



Staffordshire Moth Group Newsletter

February 2004

Introduction

This newsletter is the first of what I hope will be a regular series to keep you all informed of developments and new and interesting species that have been recorded in the county. I hope that you find it interesting and will feel like sending sightings or accounts of particularly good mothing sessions for inclusion. If you have digital photos, then we can include them too. The newsletters will be distributed electronically in PDF format. Hard copies can be supplied but I will have to charge for that.

Some Background Information

Moth recording in Staffordshire (vice county 39) suffered a severe blow when Richard Warren died in 2000. His knowledge of the county's lepidoptera was unrivalled. After his death I was asked by Monks Wood if I would take over as County Recorder - largely because I accompanied Richard on many of his forays and I knew many of the active lepidopterists in the county. I was reluctant to take on this role because while I was familiar with the macros like many others, the micros were a closed book. After a bit of arm twisting I agreed in order to maintain continuity of recording in the county.

By the time of his death Richard had put together much of the text for a new Atlas of Staffordshire Macros. The Potteries Museum approached me to see if I could finish this work which, with the help of many of you, I did.

Expert lepidopterist that he was, Richard was not of the electronic age! After the Atlas was produced, I embarked on entering all the Staffs moth data into MapMate. I had access to

what papers and lists were retrieved from Richards's house and those that were in the Potteries Museum archives. All this data is now entered BUT when I come to compare maps produced from MapMate with those in the Atlas, there are many records missing. I had naively assumed that Richard must have kept some kind of card index with something like one card per species and all the records for that species on the card. We have found no such index. So, there are dots in the Atlas that I can't account for. I'm sure they are correct it's just that I can't find the original sources. Frustratingly, there are references in correspondence that intimate that such an index existed. Another frustration is that he had many annotated checklists but most do not give the period of time over which the records span.

So, how he accumulated the data for the new and past atlases is anyone's guess. We do have his personal notebooks but it would be a lifetime's work to go through them. My own feeling is that we should not worry unduly about the historic data but should concentrate on resurveying, starting at 2000.

Where do we go from here?

Firstly, I am happy to continue as County Recorder for the time being and to try and maintain the moth database. I tend to leave butterfly recording to Butterfly Conservation though I am happy to receive records of these too.

When it comes to recording moths, however, the stark fact is that there are very few moth-hunters in Staffordshire which, considering the size of the county, is disappointing. There is an active group in the south of the county and a scattering of individuals in the north. The recent publication of the "Field Guide to Moths of Britain and Ireland" is sure to encourage a new wave of interest. Indeed, I have already received enquiries from a couple of potential moth enthusiasts.

In the "old days" it was relatively safe to go out alone at night with a trap or to go sugaring, beating etc. Nowadays things are different and most records that I get come from garden traps. If we are to extend our coverage then perhaps we need to organise

communal mothing evenings. They can be great fun but do have implications in terms of equipment ie. generators or batteries (for Heath traps).

One way to increase interest would be to form a "Staffs Moth Group" - maybe as part of the Staffs Wildlife Trust. We could then arrange events, put people in touch with other "mothers" etc. Let me know what you think.

We then have the problem of rarities or scarce species. Today, few people collect specimens. Whilst this is laudable, it does cause difficulties with some species eg. pugs, daggers, minors etc which need gentilaia examination to be sure of ID. However, for others, the digital camera has come to our aid and many queries can be resolved by taking photos. They can then be emailed to myself and others in the group for confirmation and as archive material.

The micros are another problem! The literature is improving but ID for many (including me) is a problem. Some of the larger micros - the Pyralids - are covered by Goater - in a similar fashion to Skinner's book - so they shouldn't be too great a

problem. Photos may help with some but their small size and often similar appearance means that voucher specimens are still needed. I have contacts that may be able to help with IDs.

The State of Play

To date we have 1442 species of lepidoptera in VC 39. Of these 169 species are represented by just a single record.

To give you an idea of coverage, the map shows the distribution of sites from which records have been received. A number of 10Km squares have few records e.g. SK03 and SJ81. However, some of these sites have not been visited for many years while others on only a few occasions.

