

The season so far

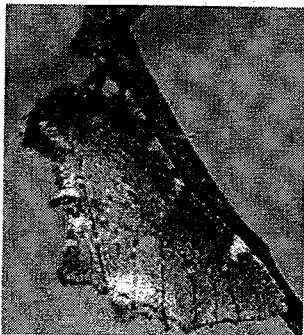
Wet weather and foot-and-mouth disease has combined to give us a far from perfect start to the year. Quite what effect the saturated soil has had on underground pupae will probably never be known, but moths and butterflies are tough cookies and (species-wise) have probably seen it all before. Lack of access to the countryside has meant that many important habitats were not visited at a crucial time of the season, but things are now gradually improving. A few highlights so far:

Micros

- 128 *Phylloporia bistrigella* Tiptree Heath, 29 May (B. Goodey) First post-1990 record
273 *Bucculatrix thoracella* High Woods, 26 May (B. Goodey). Fifth post-1990 site
701 *Agonopterix ocellana* Epping Forest, Oak Hill Farm, 7 March (T. Green) 4th recent site.
770 *Teleiodes proximella* Tiptree Heath, 29 May (B. Goodey). First post-1990 record
952 *Commophila aeneana* High Woods, 3 June (B. Goodey). First record since 1982.
1050 *Acleris kochiella* Mistley, 2 April (I. Rose). Fourth post-1990 record
1061 *Acleris literana* Epping Forest, Oak Hill Farm, 28 March and 21 April (T. Green). Fourth recent site, all in South Essex.

Macros

- 1677 **Birch Mocha** *Cyclophora albipunctata* Tiptree Heath, 29 May (B. Goodey)
1778 **May Highflier** *Hydriomena impluviata* Lexden Gathering Grounds, 26 May (A. Cook et al). A stunning example, later released, resembling but brighter than Skinner, plate 8: 15
1788 **Scarce Tissue** *Rheumaptera cervinalis* Colchester, 12 May (B. Goodey)
1790 **Tissue** *Triphosa dubitata* South Essex, 18 January, adult in hibernation in outbuilding (D.G. Down). First post-1990 record.
1846 **Narrow-winged Pug** *Eupithecia nanata angusta* Tiptree Heath, larvae, 23 May (J. Firmin et al).
1949 **Square Spot** *Ectropis consonaria* Epping Forest, Oak Hill Farm, 15 May (T. Green). First Essex record since 1966. It was feared that this moth may have died out so this record, from a former locality, is very welcome. Larvae feed on a variety of trees, so its absence in other woodlands is something of a mystery.
1978 **Pine Hawk-moth** *Hyloicus pinastri* Stanway Green, 25 May (A.P. Thompson). 20th post-1990 record.
1984 **Humming-bird Hawk-moth** *Macroglossum stellatarum* Stanway Green, 30 May (A.P. Thompson).



2010 **Scarce Prominent** *Odontotia carmelita* Epping Forest, Oak Hill Farm, 6 May (T. Green). Third post-1990 record, others being Bradwell-on-Sea in 1994 and Thundersley in 1996. (Illustrated, photo courtesy of Tim Green.)

2043 **Orange Footman** *Eilema sororcula* Numbers of this formerly rare moth have been building nicely. This year it has so far appeared at Copperas Wood nine times (P. Smith); Markshall Estate on 18 May (J. Firmin et al); Stanway Green, 1 June (A.P. Thompson); and a splendid total of 31 (and counting) at Epping Forest, Oak Hill Farm during May (T. Green).

2184 **Northern Drab** *Orthosia opima* Jaywick, 12 May (J.P. Young); two (or the same) on consecutive nights 12/13 May, Dovercourt (C. Gibson); Wivenhoe, 19 May (P. Ensom).
2223 **Toadflax Brocade** *Calophasia lunula* Dovercourt, 26 May (C. Gibson). Second for site. The first was 30 May last year, so there may be an undiscovered colony nearby, supported by another at Dovercourt on 30 May (D.M. Anthoney per P. Smith).
2463 **Burnet Companion** *Euclidia glyphica* Epping Forest, eight, 3 June (T. Green).
2480 **Buttoned Snout** *Hypena rostralis* South Essex, 18 January, thirty adults hibernating in outbuilding (D.G. Down); Mistley, (I. Rose). Second for site.

