

Macro-moths 2020

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Introduction

There was one addition to the county list in 2020, which was Sallow Clearwing. In addition, the following migrant moths were seen during the year: *Convolvulus Hawk-moth*, *Humming-bird Hawk-moth*, *Vestal*, *Silver Y*, *Scarce Bordered Straw*, *Delicate*, *Pearly Underwing* and *Dark Sword-grass*.

There were no field trips organised by the Recorders during the year nor did we undertake any field-trapping, the first time this has happened since we took on the Recordership for macro-moths in late 2006. The annual 'Creatures of the night' event at Totternhoe that we normally run lights at for the Wildlife Trust was cancelled due to Government restrictions. However, some of the county's moth-ers did manage to do some field-trapping at various locations in the county.

We gained a handful of new trappers in 2020 but sadly two of our older moth-ers passed away in the year. Tony Smith, who lived in Carlton, used to run traps regularly in various woods in the north-west of the county until relatively recently. He died in January, and in December we also lost Charles Baker, who lived in Studham. He took on the County Moth Recordership in a caretaker role for a couple of years after Len Field stepped down and before Les Evans-Hill was appointed, and was also a co-author of '*The Butterflies and Moths of Bedfordshire*'. We had known both of these gentlemen for a long time because of their association with the BNHS, and both were very supportive of us when we first took on the Macro-moth Recordership. During 2020 we also learnt of the death of Walter Champkin (known as Wally), which occurred back in June. He was the Society's Recorder for Lepidoptera from 1972-1976.

We were assisted in recording by a network of people who regularly ran light traps/recorded in their gardens in 2020. These were at Bedford, Biggleswade (two sites), Blunham, Bromham, Clifton, Clophill, Dunstable, Eaton Ford, Heath & Reach, Ickwell Green, Kempston (two sites), Leighton Buzzard, Lidlington (two sites), Lower Stondon, Luton (two sites), Markyate, Marston Moretaine, Potton (two sites), Sandy, Shefford, Shortstown, Southill, Stotfold, Tempsford, Toddington, Upper Caldecote and Wootton. Traps were also run fairly regularly at the following locations: Folly Wood (Lidlington), Home Wood (Northill), John O'Gaunt Golf Course (Sutton), Marston Vale Millennium Country Park (MVMCP) and Saint Denny's churchyard (Little Barford).

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 2020. 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 was based on the 34,356 records for 2020 that had been uploaded to the county database by mid-April 2020. However, a handful of datasets had not been received by this time and some records were 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 updates having since been published in *The Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation*. 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.

Sesiidae

52.009 Sallow Clearwing *Synanthedon flaviventris* (Stdgr.) [Nb] [377]

This species was added to the county list in 2020. Distribution maps suggested it was not likely to occur in the East Anglian region, being a more southerly species. However, someone tried out a pheromone lure in the neighbouring county of Northamptonshire (VC32) in July 2020, just on the off chance, and found the species to be present. This spurred on one of our county moth-ers, Richard Bashford, to procure a lure and try it out in suitable habitat. On 22nd July, eight males came to the lure at Begwary Brook NR, near Wyboston. He recorded the species in Huntingdonshire, VC31, a few days later, which was also new to that county.

The following species of Sesiidae were also recorded during the year: Raspberry Clearwing, Hornet Moth, Lunar Hornet Moth, Red-tipped Clearwing, Orange-tailed Clearwing, Red-belted Clearwing, Yellow-legged Clearwing, Currant Clearwing and Six-belted Clearwing.

Lasiocampidae

66.002 Pale Eggar *Trichiura crataegi* (L.) [1632]

There were four records of this species in 2020: two on 17th August at Lidlington, with singletons at Folly Wood, Lidlington, on 18th August, Marston Moretaine on 26th August, and in the Eaton Bray II RIS trap on 29th August.

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

It is very likely the high number of records (35) of this species received in 2020 was due in part to lockdown restrictions in the spring. People had to choose local walks over those farther afield, and some came across larval webs in locations where we previously had no records.

