

# LEICESTERSHIRE ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

9

September 1992

## KIRBY MUXLOE - LEP HOT-SPOT 1992!

It was a close shave for a convolvulus hawk moth (*Agrius convolvuli* L) (Sunday 13th September 1992 SK513040) when its resting place in long damp grass was mown over. Tony Russell of Kirby Muxloe noticed the moth and promptly went to the rescue. After the moth had dried out it was seen to be a beautiful male, apparently none the worse for its escapade. Thanks to Tony for bringing the moth round for inspection so it could be recorded in the Museum archives.

[The records for this species held by the Museum are of three in the 1960s, five in the 1970s and six in the 1980s. This Kirby Muxloe record in the second known for the 1990s - Editor]

### *Other rarities*

A white admiral butterfly (*Ladoga camilla* L) was sunning itself on bare ground at Kirby Muxloe (SK521037) during June and there were five sightings of the scarce tissue moth (*Rheumaptera cervinalis* Scop) in May and early June. This latter species was presumably a result of the many larvae which were observed feeding on Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) in 1991.

### *Species new to the garden*

These included: the seraphim (*Lobophora halterata* Hufn) which was caught at mvl and actinic on four occasions; the oak nycteoline (*Nycteola revayara* Scop); the grass rivulet (*Perizoma albulata* D&S)

which turned up in May; and a small elephant hawk (*Deilephila porcellus* L) which was caught in the actinic trap in July. Though far from being in pristine condition, this long-awaited species was still beautiful to me.

### *Increasing species*

Increasing locally are the treble bar (*Aplocera plagiata* L) appearing as spring and autumn generations and the mullein moth (*Cucullia verbasci* L) which has turned up regularly at mvl ever since the food plant was established in the garden. The yellow-barred brindle (*Acasis viretata* Hb) has also been more common this year. Numbers of golden plusia (*Polychrysis moneta* Fabr) were well up, rather at the expense of the delphiniums on which the larvae feed. The patch of prize blooms of yester-year is not looking too healthy under the onslaught!

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## Kirby Muxloe contd

Buff tips (*Phalera bucephala* L) have increased by 20% this year in the garden traps. A local resident called in help when she noticed her cherry tree being decimated by the larvae of this moth. The Ecology Unit at the Museum moved in and took away a jam jar full! These well-fed larvae quickly adapted to their change of diet (beech) and pupated within a few days of the move.

The short-cloaked moth (*Nola cucullatella* L) and the least black arches (*Nola confusalis* H-S) are also having a good year on the local level.

### *On the decline*

Apparently on the decline, at least locally, are species which have previously turned up regularly at mvl or actinic light. These include the rivulet (*Perizoma affinitatum* Steph), the small rivulet (*Perizoma alchemillata* L), the fan-foot (*Herminia tarsipennalis* Treit), the rosy rustic (*Hydraecia micacea* Esp), the clay (*Mythimna ferrago* Fabr), the small square spot (*Diarsia rubi* View) and the streamer (*Anticlea derivata* D&S) which failed to put in an appearance.

Generally speaking, after a promising start to the year, moth-wise, it deteriorated into a fairly mediocre season.

Jane McPhail

(Editor: do you have any news of your 1992 season - let us know)

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## Oak Eggar confirmed at Sharnford

I am grateful to Dennis and Betty Byrne of the Hinckley and District Natural History Society for drawing my attention to the capture at mvl of two specimens of the oak eggar moth (*Lasiocampa quercus* L) at Sharnford on 27.vi.92.

The site is located just a couple of fields away from the 1990 report at Fosse Meadows (see LES Newsletter Number 5).

## More on the lunar hornet moth (*Sesia bembeciformis* Hb)

Following on from the item about this species in the LES Newsletter Number 8 ("Notables of the 90s") Mark Sterling (ex Derbyshire Entomological Society) recorded the larval workings in goat willow (*Salix caprea*) at Herbert's Meadow, Ulverscroft Nature Reserve on 23.iii.85. The record is on file in the Museum but has not been transferred to the Lepidopteran Recording Scheme cards and was thus overlooked.