BAP species

We hope to gain further records of the following Biodiversity Action Plan moths this year. **Toadflax Brocade** three adults have turned recently in the Dovercourt area and we hope to search for larvae on 7 July. Contact Chris or me if you'd like to join us.

Four-spotted single adults have been found at seven scattered sites since 1997. These may be of wanderers, but we need to search for signs of breeding. North-west Essex would seem to offer the best opportunities, on flower-rich meadows and embankments containing field bindweed.

White-spotted pinion there are just six post-1980 record for this elm-feeder. National Moth Night has been arranged to coincide with the flight period. Searching elm leaves for larvae, which occur from April to June, has so far brought no success.

Buttoned Snout adults have turned up at sixteen post-1990 sites but there are still no records of larvae. I've planted hop, the foodplant, in my garden hoping to attract this and the beautiful micro *Cosmopterix zieglereella*, and searched nearby plants, but so far without success.

Moths of Essex update

The lack of records to process caused by the weather and F&MD has allowed swift progress on *The Moths of Essex*. Work on converting old records into a form that can be read by the mapping programme DMAP is done and dusted and the task of compiling core information for each species in the systematic section is 50% completed. We've had a wonderful response from people supplying photographs (over 530 species so far) and larval foodplant information. Much remains to be done on the computer, so let's hope for more cold, wet weather...

Maitland - 997 not out

Maitland's card filing system covering the microlepidoptera of Essex and other items, such as his Labrey Cottage notebook and past correspondence have been passed to me. This is an invaluable store of knowledge and one I shall treasure. I managed to find three further records made at Saffron Walden, bringing his garden list up to 997 species. This includes a fascinating record of a male *Luffia* species in his trap, thought to be *L. lapidella* (see also newsletter #13 *On the trail of a couple of bagworms*). *L. lapidella* is known only from the Channel Islands and parts of Cornwall, whereas *L. ferchaultella* is far more widespread and locally common. The problem is that *L. ferchaultella* is parthenogenetic, it is not known to produce males, just wingless females, whereas winged males are produced by *L. lapidella*. To further complicate (or simplify!) matters, some authorities think that *L. ferchaultella* may only be a form of *L. lapidella*.

Nothing Murder

[Editorial comment: Some of you may have noticed a letter printed in Birdwatch, May 2001, by Andrew Thompson in which a moth group (not named, but clearly EMG) was condemned. The criticisms regarded our February meeting and targeted certain phrases and techniques used, especially those regarding the collection of adults and larvae in the field. Andrew has since written back to Birdwatch with comments of a more positive nature, but outlines his concerns below.]

Following my recent letter regarding nothing in *Birdwatch* magazine I have had lengthy, open

and frank discussions with Brian Goodey and as a result I now totally accept that the impression I received at the moth group meeting, regarding both the motivation and level of local collecting activity, was completely incorrect. I am now convinced that limited local collecting is only done ethically and for specific scientific purposes where identification is both difficult and necessary.

Probably just as importantly we have also discussed the reasons why I got the wrong impression in the first place and agreed that it would be beneficial for me to briefly document them to see what can be learnt from this event.

I am an ardent species conservationist and unfortunately prior to the Moth Group meeting, nagging doubts had developed in my mind from reading articles in *Atropos* magazine, about for example, moths being 'exhibited at a local meetings' I had also received a price list of lepidopterist supplies which not only advertised display cabinets but also a macro dissection service.

I therefore came to the meeting looking for reassurance, so imagine my deep concern when in the opening speech by a senior English Nature official, he started by stating that there was no justification for private collecting these days, and as this view was not reinforced by any senior moth group members, my mind immediately registered that there must be a problem. Add this together with a later discussion on chemicals with which to kill moths, and terms such as collecting and beating out being used and a display of dead moths in one room and I think that even the most cynical person can see that if someone is passionate about conservation then it would be easy to get upset and dive off along the route of a wrong conclusion.

So where is the lesson from all of this, personally I think that all of us are at times guilty of being so focused on our particular discipline that we forget that much of the Jargon and normal practices which we use can be misunderstood by those on the outside. We also have to accept that for good or for bad, more and more people are taking a greater interest in natural history. So perhaps in moths and entomology in general there is a need to think about the possible audience we have now and in the future and formulate the sort of understandable explanations that Brian has given to me and to be aware of our own jargon and image.

