

Kent Moth Website Newsletter

KMN 1: January 2006

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Introduction

The year is just beginning, so those with generators are already planning what species to look for and where, while home trappers may have several species logged by now. In this newsletter there are ideas and projects that anyone can do, particularly if you enjoy walking in the country or at a local park.

Pheromones

These chemical attractants are used to find the **Clearwings** and now is the time to get your order in to the few companies that supply them. If you do not know of such a firm, use the internet to trace one of your choice. The chemicals can last a few years



Large Red-belted Clearwing
Jim Porter

when kept properly and care is needed to ensure you know which is which. When using them, try the late morning or early afternoon which experience has proved to be the best time. Remember these moths are little understood as they are



Hornet Clearwing
Jim Porter

seen so infrequently and are quite primitive, even rattling as they fly like wasps do? In conservation terms, they are Notable so any current finds will be most welcome. Not all the group come to pheromones so do please look out for recently hatched Hornet Moths when you go walking in appropriate habitats. Last year, a Surrey recorder told me of seeing one while they walked beside a river, it was resting on a stump.

Movement of Moth Populations



Orange Footman
Jim Porter

Have you noticed species coming to your garden trap that never used too? Or started finding species in woods where you did not a few years ago? Using the mapping system that you may have caught sight of on the BBC's Springwatch, progressive plotting over time we can see that the **Orange Footman** has been progressively recorded from East to West commencing near to the coastal woods. **Pine Hawk-moth** however has appeared from the Wealden woods in the Southwest and moved across Kent to the Northeast. Did you feel that happening from your own records? What other species have you noticed arriving or increasing?

Special Moths to find

Scalloped Shell is a good indicator of a fine wood, how many places can this be found in and how often is it seen? In 2003 it was seen in seven 10Km squares of the thirty from which it is known to occur but how many different woods can we all find it in 2006?



Scalloped Shell
Ian Ferguson

In 2003, BF650 *Esperia oliviella* was seen in the Blean complex, the first known sighting since 1992 but, in 2004, it was seen in two 10Km squares and, in 2005, it



Esperia oliviella
Ian Ferguson

was seen in at least four areas across the county so the total number of 10Km squares will have risen. Was this just a fluke due to recorders being there at the correct time or an indication of a population

increase? How many people saw it in 2005? Will 2006 be another good year and will we



Oecophora bractella
Jim Porter

even manage to find BF651 *Oecophora bractella*, last seen in Kent in 1924? Both these species spend their caterpillar days under bark, *bractella* may eat Honey fungus so is this a sign of fallen trees becoming suitable for this type of species, perhaps from the storms of 1987 and 1991? There was a definite time lag between the storm of 1987 and the rise in the number of Fritillary butterflies so why should moths be different, particularly ones with such a long term post-storm need. These species are known to fly during parts of the day, depending on the species, so you may find them flying together in dappled sunny spots in woods just like large numbers of BF649 *Esperia sulphurella* were seen in woods in 2005.

BF718 *Ethmia dodecea* is a pretty ermine moth and was reported from three of its five known 10Km squares in 2003, TR34, TR36 and TR37. Its food plant is **Common**

Gromwell and is shown in the Atlas of the Kent Flora 1982 to grow right across the Downs from Surrey boundary to Folkestone and Dover so it should be possible to find the moth in new places. I found the breeding location of the only known Surrey population, where is it currently



Ethmia dodecea on Gromwell
Jackie Kirby



Ethmia dodecea
Jim Porter

restricted, but this may be because of the usual "where recorders go?" issue. If you

know Common Gromwell you can visualise the particular shade of green shown by the leaves, now see if you can remember any signs of light brown markings on them. This is the effect created by the larvae eating from the underside from inside a loose web. The caterpillars that I saw with Jim Porter at the Surrey site were rather interesting, being creamy lemon overall with little square marks of blue and white along the sides and black

ends. Now this may sound odd but they did resemble those one coach push-me pull-you trains. On seeing these and the damage, I realised that the species had been nibbling away at the Common Gromwell at the site when I was the warden in the early 1980's. Then the surprise had been the Common Gromwell itself, as the County Ecologist had no other records of it at the time.

Please see if you can find the Common Gromwell and then keep tabs on the plants to see if the marks, if not the caterpillars, turn up, which will be evident late in the year. Do send or email in photographs rather than disturb the animals.

Triangle was seen in a new 10Km square in 2002 [TR15] to which Ian referred at the end of the 2003 report where he explained that he had suppressed the record until he had seen the photograph. Its usual places were shown to be Hamstreet and Appledore [Park Wood 1980]. In 2005,



Triangle
Jim Porter

Triangle was seen in several different places that are not in its usual part of Kent so did you see it too? Was it having a good year or was this just chance?



Triangle
Ian Ferguson

Do please have a look in woods that might hold this species. They seem to have a certain dampness about them so, if you know of such woods, try those first in the latter part of July. Let us know of any success you may have and also no-shows as this helps to narrow down the locations and

enhance our knowledge of where it is [and not], good hunting.

Forester is currently unreported since 2001 unless you have seen it in 2005, and it has only been reported from one 10Km square in Kent so is it really that rare or can we find it in new locations this year? In Waring/Townsend/Lewington 2003 we are told it feeds on Common and Sheep's Sorrel and has been found in damp neutral grassland, limestone grassland, chalk downland, acid and sandy heathland, mature coastal sand-dunes, woodland rides and clearings. Well there is plenty of choice in where to look then, perhaps it *is* rare or maybe we are looking for it in the wrong way. So try finding it by day walks in likely places, if you know any good times of day to try, let us know.



