

Essex Moth Group

Issue 27 2003



[Note - this is a recreated version as only original located has been a rich text file without photos or tables – SDW 13/02/25]

Please note: there are a number of images to go with this issue which can be viewed on the relevant page on the web site.

It's been an exciting few months since the last newsletter. **Humming-bird hawk-moths** and **painted ladies** have been around in higher than usual numbers, particularly the latter, and counts of several hundred, such as at Marks Tey, Colchester on 24 July (Neil Harvey), have been reported. The highlights are:

The Epping pug *Eupithecia massiliata* (Geometridae), new to Britain

Those of you with computers may recall that in April last year Tim Green caught a male and female pug which he did not recognise. They were quite small and dark, with conspicuous cross-lines, quite unlike the abundant brindled pugs which Tim was also getting. Tim kindly passed the specimens to me and the ensuing dissections raised further questions, especially that of the female which bore little resemblance to any British species. There followed much discussion on the internet but no-one was able to provide any clues as to what species the pair could belong to, and there the matter rested.

Recently, volume 4 of *The geometrid moths of Europe* by Vladimir Mironov (Apollo Books) has been published and this largely covers the pugs, so with the Epping pugs in mind I ordered a copy and found a match. I passed on my thoughts, and a series of digital images, to Colin Plant, who kindly contacted Peder Skou, a European geometer expert, Axel Hausmann, editor-in-chief of GME, and via him Mironov himself, who confirmed the identification as being *E. massiliata*. I've given it the English name of Epping pug in honour of the locality in which it was caught (Green's pug might also have done if it were not for Green pug!), and the log-book number of 1853a. In Europe the Epping pug is native to Spain, Portugal and southern France, and probably found its way to Tim's via cork, which he occasionally imports. Further details of this capture can be found in the current issue of *Entomologist's Record*.

Other new species to Essex:

Eastern bordered straw *Heliothis nubigera* (Noctuidae)

An example of this extremely rare migrant was trapped by Russell Neave at Maldon on 8 June. Russell contacted Simon Wood and Graham Ekins, who duly photographed it. An eastern Mediterranean species, this may be the fifth British record, although four further specimens occurred on the south coast during June. I understand that another was taken in France at about the same time.

Stored nut moth *Paralipsa gularis* (Pyralidae)

Peter Pyke showed me a specimen caught at his house in Layer-de-la-Haye on 14 June. There is an earlier county record based on a series in the BM, said to have been taken in East London during the 1930s, but this is the first 'precise' record. New to VC19 North Essex.

Balsam carpet *Xanthorhoe biriviata* (Geometridae)

This was caught by Jon Young at Jaywick on 2 July and photographed by myself with Jon's kind permission. Resident, though rather local, in most adjoining counties, its presence in Essex is not entirely unexpected and several recorders were looking out for it.

***Phyllocnistis saligna* (Gracillariidae)**

This tiny moth was recorded at Dovercourt on 22 July by Chris Gibson. A genus comprising of three British species which resemble the *Phyllonorycter*, and all three have now been taken in the county.

Tree-lichen beauty *Cryphia algae* (Noctuidae)

Two have been taken in Essex recently. The first by Gerry Slater at Little Oakley on 22 July and confirmed by Reg Arthur, Chris Gibson, Ian Rose and Peter Smith; the second by Paul Bergdahl at Kirby-le-Soken on 25 July. This noctuid doesn't appear in the first edition of Skinner as previous records were very old, and it is only since 1991 that the moth has become more regular: indeed its presence in Essex was expected sooner or later. Interestingly, two were reported from Regent's Park, London on 8 and 20 July (Colin Plant, pers.com.).

Other recent news - Macros:

Toadflax brocade Woodford Green, 24 July (Robin Barfoot). Two others turned up in north London a few days earlier (Herts/Middlesex Moth Group). This latest record is something of a geographic departure in Essex as the only other recent records all come from Dovercourt, where it has appeared five times from May 2000 to July 2002.

Dusky hook-tip Skippers Island, 18 July (Ray Marsh). This is the fourth county record, following on from those at Bradwell-on-Sea in 1992 and 1997, and Kirby-le-Soken last year. This latest was a female which, before being released, laid a dozen ova which Ray hopes to rear.

