

Essex Moth Group



Web Site: www.aave45.dial.pipex.com/

Issue 16

Spring 2000

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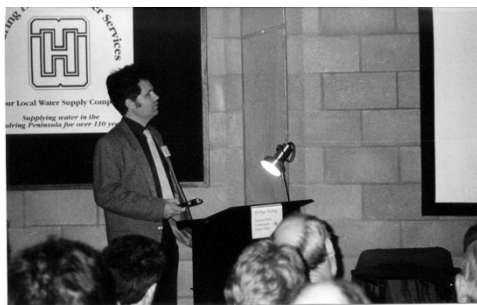
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Annual Group Meeting report

Our third indoor meeting attracted 65 members, an increase of ten from 1999 and twenty from 1998. The theme of the day was conserving Britain's rarest moths, with a bias towards our part of East Anglia. Joe outlined the day's events and thanked our hosts Tendring Hundred Water Services, especially Gordon Sadler, Bob and Sue Gooding and daughter for sterling efforts behind the scenes.

Brian then summed up the season and reported that it had been one of the most successful ever. 7000 records had been received of 840 species, five of which were new to the county. National Moth Night generated 2000 records in Essex and on that night 395 species were seen, which must be a new county record. He whinged that with all this workload he didn't get to do much in the way of field work anymore, but had now got used to staying indoors in the warm...

Paul Waring gave an illustrated talk on the recent history of moth conservation, his role with the JNCC/NCC, the creation of Action Plans and the atlas of Red Data Book species.



Paul Waring

Chris Gibson continued the conservation vein with an update on the Fisher's estuarine moth project and paid tribute to Terri Tarpey and Zoe Ringwood's work, which has shed new light on the moth's distribution and habits. He also related an embarrassing episode where the Environment Agency had, apparently through lack of communication, dumped dredge spoil on banks containing hog's-fennel at Beaumont just as the moths were emerging.

After the usual fine lunch Butterfly Conservation's Moth Officer, Mark Parsons, gave an assessment of the role of local groups and the help they can provide with finding and monitoring endangered species. A few East Anglian specialties were highlighted with hints on how best to search for them, and although some of the targets Mark suggested were long shots, you never know until you try!

Ian Rose's slide show was next, images well up to par, and those of mystery larvae failed to confuse Don Down as usual. We hope to use some of Ian's photos in forthcoming books on Essex Lepidoptera. Members slides followed, thanks to Peter Smith and Graham Bailey, and this was followed by Jerry Bowdrey's talk on the Essex Invertebrate Forum and current progress, together with slides of non-lepidopterous beasts.



Mark Parsons, Colin Plant and Geoff Martin - Curator of Moths at the Natural History Museum, London.

Discussion and questions followed. Reg Fry (AES) and Jon Clifton (ALS) were there with books and equipment for sale and the exhibition room proved especially busy. So much was crammed into the day that not much time was left for socialising, something we can perhaps correct next year. We'd like to thank you all for supporting this event and particularly to our guests from outside the county.

Early Birds

The mild winter brought a few winter butterfly sightings. On 1 January, peacocks were seen at Layer Breton Heath and Rayne. A red admiral livened up a garden centre at Ardleigh on 8 January, and Ray Marsh saw another at Thorpe on 8 March (- over wintered?). A small tortoiseshell was noticed by Chris Gibson's daughter on 31 January at Dovercourt. Moths were also evident, for example a grey shoulder-knot on 2 January at Mistley.

Response to mystery object

In newsletter 14 you may recall a picture of mysterious object at Harwich, sent in by a puzzled resident. Ian Rose may have the answer. Stock of an exotic species, the Eri Silk-moth, was apparently released into the wild by a breeder living nearby. Oh dear...

Scanning live moths *Bryon Pateman*

A practical solution for sending images of live moths for identification through the post or e-mail before their safe release.

Firstly, one needs a suitable container/box with a transparent lid. It must be as shallow as practicable, with 12mm deep maximum from the base to the lid face, otherwise focusing will be lost in the scanning. (Bearing in mind that the majority of scanners are designed primarily to replicate flat printed images.)

