



Essex Field Club

Colchester Natural History Society

Winter Meeting update

This is an earlier edition than usual in order to allow the inclusion of details for the February meeting and to give you time to return the acceptance form enclosed. Please make every effort to attend - a lot of hard work has gone into making the day a success. Your partners are welcome to join us. We may incur some expenses on the day and would therefore ask for a £1.00 donation.

Guest speaker is Colin Hart who will give an illustrated talk on plume moths, the subject of his impending book. He will concentrate on East Anglian specialities and will cover a few species in depth rather than tackle the whole group in the time available. We also hope to see Jon Clifton of *Anglian Lepidopterist Supplies* and Jon will bring a selection of gear to demonstrate and sell. Reg Fry will be displaying *AES* literature and can supply discounted copies of the new Skinner at £40 and Porter at £35. There will be a slide show by Ian Rose (and you are encouraged to bring your own slides or photos), and Chris Gibson will give a talk on the conservation and habits of Fisher's Estuarine Moth. There will be a buffet lunch (hence the need to know how many of you are coming - last year the lunch was worth the trip alone) and time for discussion and the showing of any items of interest.

The Essex Naturalist

Number 15 has just been published by the Essex Field Club. This volume contains a wealth of articles, such as the usual summaries from the club's various recorders and contributed papers which this year includes one on stranded whales on the Essex coast (John Dobson) and another covering the distribution of ants in the county (Peter Harvey). Colin Plant has done an excellent job with this journal, and it is to be hoped that it can survive the impending change of editorship.

Hunt is on for Small Ranunculus in Essex *Joe Firmin*

The discovery of what appears to be a flourishing colony of the Small Ranunculus *Hecatera dysodea* in at least six sites in the Gravesend area of Kent, after the species had been considered lost as a British breeding species since the first world war, has led to speculation that this attractive moth, which had a former stronghold in the north Essex seed-growing districts at the turn of the century, might also be found in Essex in the coming season.

Dysodea larvae feed on the flowers and seeds of wild and cultivated lettuce. Prickly Lettuce *Lactuca serriola* on which many of the Kent larvae were found in 1998, is a common plant of waste places and along sea walls. Members, especially in coastal areas, are urged to search in July and August and report any successes to Brian Goodey immediately. There is a colour photo of a *Dysodea* larva on Plate 34 (fig. 1) of *The Colour Identification Guide to Caterpillars of the British Isles* by Jim Porter (Viking).

Some of the last Essex specimens of *Dysodea* were captured by William H. Harwood, the Colchester lepidopterist and dealer, and one of these was figured on Plate 32 of *Moths* by E.B. Ford in the *New Naturalist* series published by Collins in 1955. *Dysodea* was listed by Ford as one of the UK's extinct species.

***Amblyjoppa proteus* (Christ) Hymenoptera: Ichneumonidae at Layer Breton (Could ichneumons get under your skin?).** *Jerry Bowdrey Colchester Museums 14, Ryegate Road, Colchester CO1 1YG.*

Most Lepidopterists don't need to be reminded about ichneumons and other so-called parasitic wasps (more accurately termed *parasitoids*, as they are inevitably lethal to their hosts) especially when that choice caterpillar they have carefully reared pupates and produces a 'nasty wasp type thing' rather than the hoped for moth. Quite often these ichneumon flies (as the old lepidopterists liked to call them) are attracted to light traps and lighted windows, the gingery-brown species of *Ophion* and the black and red *Pimpla* being two common genera seen in late summer. But before you squash the offending insects in disgust, consider instead preserving them and adding to our knowledge of what is a very understudied element of our fauna.

Of the 6500+ Hymenoptera on the British list, 5500+ are *Parasitica* (Ichneumons, braconids etc.), more than twice the number of our native moth species and about one quarter of the total number of British insects! New species are discovered every year, but despite this the number of workers who have devoted time to their study is very small. This is partly due to the fact that they are considered a difficult group, species differences are sometimes very subtle and rely, for example, on proportional measurements and microscopic sculpture. Coupled with this, the literature is scattered, incomplete, sometimes hard to obtain and difficult to use, although the more recent *R.E.S* keys (Gauld and Mitchell, 1977; Fitton *et al.*, 1988) are much easier to follow than the earlier ones by Perkins (1959, 1960). The large multivolume work by Morley (1903) is very scarce and none too reliable nowadays but is still useful for its detailed descriptions of some of the species.

For these reasons it was with some trepidation that I examined a specimen of ichneumon found by Ursula Broughton at Layer Breton Heath this August (1998). From her description over the telephone - black with white markings, around 24mm long - I immediately thought of *Rhyssa persuasaria*, a large and showy species which parasitises the horntail *Urocerus gigas* and is illustrated in every insect book worth its salt. However, on receiving the specimen I knew I was wrong. Although a female, it did not have the long ovipositor characteristic of *Rhyssa* and the white markings were much more restricted than those in that species, being confined to a white band on each antenna, a white spot on the scutellum, white lines on the inner sides of the compound eyes and on the front tibiae.

After several attempts at Perkin's key, which necessitated constant reference to the glossary of terms in Richards (1956), I arrived at the name *Amblyjoppa proteus* (Christ). The two British species of this genus are parasites of our two elephant hawk moths; *A. proteus* being reared from pupae of *Deilephila elpenor* the Large Elephant Hawk and the slightly smaller *A. fuscipennis* (Wesmael) from *Deilephila porcellus*, the Small Elephant Hawk. Both species are described as sometimes common. The size of the hosts is evidently related to the large size of the parasitoid. The species is not represented in the small collection of parasitic Hymenoptera at Colchester Museums, and I can't recollect ever having seen it before.

