knot *Lithophane ornitopus* in recent years, and so its presence in the London area was perhaps to be expected. Though the records are at present concentrated in the south and west of the London area, it is well worth noting that I recorded the species in my garden trap at Bishops Stortford, just outside Essex, in October 1996, the first time in ten years of continuous trapping. I would suggest that *C. siterata* will be found in Essex in 1997 and is likely to spread across the county from west to east. Records, with dates and numbers, to enable its colonisation to be properly documented, would be particularly valuable and should be sent to Brian Goodey as County Recorder. *Colin W. Plant.*

### Red-green Carpet - the current situation in Essex

The most recent county records are all from the north-east and possibly wanderers: two were taken by Peter Smith at Dovercourt in September 1989 and September 1990, and one by Ian Rose at Mistley in August 1995.

### Denis C. Owen

Clare Owen extends her thanks for the Peppered Moth data, which many of you supplied. Following the death of Denis last October, she has kindly agreed to receive any further information from 1996 and pass it on to Dr. Bruce Grant, who will continue the project in America.

### Look out for these...

I am especially keen to bear any news of the following species

**2130 Dotted Clay *Xestia baja*** D.&S. Seems to have virtually disappeared from the county, almost unnoticed. Jon Young was first to notice the decline in 1986, after the moth had disappeared from Charity Wood, Colchester, in 1980. *The Larger Moths & Butterflies of Essex* in 1985 described it as being "locally fairly common" and ten years earlier *A Guide to the Butterflies & Larger Moths of Essex* stated, "Widely distributed at varying density in well-timbered districts." Maitland Emmet noted an example in 1983 at Saffron Walden, but the next record came thirteen years later when Jean Green took a specimen in her Theydon Bois light trap on 8 August 1996.

**2148 Pale Shining Brown *Polia bombycina*** Hufn. William Harwood, in the *Victoria County History* (1903), described this as 'not uncommon' but both guides found the moth local and scarce. There have been no records since 1984.

**2184 Northern Drab *Orthosia opima*** Hb. Appears to have been initially rare in Essex but began increasing its range during 1960's - 1970's and by 1985 it was quite widespread with two main populations in the northeast and southwest of the county. Still regularly seen at Fingringhoe Wick N.R. (1996) and St Osyth (1996) but seems to have disappeared elsewhere.

**2250 Dark Brocade *Mniotype adusta*** Esp. The most recent proven record is one taken by Maitland Emmet at Saffron Walden in 1987.

**1615 The Wall *Lasiommata megera*** L. Unlike the above species the wall periodically has population falls which soon recover. Had a bad year generally in 1996 and no records were received. Graham Bailey was last to report it with three in the Maldon area on 31 July 1995.

### Breeding Great Brocade?

Suggestive evidence of a breeding *Eurois occulta* (which would be a first for Essex) has been reported by Colin Plant. A female flew to his mercury vapour trap at Harlow on 7 September 1995 and, when placed into a container, excreted a drop of green meconium fluid, the waste material left over from the pupal stage which is usually jettisoned soon after emergence. Usually considered a migrant in Essex, the question is how far a moth would fly before completely discharging this cargo. There has been a noticeable increase in records since 1990 - twenty-three specimens in all, and fifteen of these were during 1996.

### Second - or first? north Essex *Eana osseana* Scop.

Ben Fisher has taken a specimen of *Eana osseana* at his Beaumont home during 1996. The tortrix moth was identified by David Agassiz and is only the second from the north Essex vice-county, VC 19. The first was caught at Heydon, Cambs, which is included in VC 19, in 1979 (Maitland Emmet, pers. comm.). Other 1996 moths of interest from Ben included Clouded Magpie *Abraxas sylvata* on 9 August, Kent Black Arches *Meganola albula* on 9 August (a species which became not uncommon during the 1980's but which now seems to have declined), Great Brocade *Eurois occulta* on 20 August and, perhaps of most interest, Orange Footman *Eilema sororcula* on 9 June. This former resident appeared to have become extinct in Essex by 1970 but may now be in the process of recolonising the county. David Agassiz reported small numbers at Hatfield Forest in 1992 and three have been reported from the Bradwell area, two at Curry Farm in 1989 (A. J. Dewick) and one at the bird observatory during 1993 (Graham Smith).

### New look for The Essex Naturalist

The Essex Field Club's house journal has received a welcome face-lift for 1995/1996. A very professional-looking volume edited by Peter Harvey and Colin Plant, it contains much of interest in a more 'scientific format' than in previous issues and will deserve a permanent place on your creaking bookshelves.

### EMG member helps new larvae guide

Whilst on holiday in Portugal in September 1996, David Warner found a female Pale Shoulder *Acontia lucida* a rare immigrant to the Britain Isles. The moth, on return to the U.K., laid ova and David reared some of the resulting larvae to the pupa stage. As Bernard Skinner needed examples to illustrate for his

forthcoming book on the larvae of the British macrolepidoptera, 1 sent two of David's (feeding on mallow) and a photograph obtained will appear in the new book which is expected in May or June 1997. *Joe Firmin*.

