

Macro-moths 2017

Melissa & Andy Banthorpe

Introduction

An early start to spring, and warm conditions continuing throughout, brought some species out early. Summer started well with June being quite hot. On the 19th traps were run in Home Wood, Northill, and an impressive total of 135 macros were recorded. The species list included the first new macro addition for the county this year – Rosy Marbled. Unsettled, cooler and wetter weather followed in July and August. September started cooler too but there were some mild days and mid-October was unseasonably warm, with the mild weather continuing into November. It was noticed that during this period a significant number of late on-the wing dates were being recorded for a range of species, not just in Bedfordshire but across the UK, which culminated in a “note” being written up in *The Entomologist’s Record and Journal of Variation* (Homan 2018).

There were six other additions to the county list – Cypress Pug, Gypsy Moth, Small Marbled, Clifden Nonpareil, Oak Rustic and L-album Wainscot. In addition the following migrant moths were also seen during the year: Humming-bird Hawk-moth, Vestal, Gem, Dewick’s Plusia (probably resident now), Silver Y, Scarce Bordered Straw, Small Mottled Willow, Black-spotted Chestnut (probably resident now), Delicate, Dark Sword-grass and Great Brocade.

During the year the Recorders ran lights in the field at the following places: Duck End NR, Carthagena Golf Course, John O’Gaunt Golf Course, Sandy (Stratford Road), Stockgrove Country Park, Totternhoe Old Quarry and Woburn Safari Park.

We were assisted in recording by a network of people regularly running light traps/ recording in their gardens in 2017. These were at Bedford, Beeston, Biggleswade (three sites), Blunham, Bromham, Carlton, Clifton (two sites), Clophill, Dunstable, Eaton Ford, Heath & Reach, Houghton Regis, Kempston (two sites), Lidlington, Lower Standon, Luton (two sites), Markyate, Marston Moretaine, Potton (two sites), Sandy, Sharnbrook (two sites), Shefford, Stotfold, Studham, Toddington, Turvey, Upper Caldecote, Upper Standon, Wilden and Wootton (two sites). Traps were also run regularly at the following locations: John O’Gaunt Golf Course (Sutton), Marston Vale Country Park (MVC), The Lodge (RSPB Sandy), Waterloo Thorns and Whipsnade (National Trust Office).

In addition we have access to the records from the Rothamsted Insect Survey (RIS) traps in the county. These are situated at Cockayne Hatley and Eaton Bray. Ian Woiwod continues to operate and identify the macro-moths from the Cockayne Hatley RIS trap, and Melissa identifies the macros from the Eaton Bray RIS trap, which is operated by Graham Buss.

The recording boundary for moths in Bedfordshire is that of the Watsonian Vice-county 30. For more details of this see the article in the 2009 Journal (Banthorpe 2010).

Review

The following list includes species of interest recorded in VC30 during 2017. We are keen to receive records for all species, even those regarded as very common, as without these records the dataset is incomplete and we will not be able to track future changes in abundance and distribution.

Most of the species analysis is based on the 31,181 records for 2017 that had been uploaded to the county database by mid-April 2017. However, a couple of datasets are not in yet, and some records have been gleaned from emails and other sources.

The list is based on that of Agassiz, Beavan & Heckford (2013), which was a revised taxonomic list and numbering system of British Lepidoptera. This list has subsequently been updated and corrected; the new version can be downloaded via the Natural History Museum's website. The number in square brackets refers to a species' Bradley-Fletcher number (Bradley 2000), which were used in previous reports.

A checklist of the macro-moths of VC30 with their current status and acceptable flight-date ranges is on the Beds Moth Group (BMG) website www.vc30moths.org.uk or available from the Recorders on request. This is usually updated annually. Our records are also scrutinised at a national level, so please note that your records may well be rejected if you have not provided sufficient evidence. This also applies for commoner species outside their acceptable flight-date range.

Hepialidae

3.003 Map-winged Swift *Korscheltellus fusconebulosa* (De Geer) [18]

A singleton to light at Home Wood (Northill) on 19th June (LRB, MB & BS) was the only record in 2017.

3.004 Gold Swift *Phymatopus hecta* (L.) [16]

There were two records this year, both on 19th June: a singleton came to light in Home Wood (LRB, MB & BS), and several males and certainly one, possibly two females were seen late evening on Studham Common (CRBB).

Cossidae

50.001 Goat Moth *Cossus cossus* (L.) [Nb] [162]

A single larva was spotted early afternoon on 15th August crawling along the path in the gardens area of Jordans Mill (JM, HW & SB). This was the first record of Goat Moth in the county since 2009.

