



Essex Field Club

Colchester Natural History Society

Sorry for the slight delay in producing this newsletter but it's been a difficult few months weather wise and many of you have been rather quiet until recently. Also, I've only just returned from the torture of sunning myself on the beaches of Barbados...but you don't want to hear about that. - but just in case you do, I must report that it appears to be a poor island for Lepidoptera, with few butterflies (that looked mostly like large whites and brimstones) and very few moths. The largest I saw - once - was a species that looked like *Palpita unionalis* and the commonest was a grass moth that could have been *Crambus lathoniellus* but was smaller and not so colourful! Part of the reason for this lies with fact that it is a 'new' island (only 750,000 years old) and quite isolated geographically. The Bajan lepidopterist, if such exists, would positively drool over the prospect of coming to Britain to see the wealth of large and exotically coloured insects that drip off our trees. But the marine life, and especially the turtles, are another matter...

News from around the county

At **Jaywick**, Jon Young had a successful June, recording **Small Elephant Hawk-moth** *Deilephila porcellus* on the 12th, **Lunar Thorn** *Selenia lunularia* on the 17th, and *Phlyctaenia perlucidalis* and **Obscure Wainscot** *Mythimna obsoleta* on the 29th. Early appearances of moths included **Garden Tiger** *Arctia caja* on the 18th and **Mouse Moth** *Amphipyra tragopogonis* on the 29th.

Second British site for *fuscicornis*

At the RSPB's **Old Hall Marsh Nature Reserve**, near Tollesbury, the Colchester Natural History Society is starting a fairly intense study of the venue's natural history. At the initial meeting on 17 May, after warden Chris Tyas had introduced us to the site, moth group members took a wander around the reserve with nets in hand. Nigel Cumin found plenty of interesting beetles and Joe Firmin spotted a perfect **Brown Argus** *Aricia agestis*. I had caught a couple of coleophorids which, upon returning home and with the new MBGBI volume 3 at hand ready to serve as guide, turned out to be the rather spectacular *Coleophora fuscicornis*. Maitland Emmet found the first British specimens at Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve on 26 May 1973 (and again in 1974). After searching nearby localities a second colony was located in the Hamford Water area but, despite this moth's importance to Essex (ranking with **Fisher's Estuarine Moth** *Gortyna borelii* as our only endemic species), few subsequent searches were made. Not one our proudest achievements. For many years the status of *fuscicornis* was unknown. A couple of years ago the Essex Lepidoptera Panel arranged a visit to Fingringhoe but found the site overgrown with rank vegetation and it seems unlikely that the moth still survives there. Then, in June 1996, Maitland re-found the species at its Hamford Water site, much to everyone's relief, though he met with less success over the border in Suffolk. So Old Hall Marsh is only the second British locality for *fuscicornis*, though the likelihood is, given the history and distance between the sites, that further undetected colonies exist.

Joe Firmin, David Warner and Nigel Cumin have also carried out a couple of night forays at Old Hall Marsh. On 11 June they were rewarded with 74 species which included *Bactra robusana*, *Schoenobius gigantella*, *Donacaula forficella*, *Synaphe punctalis*, *Ancylois oblitella*, **Shaded Pug** *Eupithecia subumbrata*, at least 25 **Cream-spot Tiger** *Arctia villica*, **Mathew's Wainscot** *Mythimna favicolor*, and four species of hawk-moth. On 18 July they recorded **Obscure Wainscot** *M. obsoleta* and **The Shark** *Cucullia umbratica*.

During May Ian Rose caught a specimen of *Adela croesella*, a scarce long-horn in Essex associated with privet, at his home in Mistley. Also in May, Paul Bergdahl took *Elachista gleichenella* at his trap in Kirby-le-Soken, a beautiful but tiny moth easily overlooked.

Many of you have commented on the unusual abundance this year of the Treble Lines *Charanyca trigrammica* and especially the Pale Oak Beauty *Serraca punctinalis*, which has appeared in good numbers wherever people have been recording.

Breeding Death's-head Hawk-moths?

Lin Wenlock, secretary of the Essex Wildlife Trust Braintree Group, was called by a local resident to a house at Tye Green, Cressing on 9 June to identify two large moths sitting on a garden gate post. Lin was surprised to see a pair of **Death's-head Hawk-moths** *Acherontia atropus*, which were duly photographed. These images show the moths at rest back to back, as though they had just finished mating, and there is an obvious difference in size between the them. Alternatively they could have recently emerged and were the progeny of an earlier female.

Buttoned Snout at Earls Colne and Writtle

Mike Green's trap at Writtle on 3 May yielded one specimen of *Hypena rostralis* and a few days later another turned up at David Warner's home at Earls Colne on 17 May. These follow other sightings of this hop feeder: two appeared in 1993 at Bryon Pateman's trap at North Chingford, London (just inside our recording area) and Chris Gibson has had a total of six specimens from 1994 to 1996. This distinctive but generally local species may be widespread in Essex but probably at low density, though searches in June and July for larvae might prove worthwhile.

