

# Essex Moth Group

## Newsletter 8: Spring 1998



Essex Field Club

Colchester Natural History Society



*Tendring Hundred Water Services, Horsley Cross*

### Winter meeting a great success

*Held at Tendring Hundred Water Services, Horsley Cross on 31 January*

At this superb venue a lecture theatre, exhibit room and refreshment area were set up for this our first official indoor meeting as a group. Joe Firmin performed sterling work in the Chair and his first duty was to thank Bob and Sue Gooding and Gordon Sadler for their much appreciated efforts in making the day such a success, from simple touches such as signs put out in the road to the grander effort of providing the prodigious spread of food. In all I counted forty-five heads, which included many of the most experienced and active members in the county as well as guests from Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. I doubt if a gathering of such magnitude has taken place in Essex before. Among those present were Don Down, Maitland Emmet, Ben Fisher, David Corke, Colin Plant, Reg Fry and Arthur Watchman.

Brian gave a brief talk on the Group's progress and some thoughts on the clearwing group of moths, some of which we hope to search for this year. Reg Fry brought along some *Amateur Entomologist's Society* leaflets to help in the search and invited people to join this club, which was founded in 1935 but which has recently experience a few difficulties.

Dr. Chris Gibson gave a well received talk on the biodiversity and management of sea walls, mowing experiments and the effect on Fisher's Estuarine Moth *Gortyna borelii*. Chris was able to reply to questions raised from the floor, amongst which was a query concerning the *G. borelii* specimen taken at Peter Smith's home at Dovercourt in 1996, well away from its breeding locations. From the description given Colin Plant and Chris were able to confirm that it was of the British subspecies *lunata* Freyer rather than a migrant from Europe, specimens of which are larger.



*Chris Gibson in action*

Ian Rose presented a wonderful array of slides, mostly of Essex butterflies and moths. A few unidentified species were quickly named by Don Down, who proved that the traditional style of entomology - the patient rearing of stock and the careful study of life-cycles - is still the best approach if you want to learn your art thoroughly.

Following lunch more slides were shown from Peter Smith, Barbara Lock, Grahame Bailey and Don Down, who included the first photographic record of the life-cycle of *G. borelii*.

To round off the day a heated discussion with Butterfly Conservation members took place, proving that all in the world of entomology is not perfect. Yet it did help to lance a few boils and has since led to closer co-operation.

There have been requests for another meeting in the future and, encouraged (and frankly slightly surprised) by the level of interest shown at Horsley Cross, this will hopefully be arranged.

### **The season so far...**

The first butterfly I saw this year was a Peacock at Colchester Hythe on 5 February, which I thought was early until Chris Gibson told me of one, he had seen nectaring in his Dovercourt garden on 15 January! Last year the earliest record I received for a butterfly outdoors was 1 March, although Maitland Emmet writes in his delightful 'Butterfly Bedfellows' (*Entomologist's Record*, **110**: 21) of a Peacock which had overwintered in his bedroom, being active on 22 February 1997. Also, in January Chris recorded a Pale Brindled Beauty and Spring Usher.

February was generally mild and occasionally very warm, such as on the 13th which saw 18°C (65°F) in Colchester, and the early Spring warmth certainly helped to bring insects out. Chris Gibson had Double-striped Pug on the 19th and *Acrolepiosis assectella* and a Silver Y on the 24th. Chris recorded 16 species in February, including 9 species/16 specimens in his trap on the 24th - his best ever February night (compared with 7 species in February 1997, also regarded as being mild).

Brian Pateman in North Chingford recorded 14 species in February and had Oak Beauty on the 2nd, Chestnut and Hebrew Character as early as the 14th, and Shoulder Stripe on the 19th. His best night was the 19th with 9 species/19 specimens.

Saharan dust brought with it Painted Ladies and Striped Hawk-moths elsewhere in Britain. In Essex, Wendy Corben saw a large hawk-moth inside a Stanway supermarket on the 10th which may have been this species.

Alas, March thanks to some cool northerly winds was far more seasonal and has almost brought things back to how they should normally be.

### **Small Eggars at Maldon**

Simon Wood has taken a male and female Small Eggar *Eriogaster lanestris* at his garden trap in Maldon on 27 March. The most recent previous Essex record was back in 1970 from the Rochford Hundred (see Joe Firmin's *A guide to the butterflies and larger moths of Essex*, p. 46). Two were taken last year in Kent, perhaps hinting that this spectacular species is attempting a comeback.

### **Flying flightless females?**

Ray Marsh noted on 15 February four females of the Early Moth *Theria primaria* sitting on top of his Kirby Cross trap, which was situated well away from any bushes or overhanging trees. Later, in early March, he noted a similar thing happening with the March Moth *Alsophila aescularia*. Females of both species are rather spider-like with atrophied wings, quite unable to fly. Were the males, Ray asks, strong enough fliers to be able to carry females whilst *in cop* accidentally to the traps? Or do wingless females of certain species walk long distances, once they have mated as a means of dispersing their brood, and are then attracted to light in the same manner as the winged males?