Finally I would like to express my thanks to Brian for his patience and time, because moths are an absorbing subject which I have wanted to learn about for some time and I now have the reassurance that I was originally looking for to enable me to go ahead. **Andrew Thompson.**

Joe Firmin writes:

"I was pleased to learn that Andrew Thompson has acknowledged in a letter to the Editor of *Birdwatch* magazine that the letter he wrote to the May issue under the emotive heading of 'Nothing murder' was as a result of misunderstanding over the motivation and activities of Essex Moth Group. Andrew states in his latest letter, aimed at putting the matter straight, that he is pleased to say that the impression he received at the EMG annual meeting regarding both the motivation and level of local collecting was incorrect. He adds that he is now convinced that a limited amount of local collecting is only done ethically, of a scientific nature where identification is both difficult and necessary. He also agrees that "Wanna be" moth enthusiasts like himself can now move forward without the genuine concerns which, as an ardent conservationists, he first had.

Andrew didn't mention any individuals by name in his original letter but there were recognisable (to Essex readers that is) references to "two respected local naturalists, one of whom writes in a local newspaper, presenting a slide show and showing proudly the results of their beating out for larvae expeditions". Ian Rose and myself, as the targets of this criticism of a legitimate field-study method, were certainly not pleased by the implied suggestion that we were doing it for collecting purposes! In fact, of course, as most our colleagues in EMG know full well, both of us are active conservationists engaged in helping English Nature and national moth officers involved in moth study and conservation projects, including in Essex the protection and study of Fisher's estuarine moth (*Gortyna borellii lunata*). All Ian's moths figured in his photographs are released into their original habitats afterwards as are any moths resulting from larvae gathered from wild sites. Valuable new information is being obtained

from life history studies which will help future conservation of species. We sincerely hope that Andrew will become a valued member of Essex Moth Group, helping us record and conserve species and their habitats and take part in our various field activities when he will see at first hand how we are helping to evaluate and, where possible, to protect moths and their vital habitats. **Joe Firmin**

[If you'd like to comment on this matter please get in touch -Ed]

On a related matter, several people now think it's time to publish a set of rules that the Group would like its members to follow. It should be remembered that the EMG was originally formed principally as a communications device, to keep recorders informed and encourage the flow of records. The intention was to be as laid back and informal as much as possible. When I asked in an earlier newsletter for views on how the EMG was run, there was a deafening silence and the only comments received were "leave well alone". Realistically, it's up to the individual to follow what practices he or she sees fit and the image of the EMG should not therefore be tarnished by any misdemeanours, but this is perhaps ducking the issue. I could simply publish in the next issue *A code for insect collecting*, which we should all abide by, and leave it at that. But if there's a will to produce our own set of guide lines I'll collect any ideas and we can discuss them at the next indoor meeting before going to print.

I suspect there will be many people reading the above and scratching their heads in bemusement. It seems that strong views are in the minority, but I personally would rather they are out in the open and not held behind closed doors, so please have your say. Brian

Golden Moments

During the last week in May Marion and I took a stroll down by the lake at High Woods Country Park, Colchester. We were looking for ladybirds and decided to sit down on a flowery meadow and search the stems of plants. There being a large patch of germander speedwell in bloom, I searched the flowers for the small long-horn moth *Adela fibulella*, which we found in plenty. Third recent Essex site. Flying nearby around buttercup flowers were the tiny moths *Micropterix aruncella*, golden metallic wings with pale stripes and intense violet and blue reflections, which when looked at through a lens are so beautiful you could almost weep. Second recent Essex site. *Micropterix* are our most primitive moths, with mandibles to chew pollen instead of a proboscis. We have several other species, notably *M. calthella* which is more commonly found on buttercup flowers.

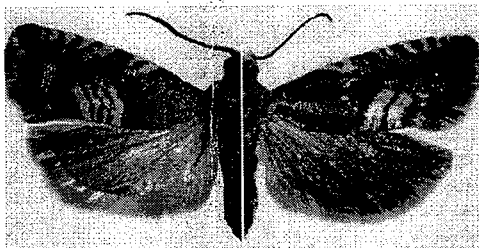
I started sweeping the area with my net and caught a small, dark tortrix moth which looked different to the *Grapholita compositella* which were also present. I took a specimen of this and a glossy green coleophorid that was nearby, ignoring the faint alarm bells.

