

Cheshire Moth Recording Group Newsletter

Issue 4

August 2001

Welcome!

Welcome to the fourth issue of the Cheshire Moth recording group newsletter. Hopefully you have all had your traps out this season and have been submitting records to Steve McWilliam and Steve Hind. The season has been notable chiefly for the loss of much of the early season due to foot and mouth and the loss of much of the later part of the season to bad weather! Whatever happened to the glorious summers we used to have? However the moth group has had a number of successes including adding two new species to the VC58 list – Lempke's Gold Spot and Scarce Silver Y. Additional highlights have included large numbers of Currant Clearwing attracted to pheromone traps. These records are detailed elsewhere in this issue. Finally, many thanks to Paul Hill for the colour photos included in this issue.

Field Trips - Additional Meetings

The following is a new field trip for your diaries. If anyone has organised trips and would like them included in future newsletter please let me know.

4th September 2001 Pickering's Pasture

Meet at 8pm in the car park.

7th September 2001 Pym's Chair

Meet 7:45pm in the car park at SJ995768. We will aim to trap on the out standing piece of heather/bilberry moorland. The area has never been actively worked but previous visits have produced Small Autumnal Moth (in a daylight visit on the 24th August this year) and Goldenrod Brindle which are our targets for the evening. If the weather is bad we will trap

in the nearby Goyt Valley which is wooded with a good bilberry under storey. This should provide sheltered conditions and some good moths as well.

Reports on Field Meetings

The following are brief reports on the field meetings I attended. Unfortunately I missed a number of field trips due to a very hectic work schedule that led to me being out of the country for much of June and July. Visits to various parts of the USA, Grenoble in the French Alps and several visits to Oxford led to me missing much of the middle part of the year. It's a hard a life but someone has to do it!

Consequently the following list of trip reports is far from complete. If you attended another meeting this year how about providing a trip report for the next edition of the newsletter? All contributions will be gratefully received unless they unmercifully ridicule the editor – see the report on the Rivacre trip for comments on my map reading ability (or rather lack of it!)



Inspecting the catch on a moth group field meeting

April 7th Lindow Common

The weather was awful for this early season trip - very cold. The favorite suggestion for the location of the traps was the pub across the road from the car park! However, we did eventually start trapping managing 5 moths of three species. The highlight was probably Slender Pug larvae found by collecting Sallow blossom.

May 4th Moore Nature Reserve

Another cool evening again led to a relatively poor catch although a lot of spring moths did put in their first appearance of the year. Good numbers of Lunar Marbled Brown were attracted to light as well as large quantities of the micro *Eriocrania subpurpurella*.

May 12th Marbury Country Park

A better night weather wise led to a much improved catch. Highlights included a number of good moths for the reserve. Lunar Marbled Brown again appeared in numbers. The first Pale Tussock of the year also appeared - a new record for the site.

May 19th Little Budworth Country Park

Another good night with the expected May moths showing up in good numbers. A total of 23 species of macro were caught. Highlights included Waved Umber, Least Black Arches and again, good numbers of Lunar Marbled Brown. Amongst the micros we also found *Taleporia tubulosa* cases on birch – the first record from the site for several years.

July 20th Arnfield Reservoir

This was an additional trip organised by Shane Farrell and proved to be the best trip of the year so far. Five of us attended and moved equipment from the car park. Shane's estimate of half a mile seemed optimistic and someone asked why we had

parked in Cheshire if we were going to be trapping in Norfolk!

However, the long walk proved worth while. Many good moths were trapped including a couple of Lempke's Gold Spot - new to VC58. This record still requires formal identification via the preparation of a genitalia slide. In addition, we also attracted a single Scarce Silver Y. Another rarity in the county. If you didn't come, you missed a cracking session!



Lempke's Gold Spot: Arnfield Reservoir



Scarce Silver Y: Arnfield Reservoir

August 4th Rivacre Valley

This was a joint meeting between the British Entomological and Natural History Society and the Cheshire Moth Group. The session was led by Paul Waring and was targeted at trying to locate White-spotted Pinion amongst the Elm at this site. Heavy rain late in the afternoon gave rise to a cool and foggy night - far from ideal for trapping. However, a few moths did come to light. No White-spotted Pinion although we did manage very large numbers of the close relative The Dun-bar.

Yours truly also displayed superb navigation skills by getting us all hopelessly lost while trying to survey the site prior to dusk. Good job we left plenty of time to set up. If it hadn't been for a friendly local in a car who directed us back to the car park we would probably still be roaming around somewhere on the Wirral!

August 24th Wainscot's at Witton

Well, not quite! We did manage a single Common Wainscot...however despite the lack of the feature family some good moths did grace our traps. Pride of place goes to two superb Red Underwings, although The Crescent, and Feathered Gothic were also welcome records. Amongst the micros we manage to attract a number of Small China Mark from the ditches along with three Chilo phragmatella from the reed beds.