Sesiidae

52.002 Hornet Moth *Sesia apiformis* (Cl.) [Nb] [370]

Evidence of the species – adults, exit holes or pupal exuviae – was seen at the following locations in 2017: Bedford, Eaton Socon, Potton, Sandy, Spanoak Wood, Upper Sundon and by the cycle track at Willington.

52.008 Red-tipped Clearwing *Synanthedon formicaeformis* (Esp.) [Nb] [380]

A singleton was found resting on Ox-eye Daisy on 23rd July in a garden in Sandy (RAC).

52.011 Red-belted Clearwing *Synanthedon myopaeformis* (Borkh.) [Nb] [379]

Males were attracted to pheromone lures as follows: 10th June Sandy (1) (RAC) and 17th June Biggleswade (total of five from two locations) (RCR).

52.012 Yellow-legged Clearwing *Synanthedon vespiformis* (L.) [Nb] [374]

The only record this year was a single male to a pheromone lure on 29th July in Sandy (AS).

52.013 Currant Clearwing *Synanthedon tipuliformis* (Cl.) [Nb] [373]

There was also only one record of this species too – a single male to a pheromone lure on 17th July at Biggleswade (RCR).

52.014 Six-belted Clearwing *Bembecia ichneumoniformis* ([D. & S.]) [Nb] [382]

There were four records in 2017 as follows: a singleton was swept from a roadside verge on 20th June at Pepperstock (Luton) (CLB); a male was attracted to a pherome lure in Biggleswade in early July (RCR); and at Stratton Park Balancing Lake at least 20 (total from three locations on the site) came to a pheromone lure on 12th July, and ten (total from two locations on site) to a pheromeone lure a few days later (RCR).

Lasiocampidae**66.005 Small Eggar** *Eriogaster lanestris* (L.) [Nb] [1633]

Larval webs were reported on 26th May at Staploe (two active) (RCR), and on 13th June at Sharnbrook Summit (one out of four active) (RCR & RAB). At the latter site on the same day two further larvae were seen; these were away from the noted webs.

Sphingidae**69.010 Humming-bird Hawk-moth** *Macroglossum stellatarum* (L.) [Migrant] [1984]

There were 57 records received in 2017. The first was a singleton on 22nd April (DCr) at Bedford. The last was also a singleton, on 5th October at Kempston (HJG). The maximum seen was five on 8th July at Cranfield University, nectaring on Buddleia (RE).

Geometridae**70.004 Least Carpet** *Idaea rusticata* ([D. & S.]) [1699]

This species was first recorded in the county in 1976, and numbers have been steadily increasing since 2006. There is generally one generation – in Bedfordshire flying from early June to around the end of August – but sometimes a small second generation occurs in the autumn (mid-September–October) and very occasionally into November and December (Waring & Townsend 2017).

The first second-brood individual to occur in the county turned up on 26th September 2006 in Lower Stondon (AMB & MGB) and was noted as being very fresh. Further second generation individuals (all records involve singletons) appeared in: 2009 – on 18th and 19th September; 2011 – on 29th September; 2013 – on 20th September and 2nd and 4th October; 2014 – on 18th September and 20th and 30th October; 2015 – on 8th, 21st and 26th October; and in 2016 – on 17th and 27th October.

In 2017 the main flight period ran from 9th June to 16th August, with none reported again until the 9th of September. From this date until 24th October, 19 records (all of singletons) were received and have been treated as a second generation. This is the largest second brood recorded in any one year so far in the county.

70.037 Clay Triple-lines *Cyclophora linearia* (Hb.) [1681]

There were three records of this species in 2017, which were the first confirmed records since 2011. Singletons were trapped on 11th May at Biggleswade (LRB) and 10th August and 4th September at Upper Caldecote (MB, KBu & LARB).

Please note that records of this species are unlikely to be accepted without photographic evidence, as indicated in the county macro checklist.

70.038 Vestal *Rhodometra sacraria* (L.) [Migrant] [1716]

It was a good year for Vestal, with 22 records received. The first was reported on 4th August at Upper Caldecote (MB, KBu & LARB) and the last on 2nd November at Wootton (DJO). The maximum seen were three between 19th and 23rd October (combined catch) in the Cockayne Hatley RIS trap (IPW).

