

Sussex Moth Group Committee

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Indoor Events 2012

7.30pm	Woods Mill, Henfield, West Sussex, BN5 9SD.
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Wednesday 8th February

Thursday 19th April: **AGM**

Monday 16th July

Wednesday 7th November



It's been an interesting mothing year with a twist in the tail! I hope you managed to make it along to some of the excellent moth field events that were on and that you caught some interesting migrants at the end of the season. We hope that you're already utilising the new Sussex Moth Group website: www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk if not please check it out soon!

Best wishes, Penny

Many thanks to the SxBRC for printing this newsletter.



Flame Brocade by Graeme Lyons

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Chairmans report by Graeme Lyons

Well, it had been a less than average moth year until the last month. Migration excitement has certainly kicked in and I've written a full article on our shenanigans. Other than that though I have personally had a quiet year mothing. Still not having a garden and doing so many early starts this year left little room for moth trapping until the later summer.

That said, the most exciting piece of news is that the incredible Sussex Moth Group website is now live! At the time of writing over 30 people have registered. It is looking really slick; it's a great asset to the group. Bob's hard work in putting this together should not be underestimated. Bob has put an immense amount of work into this and it really is an exceptional resource. I am sure everyone will join me in saying a big thank you to Bob!



The matter of insurance for field events has been resolved. Penny found an insurer who will cater for all our needs at a relatively low price.

I have been asked to give a presentation about the Sussex Moth Group at the next National Macro Moth Recorders seminar in January by Butterfly Conservation. They have asked because they want to inspire other groups that are not doing so well. I think that part of this is down to Penny's excellent newsletter and all the brilliant articles that we write. We have to keep this up as this gets us noticed as a group; we are very active across the county and really have lots of stories to tell. I often find that I only ever write about things that have happened in the last month when it comes around to newsletter time. I wonder if I wrote stories more often as they happened, would it be fresher and more representative of the year as a whole? Anyway, in the talk I will discuss the website, the indoor meetings, and the newsletter. I only have twenty minutes, but I can gabble on forever so the hard thing is going to be keeping it slick. Any ideas are very welcome.

A recent chat with Jon Clifton gave me quite a surprise. He told me that by April 2015, the manufacture of MV bulbs is going to be illegal! This is not due to the 20mgms of mercury that they contain but actually to the fact that they are not very energy efficient. Jon says he is investing a lot of time and money in trying to find a substitute but as yet he has found nothing! Talking to Jon I realised there is a way around this but it involves a rather morbid equation and some apocalyptic bulk buying...

$\frac{\text{Your life expectancy} - \text{your age now}}{5} = \text{the number of bulbs you need to last you the rest of your life}$

Update to "A Complete History of the Butterflies & Moths of Sussex" by Colin R. Pratt



Buyers should have already been informed that a free annual update to the "Complete History" containing all of the previous year's most important butterfly and moth records will be collated in the same format and distributed as an e-mail attachment, so that it can be printed off and added to individual copies. Would those enthusiasts who have been lucky enough to have encountered a lepidopterous scarcity in Sussex this year therefore please pass the details on *before December 31st*, so that they can be included. It is intended that the update for the last half of this season - already 48 pages in length - will be issued in January.

A reprint will be considered over coming months but is obviously dependent upon sufficient demand. So, if you missed out this time, please give me advanced notice that you are interested in buying a set of books from the reprint run to enable this to take place.

E-moth



E-moth Moths Count Update October 2011

It's a little bit of a surprise to see the Moths Count Update for October 2011. It's the first time since the launch of the project that we have had a month with no reports. This is due to a combination of factors, including the fact that the weather was not ideal for moth recording.



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E-moth is an electronic newsletter from the Moths Count project, which is produced approximately four times a year. The last issue was sent by email in October 2011.

If you're not receiving E-moth and would like to, please contact Butterfly Conservation (01929 400209 or info@butterfly-conservation.org) with your email address.