### **Recording Progress**

Work on the county's database is nearing completion. At present around 12000 entries distilled from 20000 records have been included and have mostly been taken from my correspondence year files, dating from 1990. There are still a couple of thousand recent records to enter plus many thousands made before 1990. Information can be extracted within a few seconds on various subjects (including species, recorders, dates, 1 kilometre or 10 kilometre squares or a mixture of these) and sorted in a variety of ways. This is linked to Dr. Alan Morten's DmapW, a programme able to display distribution maps when required.

Information in the database can be broken down as follows: butterflies 13% (1600 records), micro-moths 28% (3400 records) and macro-moths 59% (7000 records). Arbitrarily dividing the county into three segments, north and west Essex (covered by thirty TL squares) has provided 5700 records; northeast Essex (covered by ten TM squares) has yielded 5300 records, and south Essex (covered by seventeen TQ and TR squares) has provided just 1000 records.

### The Recorders

Quite why the southern vice-county is so poorly recorded remains both a mystery and a frustration, especially when considering its glorious past. Were it not for established recorders such as Don Down, Jean Green, Graham Bailey and Graham Smith together with more recent workers Clive Griffin and Bryon Pateman, the situation would be ridiculous. On the plus side, Jean's efforts at Theydon Bois are exemplary and she has provided such a wealth of data that her garden must be the best recorded in Essex. Don, incidentally, has been the first to send a list of moths recorded during 1997, mostly of early spring species for which records are particularly scarce.

The north and west (TL) part of Essex is covered well in parts, but poorly elsewhere. Maitland Emmet has a lonely vigil at Saffron Walden but has provided the largest single site list: 981 species from his garden since 1960. Many thousands of micro records made in Essex by Maitland as county Microlepidoptera Recorder await being put on to the database. Iain Grahame has produced an impressive list from Daws Hall Nature Reserve, Lamarsh of around 380 species dating from 1990. Geoff Pyman continues to monitor the entomologically rich Danbury area and roving Joe Firmin, Ian Rose and Jerry Bowdrey have made important contributions here and elsewhere, especially for tetrad records of butterflies which would otherwise be poorly recorded.

Northeast Essex (TM) holds the bulk of the county's recorders. The Harwich area has historically always been well covered, and this tradition continues with Peter Smith and Chris Gibson, who sends highly detailed yearly reports and observations on the whole range of Lepidoptera. Ben Fisher has provided me with many records from the Beaumont area and the important sites of Stour/Copperas Woods. Relative newcomers Bob Gooding (Lawford), Barbara Lock (Frinton) and Paul Bergdahl all send lengthy summaries, and Paul, in particular, has helped with our knowledge of micros in the area. Jon Young lives in a rather exposed site on the coast at Jaywick but has managed to beat the weather occasionally and has an impressive list which includes rare migrants. Perhaps the most active recorder in this part of the county is Reg Arthur who is able to identify most species he finds at St Osyth and elsewhere. His annual report is one of the most eagerly awaited since it contains details of many scarce resident species at several important localities.

There are many other people up and down the county who send records and whose efforts are much appreciated. The Moth Group has 'found' several people new to the subject who are growing in confidence and who are extending the range of species they are able to do. As we head towards millennium the future looks good and I would expect the relatively small number of entries in the database at present to at least double by the year 2000 - hopefully with greater numbers coming from south Essex. *Brian Goodey*.

(Programme deleted)

### **Painted Lady - was it common in 1996?**

Undoubtedly yes. But surprisingly few observers sent information that might be of value to future field workers who would like to compare subsequent years with 1996. Jon Young and Ian Rose gave estimates of numbers of specimens passing by their homes per hour at peak migration; I counted 450 during an

hours' walk at High Woods C.P. and a few details were obtained from Curry Farm, Bradwell. More examples would be useful together with reports of larvae.

### **Comet Hale-Bopp**

If you've not seen this spectacular and rare visitor yet now would be a good time. Choose a clear, dark night just after sun set and look towards the northwest. Early April would be best as the moon waxes later in the month - and its glow will detract from the comet's visual brightness. Hale-Bopp is now leaving the solar system and is not due to return for several thousand years.

### **Plume spreading?**

Reg Arthur took two *Amblyptilia acanthadactyla* Hb. last year at St Osyth on 9 and 23 October, which were confirmed by Colin Hart - an expert on the family who is currently preparing a book on British plumes. Paul Bergdahl recently sent me another, taken on 10 March 1997 at Kiby-le-Soken.

(Contacts deleted)

**Next Newsletter** - sometime in July. Please send me your records, notes of successful nights, comments, questions and anything else of interest.