



MONMOUTHSHIRE MOTH & BUTTERFLY GROUP

NEWSLETTER No 89

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*A monthly newsletter covering
Gwent and Monmouthshire Vice County 35*

Editor: Martin Anthoney

Neil Horton – From Beginner to Expert

Whilst clearing out old papers over Christmas, I was sorting through a folder of assorted lists passed on to me after Neil Horton's death in 2005 when a small pad of paper, which had been caught up in the folder spine, dropped out. It was a telephone memo pad which Neil had used to record the moths caught in his garden MV light trap during the year 1966. I was excited by this find because the fate of Neil's personal record notebooks is unknown, and the only records we have had until now are those he chose to use in his 1994 book, *Monmouthshire Lepidoptera*. Neil was my predecessor as VC35 County Recorder and best remembered for his discovery of a colony of the Silurian moth, a species new to Britain, in 1972. Two samples of the 1966 sheets are reproduced below.

|  TELEPHONE MESSAGE | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| Date | A.M. or P.M. | |
| No. | Name and Address | Details |
| | Plas Newydd. Usk. Mon. | |
| | Aug 15 th . 1966. M.V. Trap. (lawn) | following hot sunny day. |
| | Flane Shoulder. | |
| | Large Yellow Underwing (dozens) | Blood Vain - |
| | Lesser Y. Underwing. | Carpet ? |
| 1 | Lesser Broad-bordered Y. Underwing. | Mottled Beauty |
| | Phoenix | Noctuid ??? |
| | Small Phoenix. | Noctuid ??? |
| | Common Rustic. | Noctuid ??? |
| | Yellow-Tail. | |
| | Swallow Prominent IIII | |
| | Lesser Swallow Prominent 1 | |
| | Pebble Prominent IIII | Pyralide |
| | Short Dart. | Moths of Park. |
| | Knot-Grass. | Crambus brestellus |
| | Lychris. | Crambus culmellus |
| | Purple Thorn. | Pyrausta cecropia |
| | Smokey Wainscot. | |
| | Common Wainscot. | |
| | Dark Archer. | |
| | Silver Y. | |
| | Setaceous Helicon Character. | |
| | Maggie. | |
| | Sulphur Thorn. | |

Neil Horton's Moth list for an MV light in his Usk garden on 15th August 1966.

TELEPHONE MESSAGE

Date

A.M. or P.M.

| No. | Name and Address | Details |
|-----|---|--|
| | Plus Newydd. MV. Trap. 15/10/66 (Trap under veranda) | |
| | Beaded Chestnut (16 off) | |
| | Flounced Chestnut 1. * = my first. | |
| | Black Rustic. | |
| | Angle Shades. | |
| | Dark Wood Grass. | |
| | Festoon Thorn. | |
| | * ? Pale November Moth. | |
| | * ? Grey? ← | } Damaged left wing's slash tongued by tann. fluid (drive tanned y'day)? ? ? ? CONFORMIST |
| | Yellow-line Quaker (5) | |
| | Figure of 8. | |
| | Silur V. | |
| | Grey Spruce Carpet. | |
| | Caray. Shouldered Thorn. | |
| | Setaceous Hebrew Character. | |
| | Green-brindled Crescent. | |
| | Thump. | |

Neil Horton's Moth list for an MV light in his Usk garden on 15th October 1966.

It became obvious from the large number of common species annotated as "my first" that 1966 marked the start of Neil's light trapping for moths in his garden. I was surprised to find Neil recording his catches using vernacular (English) names. When I got to know him in the 1980s he used exclusively the taxonomic (scientific) names and often struggled to remember the corresponding common names for my benefit. Like many lepidopterists, he started with vernacular names but gradually switched to the scientific names as his knowledge of the subject increased. Some of the vernacular names were surprising old versions: names such as "Brindled Green Mottle" are obvious, but what would you guess as to the identity of "Sulphur Thorn" (see 15th Aug list)? Assuming it is not a hybrid, does "Grey Spruce Carpet" (15th Oct) correspond to Grey Pine Carpet or Spruce Carpet? And names such as "Common Garden Carpet", "Marbled Garden Carpet", "Pale Arches" and "Small Twin-spot" are anybody's guess!

It should reassure beginners struggling to cope with the wide range of moth species, compared to say butterflies or birds, to see that Neil Horton had identification problems when he started. So on the list for 15th Aug. there are one carpet moth and three noctuids unidentified – four if you include the crossed out Stout Dart, a rarity which Neil clearly thought better of as an identification. At the height of the summer, several "etc." comments at the end of a list indicated Neil failed to cope with noting all the species. Like all beginners, Neil made his fair share of mistakes. A "Broom-tip" in October was probably a misidentified Streak and a "Small Quaker" in July perhaps a Rustic or Uncertain. It is natural for beginners to be drawn to rarer species, more in hope than expectation: the "Conformist" on 15th Oct. would have been almost as important a record as the Silurian, but Neil clearly later regarded it as a misidentification since he did not include the record in his book.

Whilst it is interesting to see Neil's early records from nearly fifty years ago and compare them to current lists, the lists should also serve as an incentive for beginners at moth light-trapping to persevere – who knows, like Neil Horton, in six years time you might discover a species new to Britain!

