



Essex Field Club

Colchester Natural History Society

I returned from my summer holiday to find a hideous pile of letters and specimens awaiting me. I wanted to go through these in case anything interesting had turned up, hence the lateness of this newsletter. Despite the weather the letters revealed that many of you have been busy and have managed to turn up much of interest.

The season so far

Remember those halcyon nights in February when traps were heaving with insects and Saharan dust coated the bulbs? Since those golden times have gone slightly awry. Some events were cancelled but most managed to take place, albeit with poor results.

Chris Gibson writes...

Butterflies started well in March but April was poor due to the foul weather. Things improved at the end of the month until mid-May, but then it was dismal. Moths have fared better though overall catches have been lower than the equivalent period last year. Typical nightly numbers of adults have been in the region shown below:

	1997	1998
April	10 - 50	5 - 20
May	20 - 150	20 - 150
June	50 - 500	40 - 300

Despite the lower numbers of individuals, the number of species caught has actually been higher than last year in each of the three months. The lower total numbers have therefore been due to poor showings of some common species such as Hebrew Character, Heart and Dart and Dark Arches. In contrast I have found that some common species are doing better than last year, such as Brimstone Moth, Bright-line Brown-eye and Spectacle.

During the period hawk-moths have done well with large total counts and some multiple catches:

Poplar Hawk-moth	total so far 21 - maximum nightly count 3
Lime Hawk-moth	total so far 19 - maximum nightly count 3
Elephant Hawk-moth	total so far 91 - maximum nightly count 14
Privet Hawk-moth	total so far 23 - maximum nightly count 4
Eyed Hawk-moth	total so far 17 - maximum nightly count 6

As far as common migrants go, quite a poor show with just a thin scattering of Silver Y, Rush Veneer *Nomophila noctuella* and Diamond-back Moth *Plutella xylostella*.

News from around the county

Beaumont-cum-Moze: During May Ben Fisher caught *Pammene inquiline* 23rd and *Dichrorampha acuminatana* 24th. On 1 July *Triaxomera parasitella* and *Euzophera cinerosella* were seen and *Oncocera semirubella* appeared on 21st.

Clacton area: *Depressaria daucella* larvae on *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*. Reg Arthur spotted these last year and suspecting the possibility of something important decided to rear them through to the adult stage, Ian Rose taking photos of the various stages. This moth was last recorded in 1840 - 1842 by J.W. Douglas somewhere between Walton-on-Naze and Brightlingsea (see *Smaller Moths of Essex* p. 78).

Colne Point N.R.: The 24 species caught on 25 July included some nice species such as *Melissoblyptus zelleri*, *Ancylosis oblitella*, Ground Lackey, White-line Dart, Archer's Dart, Tawny Shears, Star-wort, Crescent Striped and Saltern Ear.

Coggeshall: Just 24 species were caught by Joe Firmin's sub-group on 23 May meeting, the best being a rather surprising Vestal.

Colchester: At Friday Wood on 1 June Jon Young and John Wilde had a successful evening (given the weather) with 60 species. Fox Moth, Lobster Moth, Alder Moth and Beautiful Golden Y were the highlights.

Danbury: Hitchcocks Meadows Nature Reserve. *Phyllonorycter scopariella* 6 June, B. Goodey. The hoped-for Rosy Marbled failed to make an appearance but the sight of a large Privet Hawk-moth found resting on a paling at dusk was nice. 46 species in all.

Dovercourt: During May Chris Gibson's trap yielded Maiden's Blush (9th and another on 2 June), *Coleophora fuscicornis* 20th, Flame Carpet 29th, Narrow-winged Pug 16th and 20th, White Point 25th, and Champion 29th. June brought Ochreous Pug 18th, Four-spotted 24th, Silver Barred 24th, *Coleophora frischella* 24th and Triple-spotted Clay 28th. Clearly the *C. fuscicornis* record is the most important - see related article.

Earls Colne: *Pempelia formosa* on 10 July, David Warner. At Brickfields a colony of the Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet was found by David, Joe Firmin and Nigel Cuming.