August 26th Little Budworth CP

A cold and misty night gave us little hope of catching many moths. However, we did manage to attract a number of Feathered Gothic, a couple of Autumnal Rustic and best of all three Neglected Rustic - a new moth for everyone present. We also spent half an hour convincing the local constabulary that we were not the local coven of witches and devil worshipers! We even managed to show them a few moths.



Neglected Rustic: Little Budworth CP

Pheromones and Clearwings

As some of you may know, sets of pheromones designed to attract Clearwing moths were offered for sale early this year. A number of Cheshire mothers purchased sets of lures and have been busily looking for these enigmatic moths. Steve Hind and I spent a lot of time in May in an unsuccessful search for Large Red-belted Clearwing (which feeds on birch stumps). A number of sites within the county were visited. I have heard of records from both Lancashire and Shropshire so the moth must occur within VC58. If any one was successful in finding the moth this year records will be gratefully received!

Following on from the wild Large Red-belted chase, I tried a local fruit farm for Currant Clearwing. This moth is known to be present in the county principally in the Wilmslow area. I tried a fruit farm at Kelsall and within a few minutes managed to attract double figures of the moth. The final count may well of been into the high twenties – all within 15 minutes. In addition, the use of the pheromones in North Wales has led to a number of records of Thrift Clearwing from a variety of sites on Anglesey.

One by-product of the Clearwing searches has been a number of records of day light flying moths which are usually under recorded. Mother Shipton has been seen at

a number of sites, and Beautiful Yellow Underwing was present in good numbers in Delamere Forest.

Hopefully next spring we will have more success in tracking down other species of Clearwings within the county.

Sugaring and Wine Ropes

These days we all seemed convinced that light trapping is the answer to all our moth catching needs. However, other approaches can also be tried. The use of sugar traps and wine roping was a mainstay of the Victorian entomologists and can often attract interesting moths. In this approach, a strong, sweet mixture is painted onto posts, fences or trees, or an impregnated rope is draped over suitable supports. Moths will visit the 'trap' to feed, and can then be potted for examination. Light traps will attract the greatest variety of moths, but some species, which are very rare at light, can be found more frequently by sugaring e.g. Old Lady, Red Underwing etc. As many of the sugar addicts are on the wing in the autumn months I thought a short note might be of interest.



Moths on sugar at Arnfield Reservoir

The simplest form of sugaring consists of the use of rotting fruit as an attractant. A netting bag can be suspended over the bait, and the moths will be attracted to the fruit by scent, will feed, and then be captured in the trap. This is the classic method of

trapping some tropical butterflies, but can also be used for moths in this country.

Alternatively sugaring can be tried. To make a sugar solution, place approximately ½ a pint of beer (stout works well) in a saucepan together with about 1kg of brown sugar (unrefined sugar is good, and dark molasses sugar is even better) and about 0.5kg of dark treacle. Bring the mixture to the boil stirring continuously to dissolve the sugar and treacle into the mixture. Simmer for about five minutes, and then remove from the heat and allow to cool. While, the mixture cools, a scum will form on the surface. This is sugar crystallising out of the solution, and it should be stirred back into the mixture. When completely cold, the mixture can be transferred to a suitable storage jar (old coffee jars are good). The mixture is applied to fence posts, tree stumps and other convenient surfaces, and should be checked for feeding moths throughout the night. If no convenient surfaces are found, the mixture can be applied to seed heads and flowers with equally good results.

The principle problem with sugaring is that the mixture leaves sticky residues on the treated surfaces. These can be a problem if trapping in areas popular with the general public. If a visitor leans against a sugared post it will create a nasty stain. Instead of sugaring you may therefore wish to try wine ropes. A similar mixture is made, substituting the ½ pint of beer for a bottle of cheap red wine. (You can use vintage claret if you like-but cheap wine is easier on the pocket!) This will produce a runnier mixture which should be transferred into a sealable bucket. Paint kettles available from most DIY shops are ideal. A few short (couple of feet) lengths of clean cotton rope are then immersed into the liquid and left to become impregnated with the solution. To use the wine ropes, the lengths of rope are removed from the bucket, given a quick shake to remove excess, and then draped over tree branches, fence wire etc. Rubber

gloves are recommended as this is a messy process. Moths will alight on the roped to feed during the night. When the session is finished the ropes are collected up and returned to the paint kettle leaving very little mess behind.

Both sugaring and wine ropes will attract moths in roughly equal numbers. However, the success of the technique is very variable. Some nights will produce lots of specimens while on others the sugar will be ignored. It seems that warm humid nights with a light wind are best for sugaring (as they are for most forms of mothing), but the technique will also work on far from ideal nights, and not work on nights that seems good for no apparent reason. To further increase the effectiveness of both sugar and wine ropes, add a few drops of rum and/or amyl acetate (smells like pear drops) to the solution before use. Banana essence used for baking cakes also seems to be effective. If you are retaining specimens caught at sugar to pin, they should be kept for a few days in the fridge before killing and setting. Otherwise, such specimens are very prone to greasing.