I have found that jewellers are a good source for these small containers. Particularly earring boxes, which can be obtained measuring 75mm x 50mm x 10mm deep with a clear top. I have found in practice that it is best to place the boxed moth in the refrigerator for a while to quieten it down. Then gently place the box upside down on the scanner bed and close the cover. If you have a preview option on your scanner, I would recommend that you take a screen shot, i.e. press "Print Screen Button" on the computer on the first preview shot. This is your back-up copy, which can be pasted/cropped and printed later in any other suitable programme. The reason for this back-up is that due to the scanner light being an ultra-violet the moth tends to wake up and chase the light. Hence one needs a small container to limit the chase.

In my experience pugs, geometers, etc., that predominantly lie flat are ideal subjects and excellent results can be achieved. If the moth hasn't moved, then proceed as normal. Enlarge and print to scale required. Placing suitable graph paper on the inside base of the container acts as guide when assessing the original size after enlarged printing.

I would recommend a scanning resolution of 360 dpi+ and use the *colour photo* option. A frequent problem when scanning at higher resolutions is that it gives the subject extra time to wake up and become mobile.

If you have any problems, give me a ring anytime on 0181 524 1550 and hopefully I will be able help.

Tutt, Tutt... Moira Tarrant

Essex Libraries has bought a copy of J. W. Tutt's *Practical hints for the field Lepidopterist*. It is in the stock of Chelmsford library but can be sent on request to any library in Essex for a fee of 80p if library staff place your request on the computer system, or 60p if you place it yourself.

Book news

New guide to European macros J. Firmin

A number of new identification guides and titles are appearing, written by European lepidopterists, and Brian reviewed *The Pyraloidea of Central Europe* in the winter newsletter. Recently I have acquired a copy of *The Noctuids of Central Europe*, written by Janusz Nowacki and published in Bratislava (Slovakia). It has 24 colour plates of imagines (excellent colour photos), plus black-and-white plates (drawings) of genitalia. The latter are, in my view, extremely valuable and could help to sort out some ID teasers, especially if a tricky immigrant or UK race is involved. At £25 this is good value as the book, written in excellent English by the way, covers some species which may (or do) occur as immigrants and are extending their range westwards. My copy was obtained, post free, from Pendleside Books, 359 Wheatley Lane Road, Fence, Burnley BB12 9QA (01282 615617).

More Gelechids

This time of central Europe, under the title of *Die Palpenmotten (Lepidoptera, Gelechidae) Mitteleuropas*, by G. Elsner, P. Huemer and Z. Tokár. 208 pages which includes 28 colour plates of adults and 85 plates of genitalia drawings. The text is in German. With this and volume 3 of Apollo Book's *Microlepidoptera of Europe, Gelechidae 1*, you have at least a chance of identifying some of the adult gelechids found in your trap. Available from Pemberley Books (Tel. 01753631114) at £30 plus £3.25 p&p.

Back Newsletters

I now have on computer back numbers of all previous newsletters (1 to 15) in A4 format only. If you'd like any of these posted or sent by e-mailed please let me know, using one of the methods below:

- By post: state which copies you'd like and supply an A4 SAE, with a first-class stamp.
- By e-mail: state which copies you'd like and let me know what word processor and version you are using.

New Groups forming

Pleasing to see we will soon have new neighbours! By the time you read this the Hertfordshire Moth Group, under Colin Plant, should have formed. Colin and I have spent much time, anger and frustration recently ensuring both counties have a compatible database and a method of data exchange. There is a goodly amount of interest in the county and I'm sure the group will succeed. Meanwhile John Dawson is trying to create the Cambridgeshire Moth Group, which hopefully should be operational later this year. Membership numbers may be a worry, but my guess is that when the group is running new people will crawl out of the woodwork.

Looking further ahead, there may be scope for a joint meeting with all the East Anglian groups, a sort of ideas forum. Interest in Lepidoptera is high at the moment and things are certainly moving on. But we still need fresh ideas to keep the momentum going.