70.043 Chalk Carpet *Scotopteryx bipunctaria* ssp. *cretata* (Prout) [Nb] [1731]

There were just two records in 2017. A singleton was seen during the day on 5th July at Houghton Regis Chalk Pit (TM), and around 40 were trapped on 14th July at Totternhoe Old Quarry as part of a Wildlife Trust event (AMB & MGB).

70.047 Gem *Nycterosea obstipata* (Fabr.) [Migrant] [1720]

A singleton was trapped on 20th December at Upper Caldecote (MB, KBu & LARB).

70.050 Balsam Carpet *Xanthorhoe biriviata* (Borkh.) [1721]

One at light on 7th July at Bromham (PA) was only the second record for the county, following the first in 2014.

70.083 Cypress Carpet *Thera cupressata* (Geyer) [1771a]

A singleton found late evening on 14th November near the entrance to Parkside Hall in Ampthill (AMB) was the second record for the county.

70.092 Spinach *Eulithis mellinata* (Fabr.) [1757]

Two coming to light on 16th June at Duck End NR was a rather nice surprise for the County Recorders (AMB & MGB), and rather unexpected. These were the first since 2013.

70.127 Fern *Horisme tersata* ([D. & S.]) [1782]

Amongst the ten records received for this species was a rather unseasonably late one, from 2nd September at Lower Stondon (AMB & MGB). This was a good seven weeks later than the ninth record of the year on 14th July. This late specimen was very fresh and was the second latest record for the county, being surpassed by one on 7th September 1975 in Sharnbrook (DVM). In recent years the latest Fern has been recorded is 1st August (2015).

70.159 Cypress Pug *Eupithecia phoeniceata* (Ramb.) [1855]

A singleton trapped on 4th October at Clophill (RC) was a new addition to the county list. It was entirely expected since the species is expanding its range, and also because one had been trapped in 2016 at Kensworth (Mick Price), which although now falls within the Bedfordshire Administrative Boundary is, for moth-recording purposes, in VC20 (Herts).

70.161 Golden-rod Pug *Eupithecia virgaureata* Doubl. [1851]

A female was trapped on 7th May at Wootton (PCo, gendet AMB). This was the first record for the county where any proof exists. Three records are noted in Colonel S.H.Kershaw's notebooks – 1935, 1937 and 1946 – but no specimens were found in his collection. There are also single records from the Ampthill (2004) and Eaton Bray II (1983) RIS traps, which would most likely have been gendetted but not kept. The species is common enough elsewhere in Britain but apparently rare in Bedfordshire.

70.203 Orange Underwing *Archiearis parthenias* (L.) [1661]

There were four records this year, all of singletons as follows: 11th (MB, KBu & LARB) and 13th March (DLB) The Lodge (RSPB Sandy), and 26th (DLB) and 27th March (JC & JS) Potton Wood.

70.204 Light Orange Underwing *Boudinotiana notha* (Hb.) [Nb] [1662]

Singletons were recorded five times this year as follows: 26th March Potton Wood (DLB); 2nd April Cockayne Hatley (IPW); and 2nd (IPW), 9th (JC & JS) and 11th April (IPW) Potton Wood.

70.236 September Thorn *Ennomos erosaria* ([D. & S.]) [1915]

There were three records of this species in 2017. On 7th July at Woburn Safari Park, as part of a bioblitz there, seven were attracted to MV light (AMB & MGB). This is the largest number ever recorded together. The other two records were of singletons to light too: 5th August Clifton (ARO) and 5th September Heath & Reach (MHo). These three records are the first of the species in the county since 2011.

Erebidae**72.011 Gypsy Moth** *Lymantria dispar* (L.) [Migrant/Adventive] [2034]

This was an expected, if not entirely welcome, addition to the county list in 2017, with a male trapped on 30th July at Kempston (MJP). The species is a defoliator and is seen as a serious pest in mainland Europe. The re-established British population is not causing too much of problem at the moment, and fortunately the larvae, unlike those of Oak Processionary *Thaumetopoea processionea* (another defoliator and pest species), pose no risk to human health.



Gypsy Moth and Small Marbled were new for county in 2017

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72.047 Hoary Footman *Eilema caniola* (Hb.) [Nb] [2045]

A male trapped on 12th August at Luton (AG, gendet AMB) was the third confirmed record of this species in the county.

72.073 Small Marbled *Eublemma parva* (Hb.) [Migrant] [2408]

This was also new to the county in 2017, and surprisingly there were two records a day apart. Both were singletons attracted to light traps as follows: 4th July Biggleswade (LRB) and 5th July Luton (AG).

