



Newsletter No 23

# Huntingdonshire Moth & Butterfly Group



September 2003

Please pass any items of interest for the Spring newsletter to the current editor: Nick Greatorex-Davies, 28 Old Pound Close, Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon PE28 9DY, Tel: 01480 301 685, email: ngd@ceh.ac.uk.

*Two-page newsletter:* I have been unable to get everything at a readable size on to one page this time so don't forget to look at the second page!

## ----- Bumper year for migrants -----

So far it has been an excellent year nationwide for migrant Lepidoptera and particularly good for the **Painted Lady**, **Hummingbird Hawk-moth** and **Convolvulus Hawk-moth**. Many other species have also occurred in high numbers. Numbers of **Painted Ladies** are unlikely to have surpassed the great **Painted Lady** year of 1996, but undoubtedly Butterfly Monitoring Scheme results will show it to have been the 2<sup>nd</sup> best year since 1976 when the scheme began.

**Hummingbird Hawk-moths** have been everywhere throughout the UK. I have received many reports from Hunts. from HuMBuG members, colleagues at CEH Monks Wood and members of the general public (See also Hunts Post 17<sup>th</sup> Sept). Places where they have been seen include Alconbury, Alconbury Weston, Bluntisham, Brampton, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Kings Ripton, Little Paxton, Needingworth, St Neots, St Ives, Sawtry, Stukeley, Upwood, Yaxley and Woodwalton – most were nectaring on garden flowers and some saw the moth(s) on a number of occasions. However none beats a garden in Bury where one person reported seeing up to three **Hummingbird Hawk-moths** at a time on a total of 31 days from 6<sup>th</sup> July to 17<sup>th</sup> September! Thanks to all those who sent me records – unfortunately too many to list here. I think just about everybody has seen one except me!

Large numbers of **Convolvulus Hawk-moths** have been reported in the south of England during August with double figures being recorded in some light traps on some nights. Just four have been recorded in Hunts. so far; one was seen during the evening on Tobacco flowers in Houghton on 13<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> Aug. (Mr & Mrs Clear), and one was found dead in a bathroom in Huntingdon on about 9<sup>th</sup> September (Marion Abbott). Two others were seen in mid September, one in Stow Longa and another in Kings Ripton (no other details available). 1983 was regarded as the 'Great convolvuli year', but it is likely that 2003 will surpass it.

**Clouded Yellows** are also common this year and there have been several reports from Hunts. Including Tesco's filling Station, Huntingdon 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug. (Nick G-D), Hampton NR 2<sup>nd</sup> Aug. (Andrew Frost), Little Paxton Pits 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug. (Andrew Booth). For more details on migrant lepidoptera to the UK see: <http://www.migrantmoth.com>

**Woodwalton Fen trapping:** Final 2003 trapping session: 17<sup>th</sup> Oct.  
Start 5.00p.m.

Contact Barry Dickerson beforehand to check that it is still on (or postponed) or if you are likely to be late. Bring a good torch, warm clothes, a sleeping bag (if sleeping in the bungalow) and something to eat and drink for a night cap and for an early breakfast.

As expected trapping at Woodwalton Fen has been mixed this year, but 22<sup>nd</sup> August was particularly good with about 130 species recorded.

## ★ - HMBG winter indoor meetings schedule - ★

Meetings to start at 8.00pm in the smaller meeting room at Hinchingsbrooke Country Park as follows: **[Don't forget subs are due on Oct 1<sup>st</sup> (£5 single, £6 joint)]**

**Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> October:** Barry Dickerson: *Leafminer identification*

**Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December:** Nick Greatorex-Davies: *Butterflies of Bulgaria (trip 08-22 June 2003)*.

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> February:** Ian Woiwod: *The Rothamsted moth trapping scheme.*

**Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> April:** Members evening & quiz night, this time to be set by Nick G-D the 2003 quiz winner! Bring slides, specimens and other items of interest.

## \* Other forthcoming events:

### AES annual exhibition

Sat 4<sup>th</sup> October: as usual at Kempton Park Racecourse, Staines Road, Sunbury, 11.00 a.m. start. [The racecourse is near the M25 just adjacent to the start of the M3]

### BENHS annual exhibition

Sat 6<sup>th</sup> November: at Imperial College, London. 10.00 a.m. start

### National Moth Night

Sat 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2004, corporate venue still to be arranged.

Please begin thinking about any contribution (long or short) you might make to the **Annual Report**. Send these to Barry Dickerson by the end of January at the latest please.

● The next newsletter is planned for April 2004. Please send any items for inclusion to Nick G-D.