Anona Finch

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## Newsletter available

As part of the ongoing cooperation with other groups working on invertebrates, the Society has established contact with one of the oldest of the entomological societies in the country. The Lancashire and Cheshire Entomological Society holds many of its meetings at the Liverpool Museum and it is hoped that one of their members, Steve Judd, will be visiting the LES in the not too distant future. The Newsletter of the LCES is available from Derek Lott at the Museum.

If you have any Newsletters with an entomological interest which you no longer require please let us have them. Such literature is essential when comparing the fauna of one part of the country with another.

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## L e p i d o p t e r a n publications wanted!

References to lepidoptera in Leicestershire and Rutland are urgently needed with the aim of publishing a definitive bibliography for the county. Please send to Ray Morris.

## Death amongst the buddleias

The attraction of buddleias as a source of nectar for butterflies is so well known that they are widely called "butterfly bushes". I have heard stories of the concentration of butterflies at buddleias attracting the predatory attention of birds. Mr Patrick O'Shea recently rang the Museum to report a tale of mass slaughter in a similar vein but with a different culprit.

Whilst visiting his sister's cottage garden in the grounds of Noseley Hall estate, his attention was drawn to a carpet of white butterfly wings under the *Buddleia* bush. He observed that this was due to the activities of hornets which were seizing the butterflies, biting off their wings and then carrying the bodies back to their nest.

It seems obvious that such a concentration of prey would attract the attentions of predators. One can only surmise that the scarcity of hornets in gardens is the reason for the rarity of reports of this kind of carnage at buddleias. My thanks go to Mr O'Shea for taking the trouble to inform me of his interesting observations.

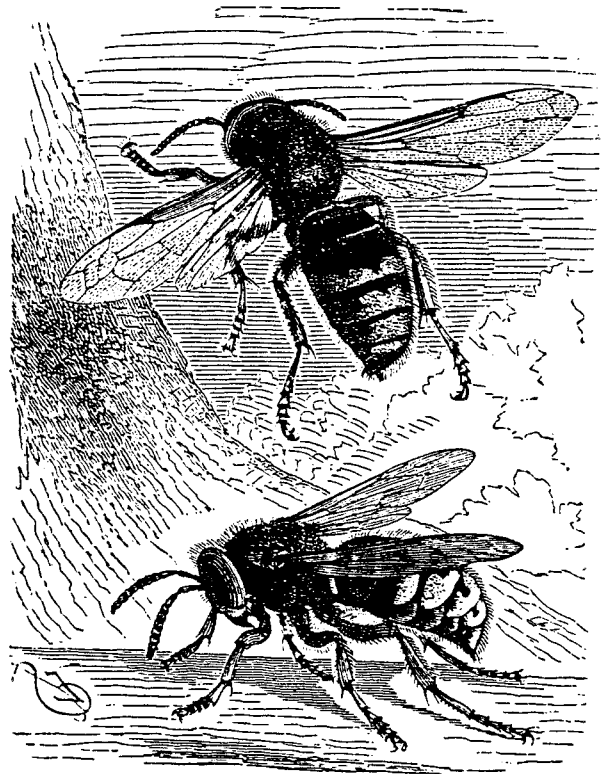
Derek Lott

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## The Vapourer tree

In a busy street by Leicester market, a paving stone was removed and a rowan tree planted complete with a colony of small, grey, red and yellow tufted caterpillars. Each year the life cycle of the Vapourer moths has revolved around this single tree, which has displayed a fascinating capacity for regrowth and survival.

At the beginning of April the first flush of spring green bursts from the rowan buds and is immediately set upon by the furry feeding machines. Initially the tree's growth keeps ahead of the damage but as the larvae develop they outpace the tree. By the end of



July the tree is completely denuded of leaves. Below, vast quantities of frass crunch underfoot like biscuit crumbs while above the skeletal midribs flutter forlornly on the bare branches.

Fully fed, the larvae pupate in large silken cocoons attached to twigs, giving the tree a gall-infested appearance. Using this respite, the poor old tree once again draws on its resources and is miraculously clothed in a leafy canopy within a few weeks.