### **All change with County Recorders**

After many diligent years service Arthur Watchman is to stand down as Suffolk County Recorder. His post will be held jointly by Tony Prichard and John Nichols, who is also responsible for the *Suffolk Moth Group* newsletter.

The addresses are: Mr A. Prichard, 3 Prowling Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 9JR (Tel: 01473 270047) and Mr J. Nichols, 18 Berners Road, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 7LF (Tel: 01394 271500). If you wish to receive the SMG newsletter send John a cheque for £2.

In Cambridgeshire John Dawson is to become County Recorder, his address is Queens Cottage, 17 Church Lane, Fulbourn, Cambs CB1 5EP (Tel: 01223 510307). Both John and Brian Goodey will act as 'Moth Officers' for the local Butterfly Conservation branch.

### ***Borelii* Protected**

The Fisher's Estuarine Moth is now officially protected by law, so it is now illegal to disturb it - unless of course you wish to build a supermarket...

### Pub names in Harlow

This town boasts of inns called 'The Shark', complete with a rather nicely painted sign of *Cucullia umbratica* (at least it looked nice as I flashed past at # miles an hour...); and perhaps more predictably 'The Gatekeeper', with suitable portrait outside. Why has nobody thought of naming a pub *The Drinker* or *The Sprawler*, or even *The Large Copper*?

### New list available

A new list of Essex species is now available from Brian Goodey. This has been adapted from that given in David Corke's *Butterflies of Essex* and contains *only* butterflies and moths which have been accepted by the Essex Lepidoptera Panel as being genuinely Essex, currently standing at 1,832 species listed strictly numerically (in the order of Bradley & Fletcher). This can be obtained by sending me a large SAE. It can also be sent as a file on disk saved as bog-standard Text, Rich Text Format (rts), *Lotus Word Pro* or *Word* in their various incarnations on the PC, or *Final Writer* on the Amiga.

A recorder's check list of common species will also be available shortly. This will be useful for those doing field who can simply tick off species as they are noted. Completed forms can then be returned to Brian for processing.

### Canvey Island first

I understand that *Gelechia senticella* larvae have been found at Canvey Island on 4 March this year by Mr. R. Heckford - the first British breeding record for this species. Abroad larvae feed on junipers.

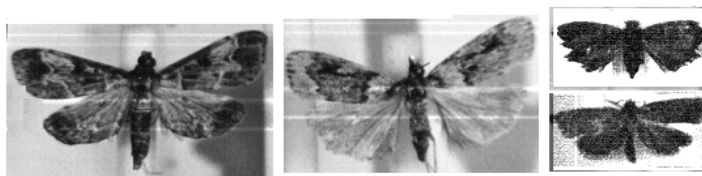
### Essex Red Data List proposed

As well as the national document which highlights the country's most vulnerable insects some counties now have or are preparing their own list of fauna which are considered at risk, the idea being to focus attention and eventually formulate a 'Plan of Action' for key species and encourage studies of their life cycles and habitats etc and allow subsequent monitoring of populations to take place. This will be a mammoth task since it encompasses many different disciplines. One advantage of this may be to facilitate information to be gathered on insects before colonies become too weak to maintain a viable population and become extinct, which may have happened to the Scarce Pug and Bright Wave.

### New species update

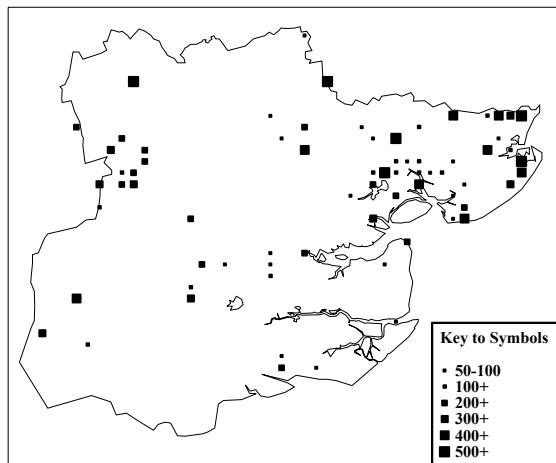
0225 *Triaxomera fulvimitrella* Sodof. This distinctive tineid moth, which is dark brown with four cream spots on the margins of each forewing, has been added to the Essex list. Don Down made the capture at his Thundersley trap on 26 July 1997 and, recognising it as being something potentially different, showed the specimen to Maitland Emmet who kindly made the identification. The distribution map in *The moths and butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* volume 2 page 184 shows this bracket fungi-feeder to be widespread and it is probably more common in Essex than the one record suggests.

Another new Essex moth, the pyralid *Duponchelia fovealis* Zell., was listed in the last newsletter. It has now been assigned the log number of 1403a. This is only the second British record, the first appearing in Norfolk in 1996. Essentially this is a Mediterranean species not known to migrate, but it is possible that *D. fovealis* has become resident here. The specimen was caught and retained by Paul Bergdahl in Kirby-le-Soken before passing it to Brian Goodey for identification.