On reaching home I closely examined the tortrix and found it to be *Grapholita pallifrontana*. A quick check of *Smaller moths of Essex* revealed no records. A new Essex species? No, I found in Maitland's card file that he had noted larvae and adults at Great Chesterford and Hadstock as early as 1977 on wild liquorice, the only known foodplant of *G. pallifrontana*. This was interesting because wild liquorice is a scarce plant associated with chalk and according to *Wildflowers of north east Essex* not found in the area. I emailed Terri Tarpey (so useful having a botanist in the Group!) for her views on related species and swiftly got a full list of plants she has recorded in the vicinity. Other members of the pea family were the most likely host and I marked these for searching later. One vetch caught my eye, smooth tare - and the alarm bells rang with a vengeance! This is the foodplant of *Coleophora fuscicornis*, a moth which in Britain is only known from five other sites, four in north east Essex and a single adult record on the coast at Bridport, Dorset last year (*M. Parsons, pers. com.*). I retrieved the specimen and immediately saw that it was indeed *C. fuscicornis*. Significantly, this is the first inland record. A search made on the following day revealed a small number of *G. pallifrontana*, and plenty of *C. fuscicornis* on all the uncut fields. The former's new foodplant remains a mystery, one that I hope to unravel by the end of the year. To cap things off nicely, a few days later I netted a couple of *Commophila aeneana*, a stunning golden-yellow tortrix last

seen in Essex at Foulness in 1982. If you only use a moth trap, try sticking your head down among the herbage and have a golden moment! **Brian Goodey**

***Grapholita compositella* and *G. pallifrontana* compared**

Their blackish colouration and small size, with wing-spans of just 10mm, make these moths easy to miss in flight. *G. compositella* males show noticeable pale hindwings whereas *G. pallifrontana* is dark, making it virtually undetectable without sweeping your net through grassland. When looked at closely, *G. compositella* has a pale mark on the forewing divided into four parallel white lines (left example). This blotch in *G. pallifrontana* takes the form of two, slightly curved white fingers (right example).



Grapholita compositella and *G. pallifrontana*, Colchester

There is one other moth to consider, *G. internana*, which also has whitish hindwings but has a noticeable wedge of pale scales in the forewing cilia, which is absent from *G. pallifrontana*. *G. internana* is a gorse-feeder, last recorded in Essex in 1987 but should still occur. *G. compositella* is common generally, but the status of *G. pallifrontana* is at the moment unclear.

Good results from the Markshall May lamp session

The foot-and-mouth access restrictions to many sites and closure of paths delayed our start to the season as well as some daunting cold, wet weather. So it was no surprise that the scheduled meeting at Markshall Estate, Coggeshall on 18 May attracted thirteen members and friends raring to get back to recording around Joe and Ian's lamp. A forecast 7°C seemed to presage a low tally of species but in the event the night turned out much better than expected with a total of 21 species and a total upwards of 40 moths. Green carpets were early arrivals, half a dozen in pristine condition, and there were the same number of water carpets. Everyone was delighted to see on the sheet four nut-tree tussocks, once considered to be a locally-distributed species in Essex, and some other highlights of the night were an orange footman, poplar lutestring, some least black arches and a couple of oak-tree pugs.

As usual, Don Down dazzled with his identification expertise. Not only can Don determine the most baffling of ID posers but as he demonstrated at Markshall he can also tell species, even the tiniest, in flight before they even land on the sheet. **Joe Firmin**

Books

It's been a busy time for books. *Atlas des genitalia mâles des Lépidoptères Tortricidae, France et Belgique* by Jean-Pierre Chambon (Inra Editions) takes a look at the male genitalia of tortrix moths from those countries. It won't appeal to most recorders, but will prove useful for those interested in sorting out the more trickier genera, such as the *Acleris* and *Cydia* groups. An excellent fire-side read for the winter months, *The Aurelian Legacy* by Michael A. Salmon (Harley Books) is a quality publication and covers the story of butterflies and the people who studied them, ranging as far back as the 16 century. *A guide to the Microlepidoptera of Europe* by Umberto Parenti (Museo Regionale di Scienze Naturali, Torino) aims to bring the subject of micros to beginners and has a wealth of superb colour plates depicting a selection of adults, and black and white plates showing resting postures, larval feeding etc. There are a few errors, but

the text is in English. At £60 it is expensive, but exudes quality.