72.076 Clifden Nonpareil *Catocala fraxini* (L.) [2451]

This was another addition to the county list and interestingly the record was of two. They were attracted to building/room lights late evening of 23rd September to one of the lodges at Center Parcs Woburn Forest (Milbrook) (MHa). The recorder was surprised to see one fly into the lodge then found another outside around ten minutes later, which was not the same individual.

The species had been on the county list but was removed in 2010 following the re-evaluation of the two records that had been in the database at the time. For more details see Banthorpe & Banthorpe 2010.

Noctuidae

73.010 Dewick's Plusia *Macdunnoughia confusa* (Steph.) [Migrant] [2436]

This moth continues to be recorded annually, since it was added to the county list in 2015. In 2017 there were again three records, as there were last year. Singletons were trapped on 1st September at Lidlington (AD) – a new site; and on 10th and 15th October at Upper Caldecote (MB, LARB & KBu), where it was seen in 2016.

73.015 Silver Y *Autographa gamma* (L.) [Migrant] [2441]

There were 212 records received in 2017. The first was a singleton trapped on 10th March at Luton (AG), and the last was one trapped on 23rd November (AD). The maximum number recorded was 18, which were amongst wing fragments collected from below a Brown Long-eared Bat roost in Maulden on 3rd August (SR).

Please note that the total number of records reported (30) for 2016 in the journal was wholly incorrect, and it is not clear where that figure came from. It should have been more like 250, and the revised total now that the vast majority of 2016's records are in is 284.

73.022 Gold Spot *Plusia festucae* (L.) [2439]

There were six records of this species, which were the first since 2013 and also the highest number of records in any year so far. In 2017 the species was recorded in Biggleswade, Eaton Ford (twice), Waterloo Thorns and Wootton (twice).

73.047 Coronet *Craniophora ligustris* ([D. & S.]) [2291]

In 2017 there was a significant increase in records received for this species – 53, with some recorders trapping it multiple times. At the beginning of 2013 there were just four records for the county and it was considered rare. Coronet was first listed as being present in the county in the Victoria County History in 1904; following this Arthur Foster, in the transactions of Hertfordshire Natural History Society for 1916, wrote that the moth was present at Pegsdon Hills but scarce (Foster 1917); Bernard West trapped one at Bedford in August 1957; and the next record was not until 2006 when CRBB trapped one in Studham. In 2013 there were five further records, just one in 2014 and then 14 records in 2016.

73.059 Toadflax Brocade *Calophasia lunula* (Hufn.) [RDB] [2223]

Amongst the 113 records received was a really late larval record – a single late-instar larva actively feeding on Purple Toadflax on 11th November in Lower Standon (AMB & MGB). Porter (1997) in his caterpillar identification guide writes that it is “A mainly double-brooded insect, with the larvae occurring in July and again in late August and September.” This reference book is getting a little out of date and Waring & Townsend (2017) is more reflective of the situation in Bedfordshire, quoting “Larva late Jun–Jul, sometimes early Aug, and late Aug–Sept.” Up until 2017 all the larval records in the county fell within these two date periods. In 2017, however, the first larvae were

reported on the 10th June, with more on the 13th and 20th, and then were also reported into October – 7th and 13th (the penultimate larval record of the year).

73.076 Scarce Bordered Straw *Helicoverpa armigera* (Hb.) [Migrant] [2400]

Singletons were recorded 12 times during 2017 (between 19th August and 2nd October) at the following locations: Biggleswade (two sites), Blunham, Clifton, Kempston, Lidlington, Luton, Turvey and Upper Caldecote.

73.087 Small Mottled Willow *Spodoptera exigua* (Hb.) [Migrant] [2385]

Five records were received in 2017 as follows: 21st July (2) and 28th and 29th August Biggleswade (LRB); 28th July John O'Gaunt Golf Course (ST det. IPW); and 17th August Upper Caldecote (MB, KBu & LARB).

73.091 Rosy Marbled *Elaphria venustula* (Hb) [Nb] [2396]

A singleton was attracted to MV light at Home Wood on 19th June (MB, LRB & BS). This was a new addition to the county list but had been expected. Since 2011 the species has been trapped a few times over the border at Rammamere Heath (VC24), including in 2017, and the thought is there is a small resident population there. The County Recorders ran lights three times at King's Wood Heath & Reach in 2012 during its flight period hoping it might appear but to no avail.

73.119 Crescent *Helotropha leucostigma leucostigma* (Hb.) [2368]

A singleton trapped on 1st August at Kempston (MJP) was the first since 2015.

