



# Huntingdonshire Moth & Butterfly Group



Please pass any items of interest for the late summer 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](mailto:ngd@ceh.ac.uk). This newsletter is produced 2 or 3 times a year – this is the first for 2005.

## ----- Poor spring weather - but plenty of Holly Blues -----

Although there have been some nice warm spring days these have been relatively few compared to the cool, generally cloudy and often windy days. It has been surprisingly hard to find days to walk butterfly transects in some weeks and moth trapping has generally produced poor results.

However **Holly Blues** (*Celastrina argiolus*) have been plentiful not only here in Huntingdonshire (VC 31) but, judging by reports on the egroups, also elsewhere in southern England. Almost any trip out into the garden (on the occasions the sun has been shining and it has not been too windy!) and within five minutes two or three **Holly Blues** have been seen. This experience seems to have been widespread. This year for the first time ever I actually watched a pair court and mate – unfortunately I did not have a camera available at the time!

### Moth trapping events in 2005

**Woodwalton Fen** (all Friday evening start):

**April 15<sup>th</sup>:** Was cancelled due to poor weather

**May 13<sup>th</sup>:** Was cancelled due to poor weather

**June 10<sup>th</sup>:** 8.00pm start (weather permitting!!).

**July 1<sup>st</sup>:** 8.45pm start

**August 5<sup>th</sup>:** 7.15 start

**Sept 2<sup>nd</sup>:** 6.15 start

**National Moth Night.** Saturday July 9<sup>th</sup>:

Venue: **Monks Wood NNR** (Public event – all night for those who want to stay). Meet at entrance gate to CEH Monks Wood by 8.30pm. Nick G-D will organise access and safe parking (*please let me know if you are thinking of coming*). The reserve manager Chris Gardiner will be with us to help us move equipment to locations around the wood before dark and later to collect.

**Holme Fen: (dates to be arranged)**

Barry (Dickerson) is hoping to organise 3-4 sessions this year. All will be on **weekdays**. Dates will be arranged at short notice according to weather conditions. If you are interested in coming (and if you have not done so already) please contact Barry to register your interest (so far 5 have done so). Barry has a key to the Fen so cars can be taken onto the Fen and away from the road for extra security.

### Summer Butterfly trips

**June 26<sup>th</sup> (Sun.): Thrift Wood** to see **Heath Fritillary**. Meet 11.00am at grid ref: TL790017 (OS map 167). Entrance to site is on B1418, 400m south of Brewer's Arms pub in Bicknacre. Parking for a few cars at main gate and on verge opposite.

**July 31<sup>st</sup> (Sun): Buxton Heath** to see **Silver-studded Blue**. Meet at 10.30am at: TG171214 (OS map 134) where there is an area for parking. Take path north from car park through the wood to the heath. Later on to: **Winterton NNR** at TG498198 (and **Horsey Gap** at: TG464242) to see **Dark Green Fritillary** and **Grayling**.

For more details and to register your interest please contact Barry Dickerson on 01480 475 689.

### BAP news

#### Buttoned Snout found in north of the county

Steve Dudley had a **Buttoned Snout** (*Hypena rostralis*) in his light trap at Farcet near Peterborough. This is the furthest north in Huntingdonshire it has been found.

Another **Buttoned Snout** came to light in Hemingford Grey on 27<sup>th</sup> May. This is now a well-known local site for this generally scarce moth.

#### White-spotted Pinion larvae found in Monks Wood

A half an hour search of the foliage of the lower branches of elm (*Ulmus carpinifolia*) in a shady quarter in the north-west part of Monks Wood revealed three **White-spotted Pinion** (*Cosmia diffinis*) larvae. These are the first known records of larvae from the wood. The moth occurs in small numbers in the Rothamsted trap there every year so these are not a surprising find, though similar searches in the last two years did not reveal any larvae.

#### No Barred Tooth-striped in Monks Wood since 1997

The past two years an actinic trap has been operated on several nights throughout March and April in an apparently suitable glade in Monks Wood (VC31s only known site for this species) which has abundant low growth Privet (*hostplant*). No **Barred Tooth-striped** (*Trichopteryx polycommata*) have been trapped. It used to be trapped fairly regularly in the Monks Wood Rothamsted trap up to the early 90s. The last record was in 1997. We hope to carry out dusk torch searches in March and April 2006 (contact **NG-D** if interested).

### Huntingdonshire Lepidoptera database continues to grow

Barry has now entered nearly **160,000** records into his Huntingdonshire Lepidoptera database.

Please continue to send in your records to Barry. If you are trapping or finding micro-moths that you cannot identify with certainty please keep a sample and send them to Barry. Please put the moths in a container labelled with the date of capture, location and your name. Moths can be killed 'humanely' by placing them in a freezer for a short time. Barry can supply containers if required. Barry also wants **macro**-moths that need dissecting in order to determine their identity.

● The next newsletter is planned for early August / September 2005. Please send any items for inclusion to Nick G-D.