A sunny day, usually in mid-August, will bring out the adult moths and it is a wonderful sight to see the males, like shimmering smuts around a bonfire, dancing attendance on the wingless females.

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## Vapourer tree contd

Eggs, laid on the many cocoons, over-winter and hatch the following spring to continue the "Vapourer Tree" story.

As polyphages, it is interesting that the moths have not yet migrated to the other three trees in the vicinity. These maples are quite near enough for a larva or adult female to "squirrel" across. Perhaps this will occur by necessity if the colony increases in size.

Jane McPhail

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## Dragonfly records wanted!

The map indicates the occurrence of *Anax imperator*, the emperor dragonfly, in the county between 1960 and 1992 - or does it???

Early records come from the Ashby and Grand Union Canals and also from the gravel pits at Wanlip and Dunton Bassett. Barwell Lane, Hinckley, proved a haven for the species when many were recorded in 1986. Unconfirmed records come from Owston Wood and Ulverscroft, while Groby turned up a single in 1991.

In June of this year, three males and two females were noted at Dunton Bassett. A little earlier in the same month a specimen crash landed in a Leicester garden and was discovered by the household cat.

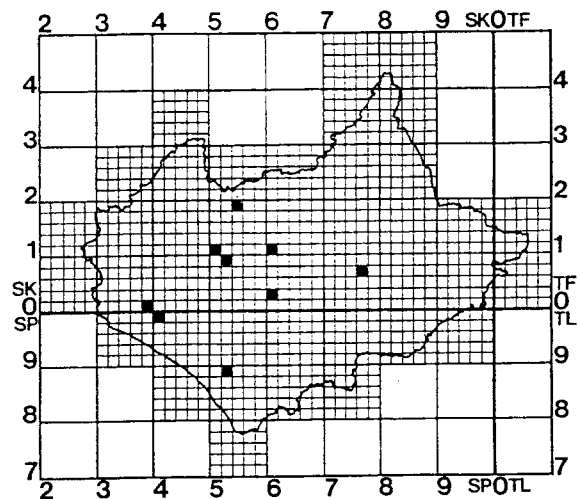
Whispers on the grapevine tell of many more sightings of the emperor dragonfly during 1992 particularly in Leicestershire gardens. But where are the records?

If you have any information about this species, or indeed any others of the Odonata, please send them post haste to the Biological Records Centre at Leicester Museum where the records are being collated.

## The Dragonflies and Damselflies of Cheshire

by Richard Gabb & David Kitching

Published by the National Museums & Galleries of Merseyside at £7.50 + £1 p&p (mail order only; special offer through the Lancashire & Cheshire Entomological Society. Obtain your copy from the Entomology Section, Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool L3 5EN.



Next copy date:

**JANUARY 25TH 1993**

## Moths at Baldersdale

Members may recall the fascinating television programme about the hard life lead by Hannah Hawkswell in the North Yorkshire Moors. Hannah lived at an isolated farm at Baldersdale near to Barnard's Castle where she tended a few sheep and cattle, leading a hard, very frugal, but by all accounts, a very satisfying life. When she died her farm came into the control of the Nature Conservancy Council (as it was then) and was rapidly recognised as being of SSSI status because of the flora. The Dales flora of old had been retained by the lack of any modern farming practices, the grasslands being used as traditional hay meadows and for grazing.

In July of this year I was fortunate enough to be able to spend two weeks in a farmhouse cottage (Blind Beck NY938188) just two fields away from Hannah's farm. I can understand why she found the place to her satisfaction. Baldersdale is only a handful of miles from Barnard's Castle but the sense of isolation is acute. There is nothing more evocative than the sound of curlews on the early morning wind or so unnerving as the carrying of voices across the still dale in the evening. Perhaps less welcome were the low flying jets each day although the pilots of these were probably the nearest people for miles!