Martin Anthony

[The identity of “Sulphur Thorn” was revealed when Neil recorded later in the year
“Sulphur Thorn (Brimstone)”!]

Gwent Distribution Maps

Accompanying this newsletter is a file containing the first batch of distribution maps for Gwent macro moths. Plotted on a 2km basis, black squares indicate records for 2000 onwards, whereas open squares indicate sites where pre-2000 records exist but no post-2000 records. Historical records which were too vague to be assigned at the 2km level have been omitted.

Martin Anthony

The State of Britain's Larger Moths 2013

On February 1st Butterfly Conservation released a new report on Britain's moths.

The State of Britain's Larger Moths 2013 found that the Orange Upperwing, Bordered Gothic and Brighton Wainscot have all become extinct in the last 10 years; these follow the extinctions of an additional 62 species during the 20th Century.

The report by Butterfly Conservation and Rothamsted Research revealed that two-thirds of common and widespread larger species (macro-moths) declined in the last 40 years. The losses in abundance were much greater in the southern half of Britain than the north.

Some once common garden species such as the V-moth, Garden Tiger and the Spinach have decreased by more than 90% from 1968-2007 and now face the real threat of extinction in the future.

The 42 page report can be downloaded for free as a pdf file from the website

<http://butterfly-conservation.org/1776/the-state-of-britains-moths.html>

Martin Anthony

Recent Highlights

2013 started with a continuation of the very wet weather and floods with which 2012 ended. A short warm spell of westerly winds in the second week of the year produced some records with very early emergence dates before the heavy snow arrived. Thereafter it was a case of making the most of short warmer interludes amongst the cold easterly winds and snow flurries. I still await the first butterfly sighting for the county in 2013.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 25 th Dec | A Small Tortoiseshell butterfly flying around indoors at Wonastow, near Monmouth, was an unexpected Xmas present! (Heather Colls) |
| 6 th Jan | Winter Moth to light at Risca. (Martin Anthony) |
| 8 th Jan | Early Grey, Hebrew Character and Chestnut to light at Risca. A record earliest date for Early Grey in the county and only one day later than the earliest Hebrew Character date. (Martin Anthony) |

| | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| 9 th Jan | Pale Brindled Beauty to light at Risca. | (Martin Anthoney) |
| 10 th Jan | Early Moth to light at Risca | (Martin Anthoney) |
| 11 th Jan | Dark Chestnut and Early Moth to light at Risca | (Martin Anthoney) |
| 4 th Feb | Double-striped Pug to light at Risca. Another earliest date for the county. | (Martin Anthoney) |
| 16 th Feb | Common Quaker to light at Melbourne Way, Newport. | (Roger James) |
| 17 th Feb | Two Pale Brindled Beauty moths took up residence, for a week or so, on the corner of my house. It was fascinating to watch each morning how they changed their positions by several feet, from wall to wall and behind pipes, to get maximum shelter as the wind direction changed! | (Martin Anthoney) |

Dates for your Diary 2013

| | |
|--|--|
| Sunday 10 th March | Habitat management at Hendre Wood. Meet at Old Lodge entrance at Hendre Woods (S0 462146), on the B4233 Rockfield Road from Monmouth, at 11:00 - 15:00. Bring lunch, warm drinks, appropriate clothing, footwear and hand tools. The task will be clearing cut rideside vegetation to encourage germination of Wood Spurge, larval foodplant of Drab Looper. For further details contact: Russel Hobson (01792 642972 or rhobson@butterfly-conservation.org) |
| Saturday 13th April, onwards | Surveys for Silurian Moth Larvae, Monmouthshire Butterfly Conservation (Wales) will be carrying out further surveys for caterpillars of the Silurian Moth at its two known UK sites: Cwmtillery and Hatterrall Ridge (Black Mountains). This will involve using torches to search the moorland vegetation for larvae feeding on Bilberry shoots. We will meet at dusk and walk from nearest parking places to the survey sites (often a steep climb) where we will spend around two hours searching for larvae. Warm and waterproof clothing are essential as well as a good torch; a warm drink is also a good idea. Dates are liable to change depending on weather and will be finalised nearer the time. If you are interested please contact George Tordoff (01792 642972 or gtordoff@butterfly-conservation.org) who will supply further details. |
| Friday 28th June – Tuesday 2nd July | Silurian Moth Trapping, Black Mountains Dave Grundy (West Midlands) will be organising several nights of moth trapping for Silurians on the Hatterrall Ridge, Black Mountains. Trapping will require staying out all night as Silurians do not come to light until late in the night. The ridge is very exposed and warm and waterproof clothing are essential. A vehicle may be available to transport equipment and trappers to the ridge; if not then a steep climb will be required from a car park in the valley. Dates are liable to change depending on weather and will be finalised nearer the time. If you are interested, please contact Dave Grundy via email <dgcountryside@btinternet.com>. |
| Thursday 8 th Aug to Sat 10 th Aug | National Moth Night 2013. Moth trapping sessions will be organised, date(s) and venue(s) to be announced. |
| Saturday 19 th October | Butterfly Conservation (S Wales Branch) AGM and Members' Day. |

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