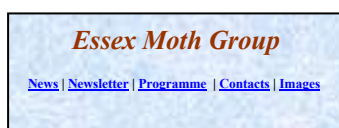
New list

I have recently updated the full Essex list (in February, so it's probably already out of date). 1895 species have been recorded in the county, of which 47 have been rejected for various reasons. Of the 1848 accepted species (about 74% of the British total), 1108 are micros and 740 macros. A printout of this list is available, but it runs to 30-odd pages, or by e-mail.

Web site

Well, we're up and running at last! Actually, it was good to hear that quite a few of you at the meeting have computers and are now on the internet - nice to see you've finally *come out*. The web site has an opening page

which leads you to other sections, covering news, pictures, the programme, articles, contact details and links to other sites.



Friday Wood SSSI survey under way

I hope to make regular visits to this nationally important site during 2000. Last extensively surveyed in 1985, the current species list stands at 814 (its SSSI status is partly due to its Lepidoptera). The MoD have given permission to drive into the main wood itself for the first time, so hopes are high that a few surprises will be found. A first lamp session on 8 March yielded 13 species, including blossom underwing *Orthosia miniosa* and a dozen small brindled beauty *Apocheima hispidaria*.

Field Work - few ideas

The use of light traps to record moths has literally exploded over the past decade. Light traps are a great piece of kit - they bring the quarry to your feet and on a good night can be very efficient. There is always a chance of a Christmas present type of surprise when going through the catch the morning after. Essex has more traps per square mile than most counties. We should be pleased, indeed proud, of this.

All the excellent work that's been done on this front should be augmented and supported by a similar surge of interest in field work, the searching out and rearing of larvae, or the traces they leave behind. And we have two of the finest exponents of this craft living in the county - Maitland Emmet and Don Down.

To try and get a few more records of those species that light traps can't attract, I'm going to start a series of small articles in the newsletter devoted to going out in the field (with the warm sun on your back and birds singing) and trying to find a few of these overlooked and often under-recorded moths. This will be a sort *What to look out for in the next three months* type of thing, non-technical (like me) and will be a mixture of easy targets you can't miss and those that will make headlines. Most of all, I hope you enjoy it!

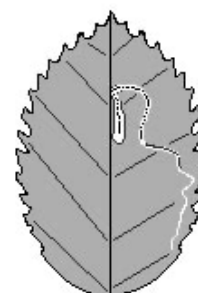
Field Work Diary

April:

Red-belted clearwing Larvae tunnel through trunks and branches of host tree. If you have any old hawthorn, apple, or other fruit trees nearby check the bark (especially cankers) for reddish frass (small grains of droppings) which may have collected in bark crevices. You may see old, empty pupa cases still protruding from small holes. If a colony of clearwings is present, the signs should be fairly obvious, so it's probably not worth spending too much time searching one tree. Mark or remember these trees for later on in the year. *Chances of success: fairly good.*

Adela cuprella Long-horns are beautiful moths, often with metallic colouration, and their huge antennae make them popular and easy to recognise. Adults of *A. cuprella* swarm around blossom of established willows, often high up in warm sunshine. You may need a pair of binoculars or wait until one ventures lower to see the long antennae. With a wingspan of about 15mm they should be easy to spot if they are there, but you may need to search a large number of willows. *Chances: slim - should occur (must occur!) but there are no recent records*

Stigmella aurella Neps can be difficult subjects, but this species is easy. Search old, over-wintered leaves of bramble for a whitish trail, 30 - 40mm long, which gradually widens. Held up to the light, you should see a dark line of frass the larvae left behind running through the centre of the trail. Empty mines turn silvery and are very conspicuous, even visible from the car. You can send the leaves for confirmation if you like. *Chances: a cert. Maitland has recorded it in every 10km square and all you have to do is find bramble. The moth will be there.*



Sloe pug Collect twigs of blackthorn blossom and stand them in a jar of water with white paper beneath. Next day you should see a scattering of frass. Alternatively, hold a net under a flowering branch and give it a sound beating. The larvae are maggot-like, whitish, often with a reddish stripe near the head and easy to rear. *Chances: good, but recently from only 16 sites.*