### ESA

The whole dale is now classed as an environmentally sensitive area despite the presence of the most boring piece of reservoir that I have seen for some time! Hay making is delayed until the first week in July to ensure that the meadows have a chance to seed down. The day I arrived the local meadows had just been cut for their hay and so the undoubted rich flora, apart from masses of nettle-leaved bellflower, was missed. Perhaps that alone will justify a further, but earlier visit, at some other time.

### Moth trapping

Needless to say, no self-respecting lepidopterist would travel without the old trusty mercury vapour light trap! The trap was run in the garden of the cottage for most nights of the stay at Baldersdale and, despite the nuisance of a full moon on some nights, the moth trapping was fairly fruitful. Overall there seemed to be some agreement between the trapping experiences at Baldersdale and those experienced at home in

Barwell - despite apparently good mothing conditions, moth numbers and variety seemed to be depressed.

Nevertheless, the first night of trapping produced the first surprise. At home, the gold spot (*Plusia festucae* L) is only an occasional visitor to the garden. At Blind Beck that first night gave thirty three of the species. This level was not to be repeated during the rest of the stay although the moth regularly came to light in sixes or sevens.

### Scarcity of micros

Throughout the trapping period, when weather varied from dry clear nights to wet and windy ones, moths continued to be attracted to the light. A total of 57 species were recorded but it was noticeable that micro moths were almost entirely absent. The only ones to turn up were the Mother of Pearl (*Pleuroptya ruralis*) and the crambid *Chrysoteuchia culmella*.

Amongst the macromoths there were virtually no surprises. True lover's knot (*Lycophotia porphyrea*) is always a beautifully marked moth to see but it was not until the last night and the last moth out of the trap that the special turned up!

The grey scalloped bar (*Dyscia fagaria*) cannot be mistaken for any other geometer and is described by Skinner as being locally widespread in the northern half of Wales, west Midlands, northern England and much of Scotland - a distinctly northern species although apparently it does occur in the New Forest. In Leicestershire the species is marked on the county recording card but this seems to relate to report from Ulverscroft by a recorder named Broad.

contd p6

## Baldersdale contd

The records of Broad are currently being scrutinised - he had a habit of picking up virtually all the rarer moths at Ulverscroft! As a consequence the occurrence of the grey scalloped bar in Leicestershire must be considered suspect.

The full list of moths recorded is on its way to the local county moth recorder. If you should ever record moths away from the county please do the same! The names and addresses of all the county moth recorders in Britain are available either from the Society or from the Leicester Museum.

Ray Morris

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## Beetles!

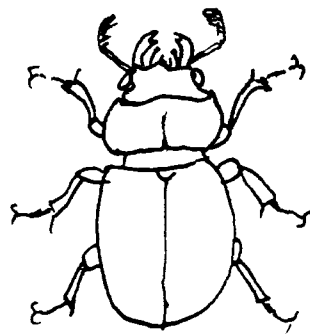
During the LES meeting at Charnwood Lodge in August of this year, Phil Thomas collected water beetles from the old reservoir, a nearby marshy area and some puddles. Identifications were carried out by Phil and also by Derek Lott of Leicester Museum.

The species recorded were: *Haliphus ruficollis*, *Hydroporus palustris*, *Agabus bipustulatus*, *Ilybius ater*, *Rhantus frontalis*, *Colymbetes fuscus*, *Dytiscus marginalis* and *Acilius nuleatus*.

All, but the *Agabus bipustulatus*, were found in the reservoir with the remaining species being found in the marshy area and puddles. All of the *Dytiscus* were newly emerged females - do the males come out later?

*Lesser stag beetle again!*

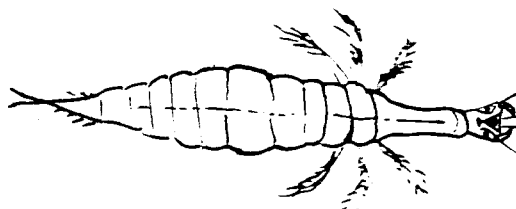
Also, following on from the notes by Reg Price (LES Newsletter 4), I saw a male lesser stag beetle (*Dorcus parallelipedes*) climbing the wall of my home in Earl Shilton during August 1992. We live about a mile from Barwell Lane where Reg first saw them.