It is surprising that such a large and showy insect should be so hard to track down!

If you breed out any parasitic Hymenoptera or take them at light, we would be delighted to receive them at the Museum. I can't promise to identify them, but at least we can build up a representative collection for future workers to study. It is essential to retain a specimen for accurate identification - they cannot be distinguished from colour patterns alone and there are often large numbers of very similar looking species - records of ichneumons identified from general field guides are therefore, unfortunately not acceptable! Don't forget to retain any associated material such as shed skins, pupal remains etc. Dates of emergence are also useful, along with the usual locality and habitat details.

For further information on rearing, collecting, preservation etc, Shaw (1997) is wholeheartedly recommended and check out Gauld and Bolton (1996) for a fascinating introduction to Hymenoptera in general, including a large section on the parasitic kinds. Thanks to Ursula for bringing this interesting insect to my attention and for donating it to the Museum.

Further Reading

Fitton, et al., 1988. Pimpline ichneumon-flies. Hymenoptera Ichneumonidae (Pimplinae). Handbooks for the identification of British insects 7(1). R.E.S.

Gauld, I.D. and Bolton, B., 1996 The Hymenoptera. 2nd rev.ed. O.U.P.

Gauld, I.D. and Mitchell, P.A., 1977. Ichneumonidae. Orthopelmatinae and Anomaloniinae. Handbooks for the identification of British insects VII(2b). R.E.S.

Morley, C. 1903. The ichneumons of Great Britain. 5 vols. Plymouth, Keys

Perkins, J.F., 1959. Hymenoptera: Ichneumonoidea. Handbooks for the identification of British insects VII(2ai). R.E.S.

Perkins, J.F., 1960. Hymenoptera Ichneumonoidea. Handbooks for the identification of British insects VII(2aii). R.E.S.

Richards, O.W., 1956. Hymenoptera. Introduction and keys to Families. Handbooks for the identification of British insects VI(1). R.E.S.

Shaw, M. 1997. Rearing parasitic Hymenoptera. Amateur Entomologists' Society.

A more efficient County Recorder?

By the time you read this my daughter will have left home. Whilst it is always sad when one's offspring fledge the nest (a sure sign of getting old) there are compensations. I shall gain a room! This means I can convert it into a study and be like proper entomologists, able to spread out books and papers - and leave them out! Half-finished projects can be at arm's length in the same state as when I left them. It should mean I can do more work. Hope you didn't mind me sharing this human touch with you...

Man in the News

Did you see member Reg Arthur's picture in the *East Anglian Daily Times* on 22 September? The article briefly outlined Reg's distinguished career in nature conservation that stretches back to the 1950s, which was about the last time he sent me any records! More seriously, Reg continues his work now as volunteer warden for the EWT's Howland Marsh reserve near St Osyth - and *does* find the time to send in many important observations.

Essex Moth Night, 19 September 1998

Over a third of you took part in this successful annual event, which may be the last in its current format. Following discussion with Mark Tunmore (editor of *Atropos*), there may be a National Moth Night starting next year though the bones of it have to be fleshed out. John Dawson, the Cambridgeshire Moth Recorder, was kind enough to sent data from his home in Fulbourn and secured 48 species. The night was rather cool and still with patches of mist around but, considering the weather this year, I think we were again lucky. The night produced 103 species which, for mid-September, seems pretty good. The top ten in numbers recorded from the 21 traps were:

Large Yellow Underwing	536 adults from	21 sites
Lunar Underwing	253	20
Square-spot Rustic	247	17
Setaceous Hebrew Character	195	19
Angle Shades	133	18
Lesser Yellow Underwing	126	19
Feathered Ranunculus	99	8
Vine's Rustic	96	14
Common Wainscot	89	12
Flounced Rustic	45	13

Also common were Garden Carpet (34 from 13 sites), Silver Y (29 from 12 sites), Rosy Rustic (17 from 9 sites) and Mouse Moth (13 from 9 sites).

Other moths of interest were: *Niditinea fuscella* and *Epiphyas postvittana* from Thundersley, Autumnal Moth from Little Baddow, Pearly Underwing from Dovercourt and St Osyth, Southern Wainscot from Daws Hall, Black Rustic from Hainault, North Chingford and Theydon Bois, Large Ranunculus from Hainault and Mistley, Small Mottled Willow from West Bergholt and Red Underwing from Daws Hall, Dovercourt, Little Oakley and Thundersley.

The stars of the night were Vestal from Kirby-le-Soken (P. Bergdahl), Svensson's Copper Underwing from Daws Hall, Lamarsh (I. Grahame), and Sandhill Rustic and Buttoned Snout both from Dovercourt (Chris Gibson).

Three sites recorded 41 species, at Dovercourt (Chris Gibson), Jaywick (Jon Young) and Thundersley (Don Down). Maitland Emmet's Saffron Walden trap was again badly affected by wasps and only a few species could be identified from the remains they left behind. Average was 19 species per trap.

Programme for 1999 *A few early dates for you*

15 May Marks Hall Estate, Coggeshall. Joint meeting with British Ent. Soc. 11am for day and/or 8.00pm for mv session. Leader: Joe Firmin.

18 September Walton-on-Naze. Joint meeting with British Ent. Soc. 11am for day and/or 7.30pm for mv session. Leader: Joe Firmin.

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 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*

(Shortened newsletter in order to include programme for indoor meeting)