Around fifteen **pine hawk-moths** were seen at Layer Wood, Tiptree on 24 July by Joe Firmin, Ian Rose and others (Ian Rose, pers.com.). This is easily the largest number seen in the county on a single night and the habitat is ideal with plenty of coniferous trees. This species is being seen frequently wherever people trap and records suggest it is now one of our commoner hawk-moths. Also seen at Layer Wood was a **festoon**, first record from the wood since Bob Dewick reported it there in 1984. The festoon appears to be having a good year. Don Down and Graham Bailey saw eight at Hockley Wood in south Essex on 9 July – there is only one, old record from this area so the records are particularly welcome; and Russell Neave had a pair in his Maldon garden on 8 July, the second Maldon site.

A **reddish light arches** was trapped at St Osyth on 20 June by Reg Arthur, the second post-1990 record, and Paul Harris has had a further **small ranunculus** at Pitsea on 18 July: since 1999 there have been six sites reporting the moth, all in south Essex.

Other macros include **four-dotted footman** at Jaywick on 17 June (Jon Young), probably a migrant; **silver barred** at Frinton-on-Sea on 2 July (Barbara Lock), Dovercourt on 3 July (Chris Gibson) and Copperas Wood on 5 July (Peter Smith).

A **Bedstraw Hawk-moth** appeared at Kirby-le-Soken on 5 July (Paul Bergdahl), the fourteenth post-1990 occurrence, and a **shaded fan-foot** at St Osyth on 2 July (Reg Arthur) represents a new site for this formerly rare resident. Reg has also seen **dotted footman**, on 15 and 16 July, the second and third in his garden. The only other post-1990 sites are Bradwell-on-Sea, Saffron Walden and Beaumont-cum-Moze. The migrant **small mottled willow** appeared at Stanway near Colchester on 8 July (Dave Owen) and Epping, Oak Hill Farm on 21 July (Tim Green).

Micros:

Agonopterix conterminella Stanway, 7 and 21 July (Dave Owen, Brian Goodey). I had considered this species to possibly be extinct in Essex, as the only previous occurrence (apart from some pre-1900 records) was at Wickham Bishops in 1980. I am delighted to report a potential colony at Stanway, near Colchester. Dave has also supplied for photographing the diminutive nepticulid *Ectoedemia intimella* on 7 July, second post-1990 record, and the tortrix *Cnephasia pasiuana* on 7 July, fourth post-1990 site.

Chris Gibson continues to add new species at his Dovercourt garden and had a very successful night on 10 July: *Coleophora potentillae* - first county record since 1986, though this is probably due to under-recording the larval stage - *Smaller moth of Essex*, published in the 80s, showed it to be widespread and locally common; *Coleophora conyzae* - fourth post-1990 record and the first since 1992; *Anarsia spartiella* - fifth post-1990 site, a species probably increasing: it is known to be resident at Stanway and could appear elsewhere; *Pseudosciaphila branderiana* - fourth post-1990 site; and *Elachista albifrontella* - fifth post-1990 site. On 22 July, Chris added *Dichrorampha flavidorsana* and *Epinotia signatana* - the only other post-1990 records are both from Saffron Walden, where Maitland had them in 1996. This brings Chris's total to 868 species for his garden!

On the edge of Epping Forest, at Oak Hill Farm, Tim Green and Dave Perry have been busy with micros. *Aspilapteryx tringipennella* on 12 June is the fifth post-1990 site; *Argyresthia pygmaeella* on 30 June the seventh post-1990 site and *Brachmia blandella* trapped on 18 June the eighth post-1990 site. The tortricids have also been evident with *Phalonidia manniana* on 10 July (fourth post-1990 site which have revealed just five adults); *Choristoneura hebenstreitella* on 30 June (second post-1990 record); *Apotomis capreana* on 30 June (fifth post-1990 record); *Ancylis mitterbacheriana* on 27 May (fifth post-1990 record); and *Strophedra nitidana* on 30 June (sixth post-1990 record).