All the records submitted were of larval webs, the majority being occupied, and were noted from 23 1km squares. Webs were reported between 11th May and 23rd June from the following areas: Begwary, Bletsoe, Carlton, Colesdon, Colmwoth, Duloe, Eaton Ford, Honeydon, Knotting, Odell, Podington, Sharnbrook, Souldrop, Staploe/Upper Staploe and Wilden.

Sphingidae

69.004 Convolvulus Hawk *Agrius convolvuli* (L.) [Migrant] [1972]

Only one of the three individuals reported this year came to a light trap - at Potton on 19th September. Both the other two were seen during the day - one was found in a garden in Riseley on 13th September and the other was found at Totternhoe Old Quarry on 3rd October.

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

There were at least 47 records of this species in 2020. The first one was seen in a garden in Sandy on 4th April, and the last was seen in a garden in Bromham on 10th October. The maximum seen together was two, in a Kempston garden on 19th August.

Geometridae

70.032 Birch Mocha *Cyclophora albipunctata* (Hufn.) [1677]

A singleton was trapped in Ickwell Green on 10th August, which was only the second recent record in over 15 years; the other record came from Clifton in 2019.

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

Singletons were recorded at The Hollow, Potton on 16th September, in the Cockayne Hatley RIS trap on 20th September, and at Biggleswade on the 10th November.

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

One was trapped at Upper Caldecote on 29th October, which brings the total number of records for the county to four. The species was last recorded in VC30 in 2018.

70.121 Scallop Shell *Hydria undulata* (L.) [1789]

Just a single Scallop Shell was seen in 2020 on 15th July in Shortstown. The recorder had run a trap overnight and the moth had not been found in it when checked early morning on the 15th; it was found later in the day on the kitchen window.

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

There were at least 17 records of this species in 2020, a significant increase on 2019. The first was trapped in Southill on 15th August, and the last was trapped in Biggleswade on 29th September. The maximum count was two on 7th September in Leighton Buzzard.

70.203 Orange Underwing *Archiearis parthenias* (L.) [1661] / **70.204 Light Orange Underwing** *Boudinotiana notha* (Hb.) [Nb] [1662]

There was a single record of an Orange Underwing in 2020 from Sandy on 25th March. There was also an individual seen at King's Wood Heath & Reach on 9th April that could have been either species. It was not possible to identify this to species level from the photograph provided.

70.287 Annulet *Charissa obscurata* ([D. & S.]) [1964]

A singleton was trapped at Pegsdon Hills on 11th August, the first at that site since 2000. The species was last recorded in the county in 2018.

Notodontidae

71.001 Oak Processionary *Thaumetopoea processionea* (L.) [2022]

There were at least 16 records received in 2020 for this species and included one larval record supplied to the Recorders by Forest Research. An isolated mass of larvae were found on a single tree in June in the Stockwood Park area of Luton. This was the first time larvae had been recorded in the county. All the adults reported in the year were seen between 6th and 12th August. The maximum was four and these were trapped at Southill on 7th August.

Erebidae

72.011 Gypsy Moth *Lymantria dispar* (L.) [Vagrant/Accidental] [2034]

Of at least 24 records received in 2020, one was of a larva. An early instar was found at Maulden Wood on 9th June by the Recorders and was the first larval record for the county. Adults were recorded from 25th July to 21st August. The maximum count was four, which were trapped at Biggleswade on 31st July.

72.030 Jersey Tiger *Euplagia quadripunctaria* (Poda) [Nb] [2067]

In 2019 the first larva of this species was seen in the county. In 2020 there were three further larval records received. Singletons were found in gardens in Kempston on 6th and 10th April, and at least ten were seen in a Stagsden garden between 12th and 24th April.

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

At the time of writing the Recorders knew of 13 records of this species for 2020; all were of single adults. The first was trapped on 11th August in Blunham, and the last was found resting on a windowsill in Stevington on 29th October.