*Selection of moths shown at the Horsley Cross meeting in January*

My apologies for the poor nature of the photograph above. Left is *D. fovealis* (see above). Next is a rare variety of ?*Scoparia ambigualis* from Friday Wood, Colchester, which I've yet to dissect. The two tortrix moths are distinctive (despite the image above) but are so far unidentified. Both were set well after capture by 'relaxing'. The top moth from Kirby (September 1996) has marbled grey wings with a dark hook on the costa (leading edge of the wing) at about one third distance from the thorax; the fringe is reddish. The bottom moth from Dovercourt (7 August 1997) is ferruginous with weakly metallic, bluish lines (striae) in the wing. It looks as though it *should* be a pine-feeder. Time will hopefully tell.



*Map of Essex  
showing sites with  
50 or more species  
recorded*

**Moth meetings - Programme for 1998** We have been informed of the following:  
20.00 start unless stated. *Please contact the leader before event.*

- 9 May Daws Hall Nature Reserve, Lamarsh, near Bures (Contact: B. Goodey 01206 841224).
- 16 May Cudmore Grove Country Park, East Mersea. (Contact: B. Goodey).
- 23 May Marks Hall Estate, Coggeshall. (Contact: J. Firmin 01206 241389).
- 31 May *Coleophora fuscicornis* search at various sites along the north-east Essex coast. (Contact: B. Goodey)
- 5 June Old Hall Marsh N.R. (R.S.P.B), near Tollesbury. (Contact J. Firmin). 20.30 start
- 6 June Hitchcock Meadows N.R Danbury - Search for Rosy Marbled Moth. (Contact: G.A. Pyman 01245 222417).
- 13 June Daytime search for clearwing moths at various localities. (Contact: B. Goodey).
- 13 June Colne Point E.W.T. N.R. near St Osyth Search for Scarce Pug. (Contact: R.W. Arthur 01255 820277).
- 3 July East Bergholt Place Arboretum, Suffolk. Joint meeting with **Suffolk Moth Group** (Contact J. Firmin).
- 17 July Old Hall Marsh N.R. (R.S.P.B), near Tollesbury. (Contact J. Firmin). 20.30 start
- 25 July Colne Point N.R., Search for Scarce Pug & Bright Wave. (Contact: R.W. Arthur 01255 820277).
- 8 Aug. Marks Hall, Coggeshall (Contact: J. Firmin).
- 14 Aug. Old Hall Marsh N.R. (R.S.P.B), near Tollesbury. (Contact J. Firmin). 20.30 start.
- 29 Aug. Cudmore Grove C.P., East Mersea. (Contact: B. Goodey).
- 5 Sept. Old Hall Marsh N.R., Scarce Pug larvae and micros with Maitland Emmet. (Contact: B. Goodey). 11.30 start.
- 11 Sept. Rodbridge Country Park near Sudbury, 19.00 start. Joint with **Suffolk Moth Group**. (Contact J. Firmin).
- 19 Sept. County Moth Night. Run your trap on this night and send B. Goodey the results.
- 3 Oct. Abberton Reservoir (Essex Wildlife Trust). Meet at Centre. 19.00 start (Contact B. Goodey).

**Sawbridgeworth Marsh Nature Reserve** near Bishops Stortford. Recording on the first Sunday of every month, from 10.00AM onwards. Some sessions with mercury vapour light trapping on the night before. Contact Colin Plant on 01279 507697.

**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 show how many stamps  
or how much money is left in your 'account'. No SAE's  
other reminders will be sent. SAEs are preferred.  
\*made payable to B. Goodey

**Contacts:**

- J. P. Bowdrey, Fair View, Colchester Road Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex. CO16 0LB. 01255 862507. *Other Order records.*
- N. Cuming, 33 Holly Way, Colchester CO3 5QL *C.N.H.S. Coleoptera records*
- A. M. Emmet, Labrey Cottage, 14 Victoria Gardens, Saffron Walden, Essex. CB11 3AF. 01799 523042. *Microlepidoptera records for Essex & Britain.*
- J. Firmin, 55 Chapel Road, West Bergholt, Essex. CO6 3HZ (01206 241389). *General Moth Group enquiries.*
- B. Goodey, 298 Ipswich Road, Colchester, Essex. CO4 4ET. (01206 841224). *Macrolepidoptera records for Essex; Newsletter.*
- C. W. Plant, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Herts. CM23 3QP. *Herts & London Lepidoptera records & National Neuroptera Recorder*
- I. C. Rose, Yaffles, School Lane, Mistley, Essex. CO11 1HN. *General Moth Group enquiries*

**Next Newsletter** - Hopefully in July. Please send records, notices of meetings, notes of successful nights, comments, questions or anything of interest. Brian.