**--- HMBG website soon to be online ---**

We are delighted that after asking for help to build a website for the group that Marion Palmann volunteered. After conferring with Barry she has largely completed the basic website, complete with pictures and it should be ready to go on-line soon. The website will contain information about the group, forthcoming events (meetings and field trips etc.), the newsletters, the county Lepidoptera report etc. It will also have a 'page' for members to show their moth and butterfly photographs and other photos relevant to the group. There will also be a moths of the month for each month of the year. For each month there will be a series of photos of the most likely moths to turn up in your moth trap with a bit of text to go with each one. This is especially designed to help those new to moths identify what they find. So far only March is completed, but the rest will be done over the coming months. I know some of you take excellent photos of moths so if you would like to contribute please let me know - I have a growing collection of my own, but I will need and would like others to contribute too.

### ***Overwintering Hummingbird Hawk-moth***

Last year Barry had 18 records of **Hummingbird Hawk-moth** (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) for Huntingdonshire, including one found by Brian Davis in Easton at the window inside his house on 20<sup>th</sup> December! (As reported in the Hunts Fauna & Flora Society Annual Report). The moth was caught and later transferred to a small cardboard box with a lid and placed in his garage. On 18<sup>th</sup> March, on a warm and sunny morning Brian went to open the box. The moth was still alive and within five minutes it had warmed up and it flew off.

This provides further evidence that the adults of this species can overwinter successfully in Britain. A few years ago Mark Telfer found one on the wall outside his house in January. It remained there for several days before it disappeared. There have already been a number of records of **Hummingbird Hawk-moths** in Britain this spring, including two or three in Cambridgeshire. It may be that some of these at least have successfully overwintered.

### **Some local moths**

On 27<sup>th</sup> May (one of the few warm nights we have had) a **Ruddy Highflyer** (*Hydriomena ruberata*) came to Nick G-Ds garden light trap in Hemingford Grey. This sallow feeding species seems to be rather scarce in this and neighbouring counties. This is the first Hunts. record for the species since one was recorded in the mid 1990s. The previous record was 1978.

The **Orange Footman** (*Eilema sorocula*) is increasing and spreading its range nationally and several have been recorded in Hunts. in recent years. This year at least two have been recorded in the Monks Wood Rothamsted trap in May, and Barry recorded one in Archer's Wood on 30/04.

### **Grizzled Skipper railway survey thwarted**

Sharon Hearle, Butterfly Conservations' (BC) Regional Development Officer, and Val Perrin have been carrying out a survey of the **Grizzled Skipper** (*Pyrgus malvae*) in BCs Eastern Region which includes Huntingdonshire. Some sites were surveyed in Hunts. last year and a new colony was found by Val on the east side of the main north railway line, north of the Connington Ballast Tip colony, itself north of the Woodwalton Marsh colony. The **Grizzled Skipper** also occurs a bit further south still in the railway cutting either side of Wennington Bridge, and of course around CEH Monks Wood and in the fields along the south edge of the wood. It used to occur within the boundary of the wood itself, in the glades called East and West Field, but appears to be extinct there now. **Grizzled Skippers** were last seen in the Monks Wood Fields in 1998 and surveys in the last few years, including this year have revealed none despite a careful search. It is likely that current management (changed from late summer mowing to winter grazing since 1998) does not provide enough suitable habitat.

Except for the Monks Wood **Grizzled Skipper** colony, all these colonies are on or adjacent to railway land and there is the distinct possibility that other undiscovered colonies may exist elsewhere on or adjacent to the railway land. Many colonies in neighbouring counties have also been found to be on Brownfield sites associated with railway land. Sharon and others had hoped to carry out a survey of railway land from Huntingdon to Peterborough this year - or as much of it as we could cover in a day. The survey was going to be expensive to carry out as we would need to have a Railtrack employee with us the whole time, but the money for that was available. In the end our plans were thwarted because we were unable to get the insurance cover required. It does seem to be unnecessarily difficult, if not impossible, to get (legally) onto railway land!

One survey I (NG-D) did manage (today (8/6) as I write this) was to walk the old railway line from St Ives to the Over-Swavesey Cutting (in Cambs VC29) and back, as land adjacent to the old railway and surrounding the St. Ives gravel pits looked promising from aerial photographs. A large colony of **Grizzled Skippers** exists at Over Cutting but is likely to be destroyed if the plans for a Guided Bus from Cambridge to St Ives go ahead. In the event, despite perfect weather conditions, I only found **Grizzled Skippers** in the Over Cutting, except for a singleton about 2-300m west of the Over Cutting bridge. There appears to be ample suitable habitat towards the St Ives end, so good in parts I was sure I would find them there. However there is a long section between the gravel pits and the Over Cutting which is unsuitable for Grizzled Skipper so if they had not existed at the St Ives end it seems unlikely that they would be able to colonise it naturally. Numbers seen at Over Cutting were low (I saw just 7) indicating that it is now well past the peak of the flight period there, so I plan to look again - a little earlier next year.

Many thanks to Barry Dickerson for his contributions to this newsletter and also to Henry Arnold who read through the text and made some corrections.