Moth Night 2012

After a year off in 2011, National Moth Night will be returning in 2012. The dates to put in your diary are 21st-23rd June 2012. The theme will be the moths of brownfield habitats (such as old quarries, disused railway lines, reclaimed coal tips, gravel and clay workings etc.) and will include both daytime searches and the usual night-time recording. Further announcements will follow in *Atropos* magazine, E-moth newsletter and, of course, on the internet, but please make a note of the dates now. Moth Night 2013 will take place on 8th-10th August 2013 and Moth Night 2014 will take place on 3rd-5th July 2014.

National Moth Recorders' Meeting

The next UK-wide National Moth Recorders' Meeting will be on Saturday 28th January 2012, at the Birmingham and Midland Institute in central Birmingham. The meeting is open to anyone interested in moth recording and conservation across the UK and will feature a variety of enjoyable and informative talks (including our very own chairman, Graeme Lyons!) from amateur moth recorders and conservationists including the progress of the National Moth Recording Scheme. There is a £5 (per person) registration fee for attendees (payable on the day). This includes morning and afternoon tea/coffee and a buffet lunch all subsidised from Butterfly Conservation budgets. It has been necessary to impose a charge this year as we no longer have Heritage Lottery Funding to cover holding such an event. Advanced booking is essential, to book your place please contact info@butterfly-conservation.org or telephone 01929 400209.



Starting out in mothing by Anne Carey

I started mothing in 2010. After too long out of permanent gainful employment, and too much time on my own, the little things in life started to take a much higher priority. These little things included micro moths which particularly seem to like hanging around my bathroom. I don't know if that reflects badly on my domestic abilities, but, if these little chaps liked it, so be it. Naturally, this led to buying the Concise Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland.

The wrong book, it turned out, as I didn't know the difference between micro and macro moths (nor do the experts, it would seem!) But I was enraptured by Richard Lewington's illustrations and, much to the amusement of those closest to me, I bought an actinic moth trap. To say this has opened doors to me would be an understatement. It has opened up a new world, one that we don't see while we slumber in our beauty sleep. Waking up in the morning and dreamily remembering that you put out the moth trap the previous evening is tempered with excitement and dread – will it be packed full of our weird and wonderful night visitors, or will it be empty?

I'll never forget my first moth trapping session - like a small child at Christmas, I awoke with this amazing feeling of excitement. I didn't have a clue what to expect. And I certainly wasn't expecting a beautiful cock-chaffer (apologies to any cereal farmers out there!).

The early days saw poor Colin Pratt receiving regular emails from me attached with poorly taken pictures of what could have been a moth, but Colin has always been able to identify them. The help Colin has given to me, and countless others, has been extremely valuable. He has also made me look at moths more closely than I ever could imagine, in order to identify the subtle (well, for me as a beginner) differences between, say, a Heart & Dart and a Heart & Club. I do draw the line at inspecting genitalia though!

Feeling guilty about persistently pestering the chap, and my lack of attempts to identify moths myself, I remember one day endeavouring to identify a moth in the guide. I spent pretty much five hours looking at every single moth in the book, and on the UK Moths website, without success. Finally admitting failure, I sent the photos to Colin, who, of course, identified it immediately. So I went to the guide to compare my photo with Colin's identified, and wondered how on earth I could have missed something so obvious! I could only put it down to moth blindness after five hours peering at its finer details.

The capture of a Spectacle moth made me laugh. I was sure what it was – even a novice can probably spot this one. I took the usual all-round photos of it and when I looked at Mr. Lewington's illustration of this moth, he could have been using this very moth in the trap as the model, so perfect is his eye for detail.

The Buff Tip is a revelation: how on earth can a moth look like twig and still be able to fly?

The moth trap may have been an extravagance others might think twice about, but for me it has added a new dimension to my otherwise quite humdrum routine.

Thank you, Messrs Pratt and Lewington, and Sussex Moth Group!

2012 - The Year of the Micro? by Tony Davis

Until recent years, most people who developed an interest in moths stuck rigidly to the macro-lepidoptera with just a few mad souls taking on the micros. The publication of Barry Goater's 'British Pyralid Moths' in the mid-1980s encouraged many people to treat this family as 'honorary macros' but further exploration of the micros remained the remit of the tiny minority. The reasons for this are probably two-fold; the expense of obtaining all the books that are necessary for identification of all the micro's and the intimidation of the large number of species involved.