## Some Hunts BAP species – good news

There are 53 species of moths on the governments UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) list of priority species of particular conservation concern. Many of these have declined dramatically in Britain in recent decades. The following provides some good news for three of these which occur in Hunts.

### Buttoned Snout – proof of breeding in Hunts

In Hunts, adults have been recorded in small numbers almost annually in Hemingford Grey since 1998 (Nick G-D). These are the first records for the county since the Victoria County History (published 1922). Although infrequently recorded at light, the 1<sup>st</sup> (1998) was caught in a garden MV trap. Most of those caught since were netted by torch-light soon after dusk.

The caterpillars feed on Hop and make characteristic feeding holes in the leaves. On 18<sup>th</sup> July Robin Field from Essex (officially working on the species), Barry Dickerson and Nick G-D visited sites in the Huntingdon area where Hop was known to be present. Larvae were found (by beating) at sites in Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon, Hartford and St. Ives confirming that the species is breeding and well established in Hunts.

Following this search further searches in the south of the county revealed larvae at Little Paxton Pits on 28<sup>th</sup> Aug. and at Coneygeare, Eynesbury on 29<sup>th</sup> Aug.

### Another good year for White-spotted Pinions

For the second year running Barry Dickerson recorded larger numbers of White-spotted Pinion than usual in August. Examples of high catches included 13 to a 6w actinic trap at Hail Lane, Abbotsley on 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug., 21 to a 125w MV over a sheet at Raveley Wood on 4<sup>th</sup> Aug., and 12 in a 6w actinic trap at Weaveley Wood also on 4<sup>th</sup> Aug. However only two were caught over the whole flight period in the Monks Wood Rothamsted trap which is fairly typical for recent years.

### Square-spotted Clay on the increase

Since about 1999 this species has appeared in moth traps at several sites in the county suggesting that the species is on the increase locally. In 2003 eleven came to a 6w actinic trap at The Gorse on 4<sup>th</sup> Aug. and a singleton was also recorded at Hail Lane, Abbotsley on the same night (Barry Dickerson).

## Other sightings:

**Queen of Spain Fritillary** - just outside Hunts. - in a Chatteris garden on 24<sup>th</sup> July (Mark Ward).

Late **Lilac Beauty** was trapped on 12<sup>th</sup> Sept. in Gamsey Wood (Barry Dickerson).

**Pale –lemon Sallow** was trapped in Hemingford Grey on 21<sup>st</sup> Sept. – only 3<sup>rd</sup> record in recent decades (Nick G-D).

Two **Old Ladies** dead in garden pond – in cop! Little Paxton 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. (Ian Dawson).

Bilateral gynandromorph **Brimstone!** (i.e. one half male and one half female!) Little Paxton Pits on 3<sup>rd</sup> Aug. (Andrew Booth).

**Bordered Straw** (migrant species) at Yaxley, 28<sup>th</sup> June (Andrew Frost).

**Gem** (migrant species) at Grafham, 20<sup>th</sup> Sept. (Barry Dickerson).

## — Extra broods —

The long hot summer has meant that some species that do not normally produce a second or third brood are doing so this year. Apart from the **Yellow-tailed Moth** which has been trapped frequently over the past couple of weeks here in Hunts. (by Barry Dickerson) and elsewhere, and the **Lilac Beauty** mentioned above, Barry trapped **Buff Arches** on 4<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Sept. He also had an **Oak Hook-tip** at Stonely on 18<sup>th</sup> Sept. This species has been trapped commonly nationally this September. Several **Blotched Emeralds** have also been reported but not in Hunts. Several micro-moth species are also producing an unusual late brood, for example **Ringed China Mark** (Pyralidae) has been particularly common here in Hunts. If we have more mild nights it is likely that more unusual late brood species will turn up.

### Pyrenean Trip Report (15-22 July) From Peter Rowlings

7 members had a superb week in the Pyrenees with excellent weather apart from the last full day. We identified 97 species of butterfly, including such "goodies" as **Bog Fritillary**, **Camberwell Beauty**, **Silvery Argus**, **Moroccan Orange-tip** and **Spanish Purple Hairstreak**. There would have been more if we could have used the net in Spain. With experts in the group on birds, trees and flowers there was always something to absorb our interest.

### Good Butterfly summer

Reports from many observers and butterfly transect recorders suggest that numbers of many butterfly species are well up on the past few years which have been generally poor for butterflies. This is almost certainly due to the hot dry summer weather. Just how much numbers have increased and which species have benefited most will not be quantifiable until about Christmas time when BMS data have been analysed. However it is clear that the **Small Tortoiseshell** has had a particularly good year after several very poor years.

Many thanks to all who have contributed information for this newsletter. Thanks also to Barry Dickerson and Henry Arnold who read through the text and made some corrections.