An *Esperia oliiviella* was taken at Thorpe-le-Soken on 2 July by Jerry Bowdrey and is the fifth recent site. *Metriotes lutarea* appeared in some numbers at Friday Wood, Colchester on 10 May (Brian Goodey), there being just one other recent site in Essex at High Woods C.P., also near Colchester. *Coleophora follicularis* was recorded at Frinton-on-Sea from cases (and larval characteristics) on hemp agrimony and fleabane on 16 May. Barbara Lock kindly gave me several cases, which fed on hemp agrimony in my own garden. Frinton is only the second recent site, the other being Donyland Wood, Colchester, in 1990. Another *Coleophora*, *C. caespitiella* was taken on 25 May, the third post-1990 record, and the tortrix *Cnephasia communana* on 25 May (both from my Colchester garden) is the fifth post-1990 record.

A very early *Dioryctria abietella* appeared at Jon Young's Jaywick trap on 30 May and is surely a migrant. Another pyralid, *Elegia similella* was photographed at North Chingford on 22 June by Bryon Pateman and is the seventh post-1990 site.

A huge total recorded at Stour Wood

Stour Wood is an important place in Essex for Lepidoptera and thanks to the efforts principally of Peter Smith we know its macro fauna well. The micros ought to be just as good and it was with some anticipation that Jon Clifton and others visited the wood on 18 July, but they couldn't have predicted what was in store for them. A mild night yielded around 240 species (Jon is still working on a few specimens) and this is the highest total I know of for a night's work at one site in Essex.

This is an amazing haul when you consider there is no chalk of heather nearby, and that the total comprises of woodland and salt marsh moths! Fifty-one new species were recorded for Stour Wood, bringing the site total to 605. Most important records on the night, apart from a couple of specialty species, were *Morophaga choragella*, *Ancylis laetana* and *Hedya ochroleucana*, all known recently from only four or five sites, and a **Gem** rounded the evening off nicely!

Clearwing bonanzas!

It has been twenty years since **orange-tailed clearwing** *Synanthedon andrenaeformis* was last reported from Essex, but in June this year Ted Ponting started to use a pheromone lure at his Langley Upper Green garden and began to record the species in some numbers. The first success was three on the 22nd and two on the 23rd. Ted then visited a neighbour's garden 200m away on the 25th and attracted another pair. On the 27th at another garden 1km away, five more were seen at the lure. The following day Ted visited a number of sites around Upper and Lower Langley and encountered twelve moths, a total beaten the following day when seventeen more were recorded around the village. During early July Ted added another

twelve moths at his home site and also from the nearby villages of Stickling Green, Littlebury Green, Elmdon and Chrishall. The final encounter took place on 8 July, giving us a flight period of 22 June to 8 July, a total of 53 insects from 18 sites.

The main foodplant of the orange-tailed clearwing is the wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana*, but it has also occasionally been recorded on guelder-rose *V. opulus*. Ted says: "It was interesting that two of the sites were devoid of guelder-rose or wayfaring tree yet attracted moths within five minutes." The wayfaring tree is fairly common on boulder clay in north-west Essex and on the chalky areas of south Essex, west of Tilbury, whereas guelder-rose has a more general, scattered distribution over much of the county. With the increasing use of pheromone traps it seems safe to assume that *S. andrenaeformis* is fairly common in north-west Essex where its main foodplant grows, but is not making much use of guelder-rose elsewhere. The literature gives older records in the north-west and the Tilbury area (where it is still likely to be resident), as well as Harlow.

Ted was unable to locate any emergence holes, but an in-depth search would surely find host trees. Ted suggests a county-wide search for this species next year using lures.

Continuing with the lures, Don Down has had considerable fortune in south Essex. Ten **yellow-legged clearwings** were attracted at Hadleigh from 9 to 12 June, and nearby at the country park, also in June, Don recorded six **red-belted clearwings**. On some allotments in Thundersley, he reported dozens of **currant clearwings** attracted to a lure on 12 June, giving him a remarkable run of success for these normally reclusive insects. Since 1998, Don has reported four species from five sites in south Essex.

Canvey Island

Don continues to monitor an important site in the south-west part of Canvey. On 16 June he recorded **obscure wainscot**, **silky wainscot** and **dotted fan-foot**. There was also a good run of pyralids, such as *Chilo phragmitella*, *Schoenobius gigantella*, *Ebulea crocealis*, *Aphomia zelleri* and the stunning *Oncocera semirubella*.

Parthenogenetic Vapourers?