The advent of web sites such as UKmoths has started to overcome the problem of having to buy lots of expensive books but the spring of 2012 will see the publication of a book that is likely to cause a revolution in micro-moth recording. This is the companion to 'Waring, Lewington and Townsend' referred to in the spring newsletter. The bits I've seen on one of the author's computer looked very impressive and the illustrations by Lewington are guaranteed to be superb so everyone will no doubt be happily identifying the micros in their traps next year!

However, many micros rarely visit light and are best recorded by looking for the early stages, so how can we improve recording of these in Sussex? I well remember going out in the field with the late, great Maitland Emmet and the not late, but equally great, John Langmaid during the 1990s. We, (OK, they!) would record 80 – 100 species in an afternoon and my brain would be bleeding! If I was lucky I would remember how to identify one or two species from each session. So, like all learning, the best way to do it is 'little and often'. I am happy to pass on what knowledge I have to others (and welcome company in the field) but it is unlikely that many members of the moth group will be able to join me very often, particularly if they live in the tundra wastes of East Sussex!

Technology may offer a solution. If members of the group are interested, I could set up a blog about what I've seen and members could then go out and look for the same species. Inevitably, each blog entry would only refer to a couple of species so there is no chance of people getting swamped. An example of the sort of thing I would produce is:

Wednesday 5th October 2011

Popped in to Sidlesham late afternoon to look for the larval case of *Goniodoma limoniella*. This relative of the Coleophoras feeds on Sea Lavender and is easy to find on Hayling Island, just over the border in Hampshire, but has not been seen in Sussex since 1890 (Pratt, C.R. 2011. A

Complete History of the Butterflies and Moths of Sussex. Volume 1). Despite some helpful advice from Ivan Lang, I failed to locate any foodplant so I think a visit next year when it's in flower is in order.



Coleophora argentula

Read the species' account taken from Colin Pratt's book, and add extra details yourself if you like, using the wiki-style box.

Look at pictures to help identify a moth, and easily upload your own pictures with the uploading function to share with others.

Check out distribution maps for different year ranges. Have you got a new dot for the map?

Look at a phenology chart based on previous Sussex records.

What phase is the moon in at the moment?

Compare similar looking species. You can help link the similar species together.

If you are able to help out with writing up some species statuses we've still got lots to do, thanks to the writers that have helped us get this far! Please contact me for a batch of 30 species to write up, this only takes about 2-3 hours and you'd be really helping us out! All you need is a copy of Colin's latest tome and a computer. Drop me a line if you can help pennygreen@sussexwt.org.uk

Sussex Moth Group's new website

In September we were pleased to launch the Sussex Moth Group's new website which Bob Foreman has been working tirelessly on for the past few months. If you've not had a chance to have a look yet, check it out at www.sussexmothgroup.org.uk Here's a guide to how it works....

Start typing in the species name and you'll be given some choices. Click on the one you'd like and it takes you to the relevant webpage.

If you know exactly what you're after then use the quick finder tool.

What are the most common species on the wing at this time of year?

Check out the latest news and events.

What weather is coming your way? Pick a town that's closest to you...

I saw some Yarrow growing on the sea wall and had a quick look to see if there were any Yarrow Pug larvae. No Pug larvae but I quickly found three *Coleophora* cases in the seed heads. There are three species of *Coleophora* which feed on Yarrow but only one feeds on the seed heads (the others feeding on the foliage) so identification as *Coleophora argentula* was easy.

Before I start writing such a blog, I need to know whether anyone is actually interested in reading it! If you think that a blog like this would be useful to you, please email me at tdavis@butterfly-conservation.org so that I can gauge interest.

Christmas List ideas....



Written by moth experts Martin Townsend, Jon Clifton and Brian Goodey, this guide brings together information on the identification of difficult macro-moths, beyond what is currently available in moth field guides. The softback guide features 72 larger moth species (plus their subspecies and forms) with over 130 colour illustrations. The ring-bound format and protective covers aid its use next to a microscope during dissections. Text and images of confusion species have been laid out together for ease of use and new keys have been designed to aid identification. Order a copy on the BC website: www.butterfly-conservation.org for £17.00 (inc. P&P)

And for the fashionable moth-er, check out the Norfolk Moths T-shirt selection on www.norfolkmoths.org.uk £14.60 plus P&P



And for those counting their pennies....