When checking the sugar patches or wine ropes, be aware that many moths will react to the presence of light. Shining a strong torch onto the insects often causes them to drop to the ground. A careful check through the grass below the sugar should therefore always be performed and may well increase the numbers and variety of moths caught.

Further Non-Moth Records

Paul Hill and I visited Marbury Country Park on the 31st March. I did some beating of Blackthorn blossom in the hope of locating Sloe Pug larvae. Although I failed to find the pug I did find a number of other caterpillars. I could not identify one of them so took it home to try and breed out. It quickly produced an elegant wasp that was sent off to Gavin Broad for identification. He writes: 'The wasp

was *Meteorus gyrator* (Thunberg). It's a fairly polyphagous parasitoid of noctuids so that's not helping the caterpillar i.d. but I haven't really looked at that properly yet. Recorded hosts of *gyrator* are *Lycophotia porphyrea*, *Diarsia brunnea*, *Ipimorpha retusa*, *Xestia xanthographa*, *Mythimna sp.*, *Lacanobia oleracea*, *Agrochola lota*, *Euplexia lucipara*, *Cosmia trapezina*, *Thalpophila matura*, and *Brachylomia viminalis*'.

Recording Schemes

A few interested persons are in the process of setting up a National Recording Scheme for Tachind flies. This season, if anybody is rearing larvae or overwintering pupae and ends up with parasites of any sort, particularly Tachinds, please don't dispose of them with a rolled up newspaper but send them to the Scheme instead. As much data as possible would be appreciated (eg host, host foodplant, no of parasites, location etc).

They have already had some very interesting records arrive at the scheme this way and will let you know what you have reared out. Any non-Tachinids are passed on to Mark Shaw at Edinburgh Museum.

If anybody would like more info regarding the scheme or the Tachinid Recording Group visit the TRG website at: <http://www.parnassus.demon.co.uk/Tachinidae/index.htm>

Nothing by Other Means

So far only Jeff Clarke and I have signed up for the great toilet block challenge. Many of you must also work at sites that have no records associated with them at all but which have lights which are left on all night. Come on guys sign up now! An

update on the current status of the race next time.

Photographs

For those interested, Paul Hill using a Fujipix 6400 digital camera took the photographs in this issue.

Contacts and Web Sites

- Steve McWilliam's web site on Cheshire Moths can be found at:
<http://www.consult-eco.ndirect.co.uk/entomol/chmoths>
- The Lancashire and Cheshire Entomology Society (LCES) can be found at:
<http://www.consult-eco.ndirect.co.uk/entomol/lces>
- The Underwings (The junior section of the LCES) can be found at:
<http://www.consult-eco.ndirect.co.uk/entomol/underwng>
- **rECOrd** – The Local Records Centre for Cheshire, Halton, Runcorn, Warrington and the Wirral can be found at:
<http://www.record-lrc.co.uk>
- Records of macro moths should be sent to Steve McWilliam at:
stevemc@consult-eco.ndirect.co.uk
- Records of micros should be sent to Steve Hind at:
steve@hind1.fsnet.co.uk
- Records from Shropshire should be sent to Peter Boardman, 7 High Street, Weston Rhyn, Shropshire, SY10 7RP or e-mail at peperouda@btinternet.com
- Submission of all biological records can be made to **rECOrd** at:
manager@record-lrc.co.uk
- Butterfly Conservation can be found at:
<http://www.butterfly-conservation.org>
- Cheshire Region Biodiversity Plans for butterflies can be found at:
<http://www.papilio.co.uk>
- Paul Hill can be contacted via email paul@papilio.co.uk or via snail mail at Paul M Hill Natural History Services, 1 Clive Cottage, London Road, Allostock, Knutsford, Cheshire, WA16 9LT

- Jeff Clarke can be contacted about field trips at BirderJeff@aol.com
- The Lancashire Moth Group now has a web page at <http://www.lancashire-moths.org>
- Gavin Broad can be contacted at The Dept. of Biology, Imperial College at Silwood Park, Ascot, Berks. SL5 7PY
- Bill Hardwick can be contacted at 4 Caister Way, Over, Winsford, Cheshire, CW7 1LT or by e-mail at bill@hardwick36.freemove.co.uk
- Jon Clifton can be contacted via Kestrel Cottage, Hindolveston, Norfolk, NR20 5DE
- I can be contacted regarding field trips, items for the next newsletter etc. at: a.wander@dl.ac.uk or by snail-mail at 16 Bramhall Park, Anderton, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 6AH