Hadleigh: At Starvelarks Wood on 15 May Don Down recorded 22 species which included Buttoned Snout, Maiden's Blush and Water Carpet. Don was also in action at Hadleigh Country Park on 6 June at a bat-cum-moth evening, usually a recipe for storms, and managed to record 20 species of which Cream-spot Tiger and three Fox Moth were the best.

Jaywick: The two coastal stations here run by Jon Young and John Wilde have yielded much of interest so far.

22 April two tineids *Tinea pallescentella* and *Monopis laevigella* found in numbers in a shed. Larvae found feeding on old blankets where a dog had whelped, the pupal cases stuck to walls and old car tyres, and adults swarming. The pupal cases were most beautiful, being constructed from the fabric of various blankets and being of different colours, depending on which blanket had been utilised. Some were bright blue and others red or white.

3 May Mullein Shark, the first Jaywick record for 7 years. 9 May Spruce Carpet - new to site. 12 May the first Jaywick Chocolate-tip for seven years. 21 May Northern Drab. 26 May a melanic Lunar Thorn. 26 May White Colon, first of the year since when six have turned up. 31 May albino male Small Copper (ab. *schmidtii* Gerhardt) and at night a Red Admiral in moth trap (another was in the trap on 6 June) - evidence of night migration?

15 and 22 June Small Elephant hawk-moth. 20-22 June a large influx of Privet Hawks. 23 June Three-humped Prominent (see article). 24 June three Maple Pug and Wood Carpet.

1 July Turnip Moth ab. *semiconfluens* Cockayne, per Bernard Skinner, a European form which may be a first for Britain. 5 July two further Small Elephant Hawk-moth and *Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*. 6 July *Euzophera cinerosella*. 26 July a Speckled Wood ovipositing, an unusual area to find the species. 20 July Satin Lutestring. 29 July *Pedesia contaminella*. Both traps have yielded 55 Bordered Sallows so far this year.

Lamarsh: Daws Hall, *Cryptoblabes bistriga* June, I. Grahame per B. Goodey. The meeting on 9 May yielded just 16 species, Puss Moth being the best.

Langenhoe: Tawnies Meadow, *Numonia marmorea* on 17 July, Hugh Owen.

Magdalen Laver: A Buttoned Snout was caught by Tim Green on 8 March.

North Chingford: Bryon Pateman reports a good year in his area so far for Buff-tip but poor for Common and Smoky Wainscots. In June he had a total of 21 Bird's Wing, 104 Blotched Emerald, a Flame Carpet on the 18th, two Golden Plusia, and eight Lobster Moth - a species which appears to be rather scarce in Essex these days. In July he added Black Arches, Dark Spinach and Waved Black to his site list. Bryon is experimenting with scanning live moths. The results vary in quality but in general are surprisingly useful.

Skipper's Island: Ray Marsh continues to monitor this site and this year recorded Northern Drab on 26 April and Cream-spot Tiger on 1 May. He reports that the Streamer was unusually common this year.

Terling: David Boyle at Faistead Hall, a number of photos and specimens which included *Mompha conturbatella* in early July. This distinctive momphid is local and scarce in Essex.

Theydon Bois: Jean Green reported two Bordered Sallow on 5 and 20 July at a time when good numbers were seen on the coast when a migration was under way. She continues to send me specimens for identification and these yielded *Acleris notana*, *A. hastiana*, *A. cristana* and *A. liturana* during February and March. A few nights ago I was examining a box with Paul Bergdahl, who was visiting, which revealed a Rosy Marbled, caught on 18 June in her garden trap. We have searched without success the Danbury area for this species during the last three years, so you can imagine our excitement as we realised what we had!

Tollesbury: Old Hall Marsh, RSPB reserve. Joe Firmin and others have continued to record at this site but conditions have been difficult. The best night so far was on 5 June when 38 species were seen which included 40 Cream-spot Tiger and two Water Ermine.

West Bergholt: At Pitchbury Wood on 19 July Joe Firmin and others found a Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet colony and Birch Mocha.