Thanks to John Maskell for this picture!

A First for East Sussex by Heather Martin

My favourite flower is the Dog Rose – *Rosa canina*. Its sturdy, arching, thorn-covered branches clamber over and tangle through hedgerows and low-growing trees. When the pale pink blooms unfurl to exude a delicate, sweet perfume, I know summer has truly arrived. As I stood at the edge of our main woodland ride in May admiring the season's first roses, my attention was drawn to a small, dark fly resting on one of the heart-shaped petals but when it took off and flew in the unmistakable manner of a moth to relocate on another flower, I potted the insect. Tiny, brown with an indistinct pale dorsal spot – it looked very similar to other micro moths I had already recorded. My camera struggled to focus on a subject with a wingspan of little more than 12mm but I persevered because unable to dissect a moth, a clear photograph was my only hope of successful identification. I returned the insect to its fragrant platform.

Back at home after lengthy searches through websites and much peering and pondering, an e-mail from Mark Parsons finally confirmed my sighting as *Lampronia morosa* – new to East Sussex. How exciting! But why am I credited with the initial record of this moth in my county? Why hasn't anyone found it before?

Lampronia morosa is a member of the *Prodoxidae* or Yucca moth family which contains some of the oldest of all moths, most with larvae feeding only on specific parts of one or a few closely related plants. It belongs to the genus *Lampronia* – ten species listed by UK Moths, seven in Colin Pratt's 'A Complete History of the Butterflies and Moths of Sussex'. I have discovered that detail is limited to the insect's size, appearance and the fact it is considered uncommon in woodland or scrub habitat. The eggs are believed to be laid inside the flowers of several species of *Rosa*. Late instar larvae feed within young rose shoots, pupation occurring in the feeding gallery followed by the emergence of the adult in early summer. So, in common with several other micro moths I have observed in our wood, only limited study has been carried out on this species nationally.

Drab colouration combined with minute size does not tend to attract attention or encourage enthusiasm. Wild roses grow in profusion along field edges and roadside verges in Sussex, but if I initially mistook the moth for a small fly so might many others whose priority is an appreciation of the blooms. Even if it is spotted, obtaining a clearly focused photograph using a pocket camera or mobile phone on such a minute subject is not easy and with no popular field guide available at present against which to check the image, identification is not going to be straightforward. Add to this the possibility that the moth, like many micros, is so similar to other family members it necessitates dissection to tell them apart and it is little wonder there are few people who specialise in the identification of these tiny insects.

I also believe the chance of being in the right place at the right time plays a significant part in the recording of creatures who tend to have secretive life cycles, developing inside plants, rotting wood or under bark for example, away from prying eyes. To witness them emerging and flying as adults in their natural environment involves perfect synchronisation of timing!

How many small, dark-coloured, indistinctly patterned insects are classified as 'rare', 'scarce' or 'uncommon' when they might possibly just be 'under-recorded' living out their lives undetected as



Crimson Speckled

tapping the bush with my net in the hope it would fly out again. Then, suddenly, I realised I was staring face to face with a Crimson Speckled!!! I squealed "Crimson Speckled!!!" Michael almost ran through the hedge. It was my natural history highlight of the year and such a strange way to discover it too. You couldn't make it up.

Upon returning to the office, Michael told a few people at Butterfly Conservation about our discoveries and before you know it they were running with the stories and the press were showing some interest. On Thursday night it was in the Littlehampton Gazette. On Friday it was in at least 25 publications, including the Guardian, it was on Radio 4, Radio 5, BBC News, ITV News and the Crimson Speckled even got a mention on Autumnwatch. It even went international, featuring on websites in Africa, Italy and New Zealand and the great Fred Dineage himself commented on the beauty of the Crimson Speckled.