73.141 Brown-veined Wainscot *Archanaara dissoluta* (Treit.) [2371]

A singleton was trapped at MVCP on 14th July (AD). The moth is a reedbed specialist, which probably came in with imported reed at the site. It is surprising that the species had not been caught at MVCP before, since AD has been regularly trapping in/near the reedbeds since 2014.

73.184 Pale-lemon Sallow *Cirrhia ocellaris* (Borkh.) [Na] [2276]

One was trapped on 24th September at Blunham (PH).

73.196 Black-spotted Chestnut *Conistra rubiginosa* (Scop.) [Migrant/recent colonist] [2259a]

This species turned up yet again in Upper Caldecote in 2017, where singletons were trapped on 21st and 30th December (MB, KBu & LARB). It is beginning to look like there is a very small resident population here.

73.214 White-spotted Pinion *Cosmia diffinis* (L.) [pRDB] [2317]

This species was trapped on four occasions in 2017 as follows: 29th July and 12th August John O'Gaunt Golf Course (ST); 4th August (2) Carthagena Golf Course (Potton end near elm copse) (AMB & MGB); and on 7th September in the Cockayne Hatley RIS trap (IPW).

73.223 Oak Rustic *Dryobota labecula* (Esp.) [2246a]

A female trapped on 2nd October at Toddington (JP) was a really unexpected addition to the county list in 2017. The species was added to the British list in 1999 and is now resident in parts of the south coast, including the Isle of Wight (Waring & Townsend 2017). Oak Rustic, though is also suspected of being a migrant to the UK too. Whether ours was a wanderer from a resident population or a migrant is not known; but 2017 was a good year for migrant moths in the county.

73.295 Delicate *Mythimna vitellina* (Hb.) [Migrant] [2195]

At the end of 2016 there were just three records of Delicate (all singletons) in the county database: 4th September 2006 Eaton Ford (A.A.Lawrence); 23rd September 2006 Great Barford (M.Corley); and 26th July 2007 Haynes (S.Knight). In 2017 there were a further three records (also singletons), all in October, as follows: 12th Shefford (PHo), 15th Carlton (HAS) and 16th Upper Caldecote (MB, KBu & LARB).

73.300 L-album Wainscot *Mythimna l-album* (L.) [Nb] [Resident/Migrant] [2202]

A singleton was attracted to MV light on 4th October in Blunham (PH). Like Oak Rustic, this was also a surprise addition to the county list. L-album Wainscot is also resident on the south coast (all counties) but its range extends to Essex, Suffolk and south-west Wales (Waring & Townsend 2017). The species is considered a migrant too but the Bedfordshire individual could easily have been a wanderer.



Rosy Marbled, Oak Rustic and L-album Wainscot were all additions to the county list in 2017 *Melissa Banthorpe* (Rosy Marbled, Oak Rustic) and *Peter Holden* (L-album Wainscot)

73.327 Dark Sword-grass *Agrotis ipsilon* (Hufn.) [Migrant] [2091]

There were 23 records in 2017. The first (1) was recorded on 24th May at Upper Caldecote (MB, KBu & LARB), and the last (1) on 28th October at Biggleswade (LRB). The maximum number recorded was two, which were amongst wing fragments collected from under a Brown Long-eared Bat roost on 3rd August at Maulden (SR).

73.332 Purple Clay *Diasria brunnea* ([D. & S.]) [2122]

A worn male trapped on 2nd July in Luton (AG gendet AMB) was only the second recent record since the mid-1990s. The other was in 2014, and weirdly, also trapped on 2nd July. This is now a very rare moth in the county; it was formerly more common, certainly in the 1970s and 1980s.

73.350 Great Brocade *Eurois occulta* (L.) [Nb] [Migrant] [2137]

A singleton to actinic light on 11th August at Upper Caldecote (MB, KBu & LARB) was the first since 2008.

74.002 Kent Black Arches *Meganola albula* ([D. & S.]) [Nb] [2076]

One trapped on 5th July at Heath & Reach (MHo) was the second record for the county, following a singleton in 2014.

Migrant records are forwarded to the appropriate editor for inclusion in the Immigration of Lepidoptera to the British Isles Report for the *Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation*.

All records are held by the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre and updated regularly. In addition the dataset is forwarded to the National Moth Recording Scheme annually.

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Melissa and Andy Banthorpe are the Society's joint Recorders for all Moths, a position they have held in an honorary capacity since 2016.