Four-spotted in an historic setting

An Essex Moth Group/Colchester Natural History Society Invertebrate Group MV lamp session at Layer Marney Tower estate, near Colchester on 6 July produced some notable records. The surprise of the night was the arrival, among more than 70 species seen between 10.00pm and 1.00am, of a specimen of the **Four-spotted** moth *Tyta luctuosa*. There are no recent records of this mainly Breckland species for northeast Essex. Another highlight was the number of **Festoon** *Apoda limacodes* which arrived at the lamp and sheet. More than a dozen of both sexes was recorded. It is assumed that they are associated with the old oak trees which dot the historic Layer Marney Tower farmland and parkland. *Joe Firmin*.

Four-spotted at Bradwell

Interestingly, Graham Smith reported another *Tyta luctuosa* at the bird observatory at Bradwell-on-Sea on 20/21 July. These are the first Essex records for twenty years. Usually considered to be a chalkland species, it was not uncommon in northwest Essex up to 1977 (A.M. Emmet - see *The Larger Moths & Butterflies of Essex*).

A few more Migrants...

In contrast to last year the migration front has, so far, been strangely quiet and even the silver y has been fairly scarce. However, there have been a few visitors in addition to the death's-head hawks above. Mr and Mrs B Wilkens watched a **Humming-bird Hawk-moth** *Macroglossum stellatarum* nectaring on flowers in their Brentwood garden on 29 June, and at Daws Hall, Lamarsh, Major Iain Grahame noted a **Bedstraw Hawk-moth** *Hyles gallii* at his trap.

New species for Essex - and Britain.

Maitland Emmet and David Agassiz have been plotting the range of *Argyresthia cupressella*, an American species which may have been accidentally imported into this country. Larvae feed on cypresses and the pair found the moth wherever they searched trees in southeast Suffolk, with the biggest concentration just to the west of Ipswich. Extending their search into Essex, they found small numbers at Harwich. This tiny moth somewhat resembles *A. dilectella* and was on the wing in early July, though adults were looking worn, so we may now have to wait until next year before finding the species in this stage. The larva mines the leaves, turning them brown, so you may be able to locate possible host trees now and find the larvae next spring. My thanks to Maitland for supplying the above information.

Meetings

Markshall Estate, Coggeshall, 12 April 1997

For once the sight of Comet Hale-Bopp in the sky was unwelcome. Clear skies and low temperatures did not augur well, but in the end the ten members and three lamps attracted twenty-two species, seventeen of which were new or updated 10km square records. Highlights were *Elachista gleichenella*, **Great Prominent** *Peridea anceps*, **Chocolate-tip** *Clostera curtula*, **Pine Beauty** *Panolis flammea* and **Nut-tree Tussock** *Colocasia coryli*. We were joined by two Suffolk Moth Group members, Graham Bull (also an EMG member) and Tony Prichard.

Markshall Estate, Coggeshall, 31 May 1997

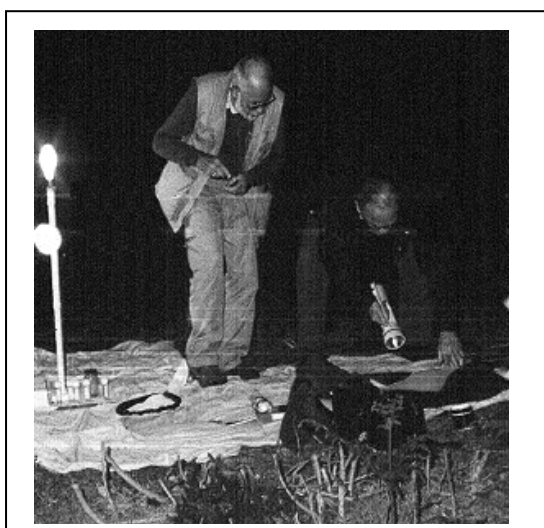
Cool conditions again and ten members struggled to record 57 species. *Cydia fagiglandana*, **Cream Wave** *Scopula flosactata*, **May Highflier** *Hydriomena imphuviata*, **Pale-shouldered Brocade** *Lacanobia thalassina*, **Alder Moth** *Acronicta alni*, **Bird's Wing** *Dypterygia scabriuscula* and **Clouded-bordered Brindle** *Apamea crenata* were noted. Three peacocks (birds) screeched nearby and Muntjac Deer screamed in the distant.

Markshall Estate, Coggeshall, 21 June 1997

Strong wind, cool temperatures and rain showers dominated the day but by night conditions had improved a little. Eight of us had a busy dusk session, netting **Beautiful Carpet** *Mesoleuca albicillata*, **Orange Moth** *Angerona prunaria* and **Gold Swift** *Hepialus hecta*. Later, **Brown China-mark** *Elophila nymphaeata*, **Blotched Emerald** *Comibaena bajularia*, **Bordered White** *Bupalus piniaria*, **Lime Hawk-moth** *Mimas tiliae* and **Small Fan-foot** *Herminia grisealis* came to light. One moth caused great excitement - for several minutes - until it was recognized as a form of the **Tawny-barred Angle** *Semiothisa liturata* f. *nigrofulvata*, which none of us had seen before.