72.081 Dark Crimson Underwing *Catocala sponsa* (L.) RDB2 [2455]

There were three records of this species in 2020. Singletons were trapped at the same site in Biggleswade on 31st July and 10th August, plus one was trapped in Southill on 4th August.

Noctuidae

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

At least 16 individuals were reported during the year (all the records received were of singletons). The first of the year was trapped on 24th April at Biggleswade, and the last was trapped on 4th October at the same site as the first.

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

There were at least 448 records of this species received in 2020, a significant increase on the year before (166). The records also included a single larva found at Toddington on 1st October, which was only the second time the species had been found in the larval stage in the county. The first adult of the year, a singleton, was trapped on 2nd May at Clifton, and the last was of two trapped on 22nd December at Upper Caldecote. The maximum number recorded was 25, which were trapped on 18th August at Clophill.

73.057 Striped Lychnis *Cucullia lychnitis* Ramb. [Na] [2219]

The Recorders, with kind permission from the landowner, checked Dark Mullein plants again near Barton-le-Clay for larvae in 2020. On 30th July 116 larvae were seen; this was an increase on the previous year. It is hoped we will be able to continue yearly counts of the larvae at this site.

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

Singletons were trapped at the same site in Upper Caldecote on 18th September, 22nd October and 17th November. In addition one was also trapped in Leighton Buzzard on 28th September.

73.093 Clancy's Rustic *Caradrina kadenii* (Freyer) [2387a]

Surprisingly, a singleton of this species came to light at Upper Caldecote on 22nd September. This was just the second record for the county following one trapped in Bromham on 8th October 2010.

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

There were 32 records received in 2020. The first, a singleton, was trapped on 4th January at Biggleswade and the last, also a singleton, was trapped on 23rd December at Upper Caldecote. The maximum count was two, which were trapped on 8th November at Upper Caldecote. The species was recorded in the following new locations in 2020: Blunham, Clifton, Ickwell Green and John O'Gaunt Golf Course at Sutton.

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

It was a good year for the species again in 2020. There were 15 records received, including a larval record from the known site at Potton on 17th June. Adults were seen from 24th July to 22nd August, with a maximum count of 40 recorded in Home Wood, Northill, on 7th August. The species was recorded for the first time in the following locations: Blunham, Ickwell Green and Southill.

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

Singletons were trapped on 27th October at Ickwell Green, a new site for the species; on 8th November at Toddington; and on 21st November at Biggleswade, also a new site for the moth in the county.

73.257 Beautiful Yellow Underwing *Anarta myrtilli* (L.) [2142]

There was just one record of this species in 2020, which was of two larvae found at The Lodge (RSPB Sandy) on 13th September.

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

A singleton was trapped at Upper Caldecote on 13th October.

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

There were two individuals trapped during the year: one at Biggleswade on 26th June, and one at Upper Caldecote on 5th October. These were the first records since the species was added to the county list back in 2017.

73.307 Pearly Underwing *Peridroma saucia* (Hb.) [Migrant] [2119]

A singleton was caught in the Cockayne Hatley RIS trap on 23rd June.

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

In 2020 at least 26 records were received for this species. The first was trapped on 26th June at Upper Caldecote, and the last was trapped on 12th November at Biggleswade. The maximum count noted was two, which were trapped on 18th October at Ickwell Green.

73.356 Heath Rustic *Xestia agathina* (Dup.) [2135]

An adult of this species was trapped at Sandy on 13th September, and this was the first sighting of an adult since August 1949. The previous record, in 2016, had been of a larva.

Nolidae

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

There were six records in 2020. The first was trapped on 23rd June at Ickwell Green, and the last was trapped on 3rd September at MVMCP. The maximum count recorded was two, from traps run at Ickwell Green on 13th July and at Lower Shelton on 16th July.

Migrant records are forwarded to the appropriate editor for inclusion in the Immigration of Lepidoptera to the British Isles Report for the *Entomologists 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.

References

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Melissa and Andy Banthorpe are the Society's joint Recorders for all Moths, a position they hold in an honorary capacity, having taken on the macros in autumn 2006 and the micros as well in spring 2016.