I urge you to have a listen to the podcast. We don't have an agenda really, other than to have a good laugh and make something that people will engage with. It is currently found here:

<http://thenaturalhistoryofsussex.blogspot.com/2011/10/episode-one-farewell-and-adieu.html>

The Natural History of Sussex



It seems a rare thing that such a discovery was actually recorded live as it happened. I usually find listening back to TV and radio interviews makes me cringe but I actually enjoyed this. As one friend said 'it sounds very natural and was like three friends having a laugh down the pub'. Someone else said 'better than Autumnwatch'. Anyway, it looks that 2011 is going to be the best moth migration year since 2006 in some counties. Does this mean I will finally get to see a Clifden Nonpareil? By the time you read this it will probably all be over for another year but I hope you managed to see a nice rare migrant or two.

Pod Lovers by Graeme Lyons

How often do you get to shout 'Crimson Speckled!!!'? Not very. How often do you initiate a process that results in over 25 national publications reporting on a moth that you found? Again, I don't think that is likely to happen again anytime soon. Not only that, we actually recorded on tape the exact moment when we discovered all those Flame Brocades! So what on Earth is going on? I'll tell you...

...A couple of months ago Michael Blencowe approached me to see if I wanted to get involved in a podcast on wildlife. Having a popular blog that has a similar approach to how we wanted the podcast to sound was a good starting point. We wanted something that is lively, funny, not at all twee, a little sarcastic and full of cultural references. The third member of the trio is Mat Davidson. He is relatively new to natural history but he is a genius with music, computers, special effects and jingle writing (check out our theme tune!).

So we decided that the podcast would be about half indoors and half outdoors and we would pick a theme each month. Moths being something that both Michael and I had in common and given the time of year, and the possibility of a rare migrant moth, we chose to cover that topic first. We were hoping for a Death's-head Hawk-moth. We ran two traps at Michael's house and pretty much the first moth we came across was a Scarce Bordered Straw.



Flame Brocade

We then decided to leave the traps for a while and head down to the coast to do some torching. Bear in mind that we are recording all the time. It didn't take long before we caught another Flame Brocade (Michael had caught one two nights prior at his home). Then we saw another, and another and another. Numbers soon went up into double figures. Mat's editing on this section of the podcast is perhaps for me the funniest and most exciting part of it. Three grown men reduced to excited squealing children. At one point I even got hit in the face by a Flame Brocade.

I don't think we really understood the significance of this find at the time but I'll get to that later. We headed back to the traps in the morning and we were all glad to see our first ever Ni Moth and a handful of other interesting migrants. The next night over 20 Flame Brocades were seen and discussions began to be had regarding whether this was an established breeding colony or not. It could be but I'm cautious about saying it is for sure until we have solid evidence.

Michael knew a chap that lived nearby so we took four traps down the following night and had another go. The wind really picked up and it was looking a little unsuitable. The next morning we went to empty the traps and was surprised to find quite a haul, albeit mostly outside the traps. There were about six Vestals, another six Flame Brocades, two Convolvulus Hawk-moths, another Ni Moth, two Scarce Bordered Straws and sitting in the grass a beautiful *Palpita vitrealis* which was a new one for me. After we had packed up I was trying to take a photo of the *vitrealis* when it flew off! Disaster. It flew over a wall and seemed to go down in a hedge. I legged it round and started

they have happily been for centuries?

On the 26th June this year I recorded another first for the county. I was standing in one of our woodland clearings when a tiny, dark brown insect landed on my shirt. I could have swiped it off but I was curious.....it turned out to be *Platyrhinus resinosus* or Scarce Fungus Weevil.

What else is waiting to be discovered?



Lampronia morosa

Early Sightings by David Webb

I found that the early warm spell in March and April brought some earlier than usual moth sightings. The first was the sighting of a Humming-bird Hawk-moth flying around the heathers in my garden at Partridge Green (TQ191192) on 24th March. It stayed around Partridge Green for a week, being seen most often along the South Downs Way off Lock Lane in Partridge Green flying up and down the nettles. Then it disappeared, the next sighting not to be until 25th July.