Dr D.S. King

Last summer I came into possession of a vapourer moth caterpillar, and wishing to re-establish the species in our garden, kept it captive in a jar. Carelessly I did not inspect it regularly and found that not only had the imago emerged but it was female and had laid eggs which had hatched. I moved the surviving larvae onto a cystus bush which experience tells me the species will use as a food plant. I have long known that aphids can reproduce by parthenogenesis, but was unaware that other insects could behave in this way. Having checked Imms' *General textbook of entomology*, 1964 edition page 190, I found to my surprise that this form of reproduction is not uncommon in Lepidoptera, though whether this has been recorded for the vapourer before I do not know.

[Ed. this form of reproduction is common in the Psychidae and present in some other families, such as Coleophoridae, but what about the larger moths? Has anyone experience of others?]

Wedding March – moth!

Congratulations to Graham Bailey on his recent-ish wedding. Bad planning meant the big day fell on National Moth Night, but Graham still found time on his wedding night to run a trap at his in-law's home (!). And to commemorate the event, an official photo was taken of the bride and groom with a Robinson trap in the background. At the reception, the tables were labelled with the names of butterflies and moths with the Top Table designated 'Monarch'. Do you get the impression that some people are absolutely barking mad?

Spindle Ermine tests Karma in Colchester

Jerry Bowdrey

On 12 May 2003 I was contacted by a local resident who had noticed a strange web on a hedge near her flat off Layer Road Colchester (TL9823). That afternoon I paid her a visit and was shown a section of hedge draped in silken webs and completely devoid of leaves! After some searching I was able to ascertain that the plant was an evergreen spindle *Euonymus japonica* bush about two metres tall and a metre wide. It was in a mixed hedge adjacent to privet *Ligustrum ovalifolium*.

It was not possible to examine the far side of the hedge in a neighbour's garden, but there must have been thousands of final instar *Yponomeuta* larvae crawling over the bare stems and in silken webs. A single **magpie moth** *Abraxus grossulariata* larva vainly sought something to eat amongst the strands! (I find this species almost exclusively on *E. japonica* nowadays). Many *Yponomeuta* larvae had wandered onto the adjacent privet and constructed webs, though not surprisingly given the unrelated plant families, no evidence of feeding was observed.

A few larvae were collected and reared indoors and after feeding on fresh leaves for a day or so, quickly spun up producing characteristic dense, white, silk cocoons. Two adult *Y. cagnagella* emerged on 2 June.

The moths and butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland volume 3 states that ova are laid in batches of 25 to 50, suggesting that the colony had been established for some time previously, although they had not been noticed before. Fortunately for the larvae, the lady is a Buddhist and was quite prepared to live and let live and leave them to carry on munching unmolested.

I remember seeing extensive damage to *Euonymus* caused by *Y. cagnagella* larvae some years ago but cannot recall seeing such total defoliation before.

The geometrid moths of Europe. Volume 4: Larentiinae II (Prizemen and Eupitheciini) by Vladimir Mironov. Apollo Books, Stenstrup, 2003. Approximate cost is £70.

Already being called the 'Euro pug book', this is a much-needed and welcome addition to the bookshelf. Its 460-odd pages, beautifully produced, covers the rivulets (and allies) and pugs found in Europe. Each species is typically shown at 1.5 times magnification and there are usually five examples of each. Each species is given a reference number, which makes navigating the book very easy. For example, the lime-speck pug is '105' so you can use this to quickly find both text and illustrations, very convenient and something I wish more works would copy. The colour plates of adults, of which there are sixteen, are pretty good and the grey background not intrusive. There are forty-six plates covering critical features, which are superbly drawn and very useful. This book deals almost totally with adults, larval information is reduced to a line or two

stating known foodplants. Probably of most value to those who have retained set specimens which need naming, and has already proved itself to me by helping to identify the Epping pug. Pugs will never be simple, but they just got a little bit easier! Should you buy this or wait for the Harley Books title due in the autumn (£29.50)? If you're serious about pugs you'll probably need both!

Moths of Essex update

Unfortunately there have been further delays and much work still needs to be done, so we're now hoping for publication sometime during this winter. We may have to produce it in paperback form because of the sheer size and cost of the systematic section.

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

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