National Moth Night

Is almost upon us (11 August) and the impending pile of data this should generate fills my sole with dread. No formal event has been arranged because of work commitments, but if you get the chance of operating your lamp near elm please look out for the white-spotted pinion. If you are lucky enough to attract this moth please make every effort to succor a photograph. The most recent records in Essex are Purfleet, Dolphin Quarry, 1982; Brightlingsea, gravel working, 1983; Elsenham, Abrey Buxton N.R., 1995; and Saffron Walden, 1997. Records for the night of all species should be sent to me before 11 September. Please send them in either log-book or alphabetical order - and don't prefix names with 'the'!

The importance of gardens as a natural habitat

In writing up notes for *The Moths of Essex*, one aspect that has become very apparent is the value of our humble gardens. Most of us will have, I suspect, at least a corner devoted to weeds (!) and some even have plantings of native shrubs and herbaceous plants (or ornamental varieties of these) and ponds and piles of rotting logs. One viola doesn't make a fritillary sanctuary, but given half the chance an amazing variety of moths will take up residency. The inclusion of an oak, hawthorn, birch and willow, kept strictly in control if necessary (!), not only provides green interest but will soon harbour more moths than you can shake a stick at. Quite apart from light-trap records, the number of species found breeding in suburbia is quite amazing.

Rare moth in South Essex

Whilst butterfly recording on some rough ground on Canvey Island last year I disturbed a small moth from a lucerne patch growing on some sandy paths. On closer inspection I realized it was *Melissopteryx zelleri*, a fine fresh female moth, the second of this species I have seen in South Essex (the first was a male in my garden trap in 1998).

I know this moth breeds on the sandhills of East Kent, where I saw it in numbers way back in the 80s. I fancy this local record may be a migrant but feel it could be breeding on this site. I will try and follow this recording up. **Don Down**

How good is your recording?

I recently received *A provisional atlas of Somerset moths* from Keith Brown of the Somerset Moth Group. In this is a most fascinating graph. Having already listed the total number of macro moths in each 10-Km square in the county, Keith plots these against the proportion (percentage) of that recorded total which belong to his two lists of the top one hundred most widespread moths and top one hundred most numerically abundant moths. What this clearly shows is that in order to record 90% of the most widespread or most abundant moths in the county, it is necessary to record at least 250 species. Since the most widespread and most abundant species are those likely, by definition, to be in every site, it means that unless your site list includes 250 or more larger moths it is certainly under-recorded. Copies of the Somerset atlas can be obtained from Keith Brown, SMG, The Barn House, Cheriton Hill, North Cheriton, Temple Combe, BA8 0AB. **Colin Plant**

E-mail

Many of you are taking the newsletter by email, so if you have this capacity but still receive your copy by snail-mail please let me know. From any point of view there are advantages of sending the newsletter through the ether. From your point of view it is received faster, incurs no postage cost and you can request to have any photographs in colour. If there is a demand, I can arrange a monthly news bulletin (or more frequent news updates). If you're interested please let me know what word processor you're using.

Memories of Maitland

I'd like to print any anecdotal accounts you may have regarding Maitland. I'm sure many of us have them - he was that kind of person and would certainly have enjoyed reading them! Did he do that famous ear-wag to distract you on purpose, or did you perhaps get the chance to sample Katie's superb apple snow?

Those us who, perhaps unwisely given the weather, went along to the Old Hall Marsh meeting in September 1998 for a leaf-mine workshop were gathered in a soggy huddle (a 'group chat', the sort of thing that always afflicts field meetings) when suddenly we became aware that Maitland had disappeared. Despite a recent hip operation and great fat rain drops splashing on his head, there he was perched on top of a sea wall, heading for the saltings. Full of concern and chagrined we caught up and, after seeing him safely over, started looking for mines. We must have looked like a party of leaf-cutter ants, proudly bringing back our leafy prizes for him to identify. At lunch he sat in his car, quaffing beer and a supermarket sandwich, entering the records into his little dictaphone:

"... *centifoliella*, *viscerella*, *crataegella*...er...what's that thing called...?"

"um...angle shades?"