So, there is plenty of scope for further recording. Remember too that many records are now quite old so even well-recorded sites need re-visiting.

New and interesting records 2002-3

2003 got off to a very slow start but the wave of immigrants that hit the south coast eventually reached Staffordshire. There were many records of **Hummingbird Hawk-moth** and even a **Death's-head Hawk** (if you know where this was please let me know).

New county records

The highlight of the year was not a moth but a new butterfly to the county - a rare event these days. Jan Korysko found a **Queen of Spain Fritillary** in his garden at Meir on 3rd August 2003.

Maple Pug : Pipe Green, SK10 : August 8th 2002. D. Grundy.

Stigmella ulmariae : Fradley Wood and Alrewas; SK11; September 2002. J. Clifton.

Phyllonorycter schreberella : Fradley Wood, September 2002. J. Clifton.

Tachystola acroxantha : Harborne, SP08; 30th June 2002. J&C Chance.

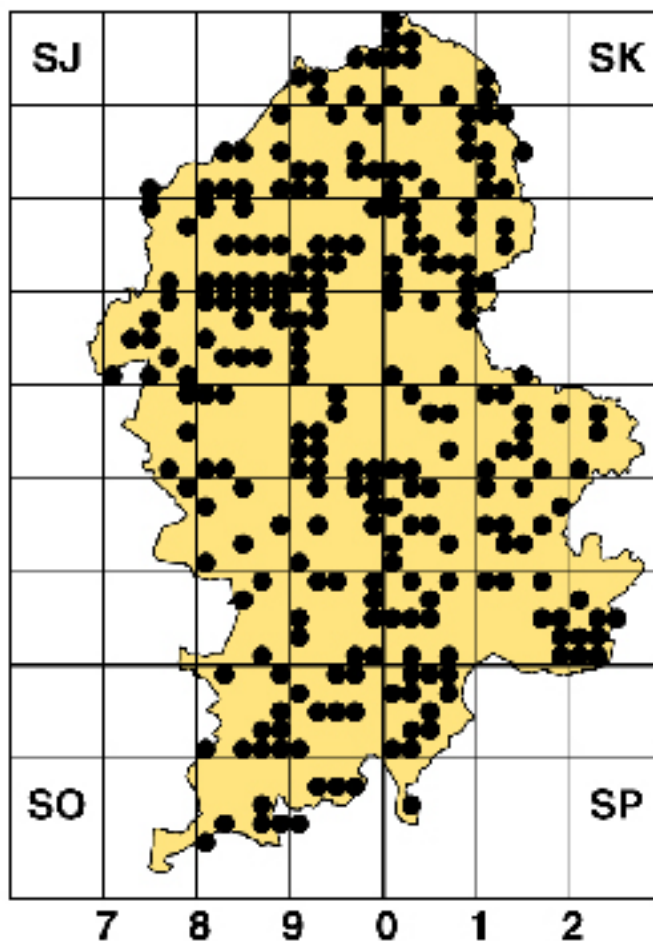
Eupoecilia angustana f. fasciella : Swineholes Wood, SK05; 14th August 2002; J. Clifton.

Pammene aurita : Saltwells Wood, SO98; 10th August 2002; D. Grundy.

Dichrorampha aeratana : Brownhills Common, SK00, 23rd May 2002; D. Grundy.

Other records of note

Scarce Bordered Straw : West End, Stoke; August 23rd and September 12th 2003. N. Pomiankowski. These are the 2nd and 3rd county records; the last being bred from a larva found in a box of tomatoes in Hartshill in 1980.



Gem : Compton Park, Wolverhampton; July 16th 2003. This is the 7th county record. G. Blunt.

Buff Footman : West End, Stoke : July 7th 2003. This is the 4th county record, the others being at The Gorge (SO88), Bunkers Hill Wood (SO99) and Alton (SK04). N. Pomiankowski

Netted Pug : Apedale CP; 2003. The 9th county record and the 5th since 1990. The nearest record is from Ashley Heath. It feeds on Bladder Campion which is not uncommon in the area so worth looking out for. N. Pomiankowski.

Please send records to:

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Whichever method you use to send records, please use the Bradley & Fletcher checklist number if possible. Also include the date and grid reference.