Backwarden N.R., Danbury, 14 June 1997

Eleven people, led by Geoff Pyman, noted 84 species which included **Gold Swift** *Hepialus hecta*, *Lampronia oehlmanniella*, *Coleophora alticolella* (of which there were clouds), *Batrachedra praeangusta*, *Pseudosciaphila branderiana*, *Ancylis laetana*, ten **Blotched Emerald** *Comibaena bajularia*, **Peach Blossom** *Thyatira batis*, **Small Seraphim** *Pterapherapteryx sexalata*, **Round-winged Muslin** *Thumatha senex*, **Grey Arches** *Polia nebulosa* of which there were several interesting varieties, and **Small Fan-foot** *Herminia grisealis*.



*Geoff Pyman and Nigel Cumin
admire a fresh Peach Blossom
at the Backwarden Nature
Reserve Danbury*

County Moth Night, 17 May

Results are still trickling in.

Friday Wood, Colchester, 26 July 1997

Seven of us looked forward to visiting this excellent locality, including Graham Bull and Tony Prichard who brought two additional lamps and thus allowed us to sample the main, ancient woodland as well as the dry, scrub area near the car park. Things started fairly slowly but by 1.30am the woodland traps, sheltered from the wind, were heaving with moths. *Yponomeuta evonymella*, *Acleris holmiana*, *Catoptria falsella*, *Scoparia basistrigalis*, *Acrobasis repandana*, *Dioryctria mutata* and *Strophedra nitidana* - a moth I've not seen before - were amongst the first wave here, and were followed by **Large Emerald** *Geometra papilionaria*, **False Mocha** *Cyclophora porata*, eleven **Maiden's Blush** *C. punctaria* (a recent arrival at Friday Wood), two **Black Arches** *Lymantria monacha*, **Dingy** and **Buff Footman** *Eilema griseola* and *E. deplana*, **Slender Brindle** *Apamea scolopacina* and two **Clouded Magpie** *Abraxas sylvata* - another new moth to me. The car park trap was not as successful but still yielded **Oak Nycteoline** *Nycteola revayana*, **Ear Moth** *Amphipoea oculea*, **Swallow Prominent** *Pheosia tremula*, four more **Maiden's Blush**, *Acrobasis consociella* and four *Pediasia contaminella* - my third new species! Many of the above are local moths in Essex. By the end we had recorded

106 species, a total which does not include a very strange looking *Scoparia/Eudonia* species - possibly a weird variety of *Eudonia mercurella*, of which we saw 40-odd specimens. Another notable capture was a huge, long-horn beetle, not much smaller than a stag beetle, which may prove important. Despite having one of the highest species lists of any site in the county (made mostly pre-1990), we still managed to make three additions.

Moth Group Programme for 1997 If any of you want to arrange an evening at a site near to where you live and wish to advertise it here please let me know. Phone the leader before hand to check any last minute changes. Keep in touch for events arranged at the last minute and not advertised here. Brian.

2 August 1997 **Marks Hall Estate, Coggeshall**

Meet at the visitors' centre TL839252 at 11.00am for day session and/or 8.30pm for dusk/MV. Joint British Ent. Soc. meeting. Leaders: Jerry Bowdrey and Joe Firmin (01206 241389).

16 August 1997 **Abberton Reservoir**

Meet at the visitors' centre TL963185 at dusk. Leader: B. Goodey (01206 841224).

23 August 1997 **Friday Wood SSSI**

Meet at Bounstead Road car park TL985209 8.30pm. Leader: B. Goodey (01206 841224).

11 October 1997 **Danbury Common**

Meet at Danbury Common car park TL783044 at 11.30am. A fascinating chance to see how Maitland Emmet records micros from evidence of larval feeding. Leader: A. M. Emmet (01799 523042).

The Entomologist

Sadly, the Royal Entomological Society has decided to stop producing *The Entomologist* despite the journals profit last financial year of £2000. The main reason is lack of submission of papers from authors.

Renewal notice:

Many of you have supplied SAE's or a cheque (usually £3.00 - £5.00) as a method of receiving the newsletter. The boxes display how many stamps or much money is left in your 'account'. No other reminders will be sent.	£ SAE's
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J. P. Bowdrey, 12 Sparrows Corner, Harwich Road, Great Oakley, Essex. CO12 5AA. *Other Order records.*

A. M. Emmet, Labrey Cottage, 14 Victoria Gardens, Saffron Walden, Essex. CB11 3AF. *Microlep. records.*

J. Firmin, 55 Chapel Road, West Bergholt, Essex. CO6 3HZ (01206 241389).

B. Goodey, 298 Ipswich Road, Colchester, Essex. CO4 4ET. (01206 841224). *Macrolep. records.*

C. W. Plant, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Herts. CM23 3QP. *National Neuroptera Recorder.*

I. C. Rose, Yaffles, School Lane, Mistley, Essex. CO11 1HN.

Next Newsletter - sometime in October...or November. Please send me your records, notes of successful nights, comments, questions - or *anything* of interest. Brian.