Forester
Jim Porter

Five-spot Burnet and **Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet** are very difficult to tell apart and, whilst most moth spotters will know this, those that use the internet to identify moths they have found whilst out walking, will be unaware of this problem and seem to report the **Five-spot Burnet**. In fact, I received an email about a sighting from a new recorder but my hard drive failed, destroying my email records so I have been unable to contact the chap. The narrow border refers to the underwing and is therefore not visible in general



Five-spot Burnet ???
Dennis Newland

field observations, unless one is gifted in handling the moths. Furthermore, if one looks at the specimens in Skinner 1984, they seem too difficult even then as the border can vary in its narrowness; as I hope you agree - and I was using a hand lens to check! The caterpillars though are a little different and feed on different sorts of plants so what I ask recorders to do is to let us know where you see five spotted burnets and we can go back then in case of late specimens or earlier the next year to look for caterpillars. You never know, as the **Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet** is reported regularly but the chalk form of the **Five-spot Burnet** has not been seen since 1986 whilst the marsh form, not since 1957.

Both the **Orange Underwing** and **Light Orange Underwing** are reported in Kent although the latter is much more restricted, being found in only two 10Km squares compared with nine. These moths are unusual in that they were night flyers that have moved to day flying so evolution in action, but this means that lepidopterists, walking in the early spring sunshine, could look for the moths. The **Orange Underwing** flies around Birch trees before they are in leaf starting at the tops then, as the day continues, it flies lower even coming to ground for moisture. So not too difficult to spot perhaps, do please have a go at finding them from the beginning of March. The **Light Orange Underwing** will fly around its foodplant too, in its case Aspen, and may also be seen visiting puddles. The records for this species are from a little later in March to early April. Do tell us how you get on.



Orange Underwing
Jim Porter

The bee hawk-moths have had a rough time in most of the country and Kent is not exception. I have been kindly shown the larvae of the



Broad-bordered Bee Hawk
Jim Porter

Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth feeding on Honeysuckle, not in Kent mind before you ask, and they are very distinctive. With Honeysuckle being so common, it is possible we still have the moth in Kent even though it has not been seen since 1998. Visits to nice warm woodlands with open areas and Honeysuckle are what you need to try. The **Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth** caterpillars feed



Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk
Ian Ferguson

on Devil's-bit Scabious but also Small Scabious and Field Scabious so visits to downlands or chalky grasslands seems to be the order of the day, even though this species has not been recorded in Kent since 1958. When I attended the formal opening and open day at the Butterfly Conservation headquarters in Dorset, the visitors were pleased to see a Hummingbird Hawk-moth nectaring by the main door when it was realised that the second moth that had just arrived was actually a **Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth** so watch out in your gardens too.



Garden Tiger
Ian Ferguson

Caterpillars

Please have a look for caterpillars this year as Jim Porter's book 1997 is very useful especially when you read the introduction and wait until the caterpillar is in the final instars. We do get sent records from people with the book and no clear interest in moth trapping [as yet] but, if we can encourage moth trappers to go for walks to see day flying species, they may see caterpillars and day flying micro-moth species that can be identified too. If parasitic wasps emerge from your caterpillars or chrysalides, then you can get these identified by sending them, with appropriate data to:

Dr. Mark Shaw
National Museums of Scotland
Chambers Street
Edinburgh
EH1 1JF

I found a bundle of Hornbeam leaves at Ellenden Wood last year and, from a quick look at the caterpillar [a tortrix], I could not identify it, even using the index from Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland volume 7.2 1991 to find hornbeam feeders to look up in Ray Society books 1973 & 1979. So, I waited until it hatched and found I had a Bud Moth [BF1205 *Spilonota ocellana*], when I re-checked, but using Ray Society volume 2, there it was, known to feed on hornbeam and spot-on description of the caterpillar. The foodplant list for Bud Moth in The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland states "P. on trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants; buds in spring." which is why I had not been able to narrow it down – it feeds on too many plants to mention them all and the Ray Society book only states foodplants of economic concern in a general list rather than having an all known foodplants cross check list. So, once you have identified the caterpillar or moth, you can check the foodplants from the species account which, in Ray Society book, is quite extensive.

Please Find List

In Surrey, Jim Porter publishes a "hit" list of micro-moth species that have not been seen for a long time and provides data on recent sightings and likely places to look. I do not know if we can be that detailed but with the database becoming available to search through we will publish on the website a list of species not seen recently and ask that you **Please Find** them! Our list will be printable off the web site and split into sections so you can pull off the bit you want. Please let us know how you get on, particularly as this is the last year that re-finding can go into the proposed book on Kent Lepidoptera.

Table of Mentioned Species

We will create a table of the species that get a specific mention to be looked for so that you can see how progress is being made in finding them. This will be separate from the **Please Find List** table for which there is not such a detailed dissuasion for each species.

AditLite

This computer program is free to recorders and is issued by the record keepers that have

AditSite as their database. This allows us to personalise the version of AditLite you receive. It is an easy program into which to type records and then send them electronically to the database keepers so they do not have to retype your records. Using AditLite will enable people who send in annual summaries, to send in records from a simple list for each day trapped and these will be much more useful in phenology and seeing changes in moth flying dates, particularly as the lepidoptera is now an index group for the European monitoring system on agri-environment schemes. There is a small garden moth scheme in the midlands but AditLite is easier to operate for all recorders as the system covers *all* lepidoptera so all your sightings can go into the county-wide monitoring of moth species.

If you have found this website informative and enjoyable, please let us by emailing us @ mail@kentmoths.org