Slender pug Collect fallen willow catkins and place on a piece of white paper. Check after a couple of days for any evidence of frass. Larvae are pale green with a black head. You may need to rear them as other species feed on catkins, but their small size when pupating should be a good clue. *Chances: good, but recently from only 17 sites.*

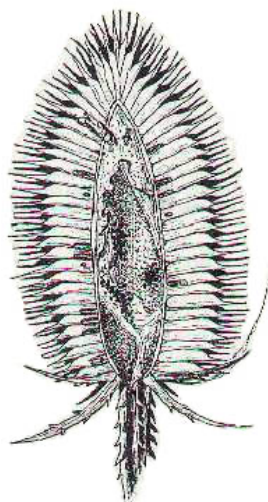
April to May

Teasel Although usually an autumn or winter job, you can still check old flower heads for two tortrix moths - it's easy and rewarding. Split the old flower head apart and look inside the empty central cavity. You may see clumps of black, granular frass heaped at the bottom and suspended in the silken mess above. You can safely record *Endothenia gentianaana*.

Next, carefully check the bases of the surrounding seeds for small holes. These are caused by the larva of *Cochylis roseana*. Adults of both moths are rarely seen in the wild.

To see them, collect the seed heads and keep them in an airy cage or old net and the moths should emerge from May onwards.

Chances: very good. Drastically under-recorded recently.



Pterophorus galactodactyla In spring larvae make conspicuous round holes in young leaves of burdock *Artium lappa*. These holes may have a crescent of whitish down (from the leaf) along one edge. Larvae will rest along a vein and can be very well camouflaged, so search carefully. *Chances: fair, but you need to know your burdock.*

May

Cnaemidophorus rhododactyla (rose plume) search wild rose for larvae, which create a loose spinning of leaves of a terminal shoot, including the bud which is eaten from the side. The larva is greenish-yellow with a purplish line down the back. *Chances: fair. There is just one recent breeding record, at Thundersley, but light trap captures indicate it is widely distributed and we need more records of larvae.*

May to early June

White-spotted pinion This is a target species, but to stand any chance of success will probably involve a deal of searching. If visiting an area with elm at night, try to set up a lamp close by and beat foliage into a tray or net. Beating during the day may also yield results. Larvae are light green with pale lines and with a dark head. If you find any, rear them separately on elm leaves. *Chances: recently from four sites widely separated in Essex and a further eight records made between 1970 and 1985, so it's here somewhere.*

June-July

Nemophora fasciella Check *Ballota nigra* (black horehound) flowers for adults of this diminutive, but very beautiful, long-horn. *Chances: fair. Three post-1990 sites at East Ham, Colchester and Jaywick plus earlier records near the Thames estuary and Walton-on-Naze suggest a wide distribution, especially along the coast.*

Nemophora cupriacella Another jewel-like long-horn, adults this time on flowers of field scabious. *Chances: two most recent records are Great Samford, a roadside at TL632364 in 1979 (SME p.38) and Friday Wood in 1986 (Col. Mus.). Hopefully just under-recorded.*

Red-belted clearwing Search trunks of old hawthorn, apple, or other fruit trees regularly during mornings for moths. Be patient!

Button snout Place a beating tray or net beneath leaves of hop bearing large central holes or other signs of feeding (carefully, as larvae are easily disturbed and will throw themselves off). Larva green with a white stripe down the sides, about 25mm long when fully fed. Easily reared. Another target species. *Chances: good. 14*

recent sites, mostly in south Essex but all of adults and we need breeding information. We also need hibernation sites.

July

Yellow-legged clearwing Adults are regular visitors to *Escallonia* blossom at Fryerning churchyard, so check nectar sources between now and August. *Chances: iffy. 5 recent sites.*

Toadflax brocade search toadflax stems for larvae low down by day, and higher up by night, especially if the plant is growing on shingle areas. *Chances: none, but....*

White-spotted pinion Set up a lamp close by elm for adults. Also try sugaring.