Lesser stag beetle - male 19-32mm

In my pond at home larvae of the water beetle *Acilius sulcatus* have been found. They are easily recognised by their shape - the first segment of the thorax is very elongated. Their mode of propulsion makes identification more certain. They may swim by very rapid movements of their hairy legs. Alternatively, to escape danger they will move more rapidly by flexing and straightening the entire body. I have watched them constructing pupation chambers which look like little igloos made of mud.

Phil Thomas



Larva of *Acilius sulcatus* 20mm when full grown

# FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS!

LES Occasional Publications Series

No. 7      **Provisional Atlas of the Leicestershire  
Microlepidoptera**

Jane McPhail

This major review of the smaller moths of Leicestershire will be the first comprehensive county-wide listing of lepidoptera since the Victoria County Histories were published over eighty years ago. Due end of November 1992.

No. 8      **The Lepidoptera of Bunny Hill**

David Longden

Another in our series of specific site surveys, this time reporting on the lepidopterous fauna of a woodland on the Leicestershire/Nottinghamshire border. Due January 1993.

No. 9      **The Harvestmen of Leicestershire**

Jon Dawes

The first publication on this fascinating group of arthropods in Leicestershire. Due January 1993.

No. 10     **Ten years of moth recording at Barwell**

Ray Morris

A detailed report on the lepidoptera taken at mercury vapour lights at Barwell over a decade. Due Easter 1993.

No. 11     **A Bibliography of Publications on Leicestershire  
Lepidoptera**

Ray Morris and Jane McPhail

The only known review of all known published references to Leicestershire lepidoptera. Indispensable for future research into the county's moths and butterflies. Due end of 1993, hopefully!

No. 12     WILL THIS BE YOURS? LET US HAVE YOUR COPY NOW!

Newsletter: copy always wanted - nothing too trivial for us!

Send all manuscripts, notes, drawings, photographs (B&W only) to - Ray Morris  
142 Hinckley Road, Barwell, Leicestershire LE9 8DN

# WINTER PROGRAMME 1992-3

Evening meetings are held this year on MONDAYS at Leicester Museum in the Council Room entered from West Street. All meetings start at 7.30 p.m. There will be an opportunity for members' exhibits at the start of all meetings. Workshops will be at the same venue but on SATURDAYS starting at 10.30 a.m. Entrance will be from the main reception area of the Museum.

- MONDAY 26 OCTOBER                    ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and MEMBERS' MEETING.
- A chance for members to present exhibits, show entomological slides and give short (maximum 10 minutes) talks to the Society on subjects of interest after the summer season.
- SATURDAY 7 NOVEMBER                MACROLEPIDOPTERA WORKSHOP
- A chance to use the Museum's collections to identify those more difficult specimens. May include genitalia preparations.
- MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER                AN EVENING OF DRAGON AND DAMSELFLIES
- Stuart Ball (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) on Photographing Dragonflies and Steve Grover (Ecology Unit) on The Dragonflies of Leicestershire.
- MONDAY 25 JANUARY                 THE LARGE COPPER IN BRITAIN: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
- Ian McLean of English Nature. Since the extinction of the British subspecies of this beautiful butterfly in about 1850 and the establishment of the Dutch subspecies into the Cambridgeshire Fens in 1927, one population has maintained a precarious foothold here and is now of international significance. Work is now under way to strengthen its chances of survival here in the future.
- MONDAY 8 MARCH                    AN INTRODUCTION TO STUDYING SPIDERS
- Stan Dobson (Stockport) has run annual courses on spiders for the Field Studies Council at Orielton (Pembrokeshire). [This is coupled to the Workshop on March 20th]
- SATURDAY 20 MARCH                SPIDERS, HARVESTMEN AND WOODLICE WORKSHOP
- Stan Dobson (above) and Jon Dawes (Leicester Museum). For complete beginners and experienced alike. Stan will bring along material to work on but also bring some Leicestershire specimens and spur on recording in the county!

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*^The Society is grateful for the support which it receives from the Leicestershire Museums Service.*