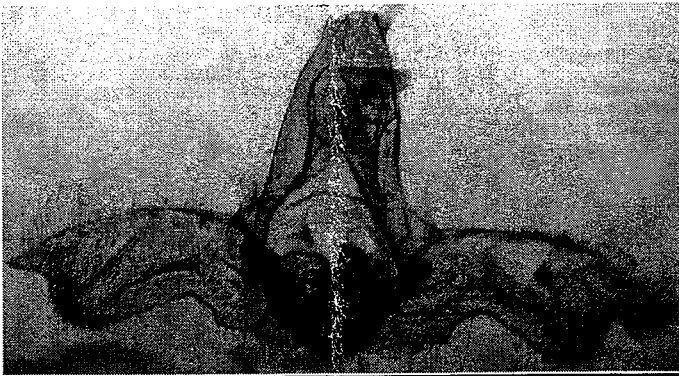
"Yes, that's it, *meticulosa*!"

The pitfall of traps

One of the problems sometimes encountered with traps run regularly is wasps and birds. Maitland I know use to have great trouble with wasps in his garden, sometimes forcing him to stop using light. All that would be left in the morning would be a few sad, scattered remains. It would be interesting to record the degree of predation and by what predator. If you've had experience with wasps, hornets, frogs or birds let me know. Do wasps actually eat their scaly room-mates or simply kill them in a fit of insect pique? What species or families suffer worst? What birds have learned that there is an easy meal on offer, and what if any measures have you taken to prevent the little devils?

A poser...

Finally, something of an identification problem. Last year in July, Jon Young noticed a smallish grey tortrix in his Jaywick trap, which he recognised as being an *Acleris*. The male specimen was sent to me and the genitalia are figured below. The genitalia appear to resemble most closely *Acleris aspersana*, or possibly *A. hippophaeana*, which isn't known from Britain. *A. aspersana* occurs in Essex but it is scarce. It flies during July and August and is small in size, but the colouration, being yellowish or reddish-yellow, is very different. The Jaywick specimen is totally grey and without markings, but could be perhaps an extreme variety.



Programme for 2001

These are events we are aware of but may not necessarily have arranged. Please treat as provisional and contact the leader before attending. Thanks to Joe for organising the 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. Because of foot and mouth disease, some events may not go ahead, so check before attending.

15 June Pod Wood, Tiptree. Meet at entrance at 8.30pm. (Joe Firmin)

22 June Oak Hill Farm, Theydon Bois. Meet at 8.30pm, on B172 just outside village. Power available; possible access to surrounding Epping Forest. (Tim Green - see contacts).

29 June Old Hall Marsh NR. Meet at car park at 8.30pm. (Joe Firmin)

13 July Cudmore Grove CP, East Mersea. Meet at car park at 8.30pm. (Joe Firmin)

21 July Coggeshall, West Street, TL846226. Meet at 20.30 (phone Jon Young 01255 432134)

10 August Great Bentley village green. Meet at the play park at dusk, trapping opposite the road amongst the 'wildlife area'. (Jon Clifton)

11 August *National Moth Night* Try and find the white-spotted pinion *Cosmia diffinis*

17 August Broaks Wood, Gosfield. Meet at car park at 8.30pm. (Joe Firmin)

7 September Marks Hall, Coggeshall. Meet at car park at 7.30pm.. (Joe Firmin)

Contacts:

EMG Chairman. General Moth Group enquiries. J. Firmin, 55 Chapel Road, West Bergholt, Essex. CO6 3HZ (01206 241389).

Lepidoptera records for Essex; Newsletter editor. B. Goodey, 298 Ipswich Road, Colchester, Essex. CO4 4ET. (01206 841224, or Mobile 07941133944). -email: brian.goodey@dial.pipex.com

BC butterfly records. V. Perrin, 13 Pettitts Lane, Dry Drayton, Cambs. CB3 8BT

Coleoptera records N. Cuming, 33 Holly Road, Colchester CO3 5QL (01206 330019).

Other Order records. J. P. Bowdrey, Fair View, Colchester Road, Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex. CO16 0LB (01255 862507).

Tim Green day 01992 815605, 01277 890474 evening, mobile 07951 704041

Photos. Moth Group enquiries I. C. Rose, Yaffles, School Lane, Mistley, Essex. CO11 1HN.

Anglian Lepidopterist Supplies (ALS) PO box 232, Northwich Delivery Office, CW8 3FG (01263 862068 www.angleps.btinternet.co.uk)

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

One of secrets to finding moths is to go out looking for something else, such as beetles. It really does work, honest. If you want to find beetles, go out looking for moths. And if you think a site is rubbish, you're probably not looking hard enough. And always be prepared to find something unexpected or out of place. That way you'll recognise an obvious moth when you see it, even though you're not on the coast and therefore not expecting to it....

Renewal Notice

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