West Mersea: The meeting on 16 May produced an interesting observation regarding the Least Black Arches: a lamp was placed tight against a hedgerow because of the strong cold wind and five *N. confusalis* were netted as they drifted from an oak tree a couple of feet from the lamp, seemingly completely oblivious to its glare. This light picked up 30 species but another placed in the middle of a field managed just one Common Swift.

Wethersfield: High Street, Death's-head Hawk-moth in early July, Mrs Johnson

Wivenhoe: At Sunnymead Farm in June Moira Jackson reports *Trichophaga tapetzella* Tapestry Moth on the 6th, a local and rare species in Essex. Lunar Thorn also on the 6th and Cream-bordered Green Pea 20th were amongst others.

Wrabness: At Copperas Wood on 10 July Peter Smith recorded 55 species which included Rosy Footman, Beautiful Carpet, Peach Blossom, Triangle, two Clouded Magpie, six Maple Prominent, Vapourer and Broad-barred White. The last two were new additions to the site, which has a list total of 328 species. White admiral was seen here and also at Stour Wood.

General Observations

At East Bergholt Place, Suffolk on 3 July the combined lamps of the Essex and Suffolk Moth Groups yielded 122 species on what was a very successful night, Joe Firmin informs me. Pine Hawk-moth, three Clouded Magpie and Cream-bordered Green Pea were among the highlights. No fisticuffs or other adverse rivalry took place.

There was an increase in Chamomile Shark numbers, the first was on 6 April at Jaywick. Privet Hawk-moths were abundant and some were seen during the day, flying like grey arrows. Many reported nightly catches of four or five and a few reached double figures.

There are two new sites for Shaded Fan-foot, although one awaits confirmation and is well away from its usual north-east Essex haunts.

Clouded Yellows have appeared this year at East Mersea, 28 June (J. Firmin), Pitchbury Wood, West Bergholt, 19 July (J. Firmin et al), Beaumont-cum-Moze on 28 and 29 June (J.B. Fisher) and Maldon on 20 July (S. Grimwade). Painted Ladies have been scarce but present. Numbers of the Brown Argus have been noticeably smaller than in previous years.

***Coleophora fuscicornis* search a success**

Various sites along the north-east Essex coast were checked on 31 May starting at Dovercourt, where Chris Gibson had reported a specimen in his garden trap on 20th and the

foodplant, *Vicia tetrasperma*, close by. Paul Bergdahl, Chris and myself searched the nearby dune area and quickly found two adults. This botanically-rich area looks superb and we hope to run lights there next year. It extends the moth's known distribution range and places it within sight of Suffolk, though Maitland Emmet has carried out a short search there and found nothing. Jaywick, East Mersea and Fingringhoe Ferry were also checked (as well as other sites later in the month) but despite finding the foodplant no moths were found. This at least shows that its distribution is genuinely patchy.

Rare Prominent re-added to Essex list after 156 years Jon Young

Following a wet and windy night rather typical of the '98 season, I was both surprised and delighted to find a male Three-humped Prominent *Tritophia tritophus* in my garden trap on the morning of 23 June 1998. I checked the status of the moth with Bernard Skinner, to update any records in his forthcoming guide, and found the full list this century to be: Bedford May 1907, Havant 20 May 1920, Waterlooville July 1920, Folkestone 21 August 1955, Freshwater 19 August 1956, 'Isle of Wight' 1960, and Walberswick 24 July 1992 - making my specimen the eighth this century (Skinner, B. pers comm.).

However, there are also a few 19th century records and indeed the moth was first discovered as a British species in 1842 at St Osyth - only a few miles away from Jaywick where I live! This is of course no more than a great coincidence. The discoverer in July 1842 at St Osyth was Mr J.W. Douglas. He then wrote: "During the Essex excursion I took from an aspen a larva of a greenish-grey colour, having three prominences on the back, and which, I thought, was *N. ziczac*, though differing somewhat from the usual appearance of that larvae. It formed a slight covering between two leaves in the collecting box, and appeared in the perfect state on the 10th of August. It has not, I believe, been taken in Britain before." (Allen, 1947).