On the 13th April, 27 Brimstone moths came to my light trap, the most seen at any one time. On 18th April a Double-striped Pug appeared, not usually out until May and also on the same night a Maiden's Blush, again, usually a May moth. The biggest surprise however was the capture of a Coronet on 24th April not usually seen until June, a very early sighting for me of this species. On 9th May a Common Wainscot and three Yellow Underwings appeared earlier than their usual June appearance. Has any one else found that many moths have appeared earlier than usual this year and can it be put down to the really warm spring we had?

Kingstanding Moth-trapping by Dennis Dey

Steve Wheatley called to say that he was going to do some more moth-trapping up at his site at Kingstanding on the Ashdown Forest. Could I make it, he asked? No contest! This was to be our ninth session there since we started in July 2004.

When I arrived Keith Alexander and two other members were already there. Four traps were set up; two in the bunker area, as last year, and two out on the open heath. Soon after dark we heard a Nightjar churring as the traps were lit. That done, you've guessed it, we went to the gatehouse for the traditional tea and biscuits (thank you Steve).

We didn't have a target species, although I hoped for Barred Chestnut - the one we failed to get in August 2009. We missed it again and this time I reckon we were too early. It was an almost perfect night again, as it was last year. We were taken up to the traps by car this time...so easy!

By the time we left at around 02:00 or so we counted 93 species of macros, 15 pyralids and Steve identified 12 species of micros but there were many more of the latter. As last year, there is never an expert micro-lepidopterist like John Radford around when you need one! Moths of interest were:-

True-lovers Knot (48), Antler (6), Beautiful Yellow Underwing (7) - a very pretty little moth - Small Seraphim, Plain Wave, Ear Moth (7), Satin Lutestring (3), Sallow Kitten (2), Chevron (3), Double-kidney (1), Scalloped Shell (1), Small Rivulet (1), Large Emerald (1), Sharp-angled Carpet (1), Suspected (1), Olive (1), Grass Emerald (1), Hedge Rustic (1), Treble-bar (1) - big and boldly marked, and Lesser Treble-bar (23 at least).

Steve had pointed out to me an aberration of the latter moth, something that Colin Pratt was interested in, but we failed to make a count. Sorry Colin, can't get the staff!

Only three species of Hawk-moths came, but included the only resident species we didn't catch last year in July - a single Pine Hawk-moth.

Back at the gatehouse, Steve and I released a Large Skipper that had become tangled up in spider webs. It had come to a lit window. How long it had been there we don't know, but it wasn't there when we'd set out earlier.

Another enjoyable night up on the Ashdown Forest and I'd like to thank Steve and Keith for coming along.



Pine Hawk-moth by Dave Green

Moths Count update (taken from the Moths Count newsletter)

The climax of the first four years of the Moths Count project was undoubtedly the publication of the Provisional Atlas of the UK's Larger Moths. The first print run sold out in a matter of weeks. However, it is **back in print and available NOW!** This landmark production is a compilation of years of recording and survey effort by the UK moth recording community. It is a great achievement to be able to publish the first up-to-date maps in 30 years for 868 macro-moth species. The maps for the Geometridae (over 300 species) are the first ever to be published for the UK!

The maps were generated from the National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS) database which, at the time, held 11.3 million moth records from all UK vice-counties plus the Channel Islands and Isle of Man. We hope that it is exciting and rewarding, as well as useful, for individual moth recorders to see their records in a national context.

A note from Penny Green, SxBRC:

We managed to digitise and send off 260,000 macro moth records for Sussex. If you've noticed that your records aren't in the atlas, or on our new Sussex Moth Group website, then please do drop me a line as it means that they're not in the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre database. We welcome all records, whether they're in notebooks, on spreadsheets or in MapMate, and we welcome all historic records. Don't worry if you've not got around to sending your records to Colin previously, I'll filter back all moth records sent in to the SxBRC to Colin at the end of the year, and I'm not suggesting that you send them to me only, Colin should always be the first port of call.

It would be great to get your records into the system so that when the Atlas 'proper' is published we will have a complete picture for Sussex. I'd be very happy to hear from you: c/o Woods Mill, Henfield, West Sussex, BN5 9SD. pennygreen@sussexwt.org.uk or 01273 497521.