Monitoring work in 2000

Just a reminder that monitoring work will be continuing at Old Hall Marsh Nature Reserve, Tollesbury and Marks Hall Estate, near Coggeshall. If you visit these sites alone, please remember to supply records of anything you see.

Essex Bird Report, 1998

It may seem strange to include this, but it shows what can be achieved with 700 members, a kitty of £7,000 and a team of dedicated editors and authors. The *EBR* usually wins British Birds *Best Annual Bird Report*, and is on a par with Essex Field Club's *Essex Naturalist*. This is well up to its usual quality - 200 pages packed with articles, reports, pictures and maps, it's something us poor moth groups can only dream of. (*By the way, our membership fee next year is going up to £100!*) Although Essex is large by moth group standards, it's still small beer compared to bird-watching societies. Available for £8.00 to non-members.

Programme for 2000

These are events we are aware of but may not necessarily have arranged. Please treat as provisional and contact the leader before attending. My thanks to Joe for organising the Friday night surveys. If you know of any other events, please let me know and I'll include them.

Please note that you attend these meetings at your own risk. We cannot be held responsible for any accidents, injuries or loss of property.

April 14 (Friday) **Old Hall Marsh RSPB N.R.**, near Tollesbury. Meet 7.00pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin (01206 241389).

April 28 (Friday) **Marks Hall, Coggeshall.** 7.00pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin

May 12 (Friday) **Old Hall Marsh N.R.** 8.00pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin

May 26 (Friday) **Marks Hall, Coggeshall.** 8.00pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin

June 9 (Friday) **Tiptree Heath N.R** 8.30 at car park 'A' opposite Manor House Farm. Leader Joe Firmin

June 23 (Friday) **Old Hall Marsh N.R.** 8.30pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin

June 24 (Saturday) **Hanningfield Reservoir.** Meet 9.00pm at causeway TL722971 B. Goodey.

July 8 (Saturday) **Weelyhall Wood NR.** Meet at 8.30pm. Olive Crescent. B. Goodey

July 14 (Friday) **Marks Hall, Coggeshall.** 8.30pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin

July 15 (Saturday) **Marks Hall, Coggeshall.** Monitor recent butterfly releases. Meet 10.00am.

July 28 (Friday) **Pods Wood, Tiptree.** 8.30 Leader Joe Firmin

August 4 (Friday) **Broaks Wood, Gosfield.** 8.30pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin

August 18 (Friday) **Old Hall Marsh N.R.** 8.30pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin

September 8 (Friday) **Marks Hall, Coggeshall.** 8.00pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin

September 23 (Saturday) **Stour Wood NR,** search for Olive Crescent larvae. Meet 11.00 BG.

September 23 (Saturday) **National Moth Night.** Fingringhoe Wick NR. Meet 7.00pm

October 6 (Friday) **Old Hall Marsh N.R.** 7.00pm at car park. Leader Joe Firmin

Top Essex sites

Here's a list of the top sites in the county according to records on my database - all those over 400 species are listed in the table below and those over 200 species as a footnote. There are one or two other sites in Essex that have not supplied full data and would otherwise qualify.

Site	From	Recorder	Type	Total
Saffron Walden	1960	A.M. Emmet	Garden	995
Friday Wood	1973	Various	Mixed woodland	814
Jaywick	1987	J. Young	Garden	797
Fingringhoe Wick	1986	Various	Scrub, coastal	740
Dovercourt	1991	C. Gibson	Garden	717
Kirby-le-Soken	1993	P. Bergdahl	Garden	603
Daws Hall	1983	I. Grahame	Woodland, meadow	560
Colchester	1984	B. Goodey	Garden	541
Theydon Bois	1985	J.G. Green	Garden	500
Beaumont-cum-Moze	1969	J.B. Fisher	Garden	469
Mistley	1994	I.C. Rose	Garden	441
Frinton-on-Sea	1993	B. Lock	Garden	426
Old Mall Marsh	1985	Various	Salt marsh, grazing	418

And those over 200 species:

South-west Essex Ingatestone, garden 363; North Chingford, garden 351; East Ham NR 345; Dolphin Quarry, Purfleet 328; East Ham, garden 310; Harlow, garden 245; Mashbury, garden 245; Writtle, garden 219; Chelmsford, garden 200. **South-east Essex** Thundersley, garden 314; Maldon, garden 288; Bradwell St Peters, coastal 275. **North-west Essex** Hatfield Forest 369; Rushey Mead NR 348; Stansted Mountfitchet, garden 323; Elsenham, Eastend Wood 284; Takeley, garden 272; Pelham Field Centre 259; Sawbridgeworth NR 256; Bambers Green, garden 223. **North-east Essex** Markshall Estate 387; Stour Wood 383; St Osyth, garden 350; Copperas Wood 345; Great Holland Pits NR 308; Earls Colne, garden 278; Langehoe 269; Skipper's Island NR 231; High Woods CP 208; Abberton Reservoir NR 207.

More on the Web

You may be surprised to know that there's already a web site devoted to moths in Essex. Imagine my shock when listed were species I'd never even heard of, complete with distribution maps. Then I realised the area covered was Essex County, USA! This may explain why recently I've received requests for help identifying moths from Texas and Colorado. Oh dear....

If you're new to this electronic world you may like to know there's quite a community out there, with sites devoted to local groups, a store of photographs, migration reports and groups that post messages, so that every time you log on you can read what other people have caught the night before, or have a go at identifying someone's mystery moth. If you'd like further info and would like to visit these sites let me know (but I've not found all of them!). Colin Plant is compiling a list of bug sites for publication in *The Entomologists' Record*.

STOP PRESS STOP PRESS STOP PRESS

Paul Bergdahl has just taken (17 March) Britain's sixth *Duponchelia fovealis* at his Kirby-le-Soken home. A full list of British records and method of capture so far is:

1/	11 September 1996	Thorpe St Andrew, Norfolk	[Indoors]
2/	September 1997	Kirby-le-Soken	[Trap]
3/	7 May 1999	Leigh, Greater Manchester	[Indoors]
4/	September 1999	Southsea, Hants (J. Langmaid)	[?]
5/	25 September 1999	Stoke Holy Cross, Norfolk	[Indoors]
6/	17 March 2000	Kirby-le-Soken	[Indoors]

Because so many were taken inside properties, it's thought larvae/pupae were inadvertently brought in with house plants from nurseries. The moth has become something of a horticultural pest, I understand, in some northern European countries. (*Info supplied by Martin Honey*)

Contacts:

Microlepidoptera records for Essex & Britain: A. M. Emmet, Labrey Cottage, 14 Victoria Gardens, Saffron Walden, Essex. CB11 3AF. (01799 523042). **Macrolepidoptera records, Newsletter editor, web site:** B. Goodey, 298 Ipswich Road, Colchester, Essex. CO4 4ET. (01206 841224, mobile 0973810097 during working hours or 07941133944 at other times. E-mail: brian.goodey@dial.pipex.com . **EMG Chairman:** General Moth Group enquiries. J. Firmin, 55 Chapel Road, West Bergholt, Essex. CO6 3HZ (01206 241389). **Photos:** Moth Group enquiries I. C. Rose, Yaffles, School Lane, Mistley, Essex. CO11 1HN. **BC butterfly records:** V. Perrin, 13 Pettitts Lane, Dry Drayton, Cambs. CB3 8BT. **Herts. & London Lepidoptera records & National Neuroptera Recorder:** C. W. Plant, 14 West Road, Bishops Stortford, Herts. CM23 3QP. E-mail: Colinwplant@compuserve.com. **Other Order records:** J.P. Bowdrey, Fair View, Colchester Road Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex. CO16 0LB (01255 862507). **Coleoptera records:** N. Cuming, 33 Holly Road, Colchester CO3

5QL (01206 330019). **Entomological equipment:** Jon Clifton, Anglia Lepidoterists Supplies PO Box 370, Cambridge, CB4 1ZJ or phone 01263 862068.

Next newsletter: Mid-July, or thereabouts. (Yes, I know the issue you're now holding was a month early!)