As most migration takes place in numbers, I would suggest the possibility of a small influx. So it's feasible that females came too and if this was the case, now is the time to search for larvae. Don't pass that aspen tree by without checking! The specimen has been preserved and has been lodged with Brian Goodey for safe keeping. A photo will hopefully appear in the next newsletter. My thanks to Bernard Skinner for providing updated records.

Allen, P.B.M. 1947. *A moth-hunter's gossip*. Watkins and Doncaster, London.

High Profile TV Peppereds Joe Firmin

Specimens of the Peppered Moth *Biston betularia* provided by our members, including Dave Warner, will feature in a BBC 2 programme in the *Local Heroes* series about John Ray, the famous 17th century naturalist known as the father of British scientific natural history, filmed in June at Ray's former cottage at Black Notley, Essex and which will be screened in the autumn.

Several members were approached by the production company during the filming for some peppered moth specimens as the presenter Alan Hart-Davies wanted to show how the soot-laden atmosphere of the industrial revolution had affected the genetics of moth species common in Ray's day and had produced a melanic (black) form as a protection against predators on the dark backgrounds of walls and tree trunks. Dave has provided the typical specimen and an all-black *carbonaria* form for Hart-Davies to show on a tree trunk in the Ray cottage garden. In Ray's lifetime, of course, the white, black-speckled *B. betularia* was the norm with only a rare melanic form. Nowadays the *carbonaria* and intergrade forms are declining with cleaner air and environment.

On the subject of the Peppered Moth, I have received a copy from America of the finished paper which we helped produce data for. Written by the late Dennis Owen and others it is due to be published in the autumn 1998 edition of the *Journal of Heredity*, but if anyone would like a preview please contact me (Brian) on 01206 841224.

Notes and requests

Natural History Courses at Epping Forest. Last year's programme was the most successful in the Field Centre's 25 year history. For further information telephone 0181 508 7714.

Rainham Marsh. Phil Butler has requested records from this site and would like some survey work to be done. If you are interested or can help please contact Phil at 218 Lodge Lane, Romford, RM5 2EU (01708 754391).

Hanningfield Reservoir. Warden Claire Cadman has request the loan of a trap to be used at this important site and help with identifying the catches. Phone 01245 212032. We hope to arrange a couple of moth group meetings there next year.

Web site (Butterfly Conservation). Terry Jeffries hopes to start this and include a section for the moth group. More details when available.

Duponchelia fovealis - In the *Pyralid & Plume Recording Scheme* newsletter no 6 (May 1998) Tony Davis writes that, according to David Agassiz, there is evidence to suggest that this moth may be imported in to Britain on house plants of the genus *Kocklea*.

New source of records. David Miller, a warden of the Essex Filter Beds, near Leyton, has kindly agreed to supply data from this London site. Of particular interest are the reed/marsh species of wainscots and pyralids. Steve Grimwade also joins the cause and will be operating a trap in the Maldon area and elsewhere.

Programme for 1998

20.00 start unless stated. **Please contact the leader before event.**

1 Aug. Fingringhoe Ranges. Restricted numbers. (Contact: B. Goodey).

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.

22 Aug. Beth Chatto Nursery, Elmstead Market. Restricted numbers. (Contact: B. Goodey).

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.
 26 Sept. Fingringhoe Ranges. Restricted numbers. (Contact: B. Goodey).
 3 Oct. Abberton Reservoir (Essex Wildlife Trust). Meet at Centre. 19.00 start (Contact B. Goodey).



Small Eggar Eriogaster lanestris, a pair caught by Simon Wood at Maldon, 27 March (see previous newsletter).



Chris Gibson and Paul Bergdahl confirming C. fuscicornis

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 other reminders will be sent. SAE's 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 Road, Colchester CO3 5QL 01206 (01206 330019). *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 editor.*
 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 October or November. Please send records, notices of meetings, notes of successful nights, comments, questions or anything of interest. Brian.