LEICESTERSHIRE ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

18

February 1997

# *Painted lady summer - and an albino or two!*

*See page 2 for story*

*Photo: Dr Alwyn Sharples*

**Next copy date: July 15th 1997**

# *Extraordinary albino painted lady in Leicester garden*

It cannot have passed anybody's attention that the summer of 1996 was a painted lady extravaganza! Early migration from the continent in the spring boded well for the summer with further immigrants and the results of a highly successful breeding of the earlier arrivals. That the invasion was spectacular is borne out by the numbers of records received by the Hinckley & District NHS with the total number of records for 1996 being substantially more than all others submitted to the Society since they started biological recording in south west Leicestershire nearly 25 years ago!

Amongst the Hinckley records for 1996 was one a paler form of painted lady seen in a Burbage garden. But more extraordinary was the record of a pure albino of the species seen in a Leicester garden by Dr Alwyn Sharples. This event was picked up by the Leicester Mercury (October 3rd!) with the headline "*A pale lady of mystery*". Dr Sharples had had trouble identifying the most unusual butterfly seen in his garden on August 5th.

Fortunately for posterity, the butterfly was captured on video in the company of about 50 other painted ladies. That the specimen was an albino painted lady was confirmed by the Natural History Museum. The aberration is not figured in MBGBI vol 7(1), Russwurm's "Aberrations of British Butterflies" or Higgins & Riley "A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Britain & Europe". A truly rare occurrence!

We are grateful to Dr Sharples for supplying us with a little more information than was carried by the Leicester Mercury but even more so for the copy of a photograph taken off the video film which is reproduced on the cover page.

*Ray Morris*

# *New pesticides from black widows?*

The advance of technology is truly astounding. Readers may remember the stronger-than-steel silks produced by the golden orb spider reported in the LES Newsletter (number 14, January 1995). Well, the news is that the Japanese (who else?) have succeeded in producing the material artifically and who knows what the future holds for the product.

Hard on the heels of the golden orb comes the spider which everybody loves to hate - the black widow! According to a report in the Daily Telegraph (December 12th 1996), the venom from this little vicious arachnid is set to become the model for the next generation of environmentally friendly insecticides!

Apparently the venom consists of several toxins each of which is lethal to a specific group of prey, including mammals. By isolating and cloning the toxin that kills insects but which does not affect mammals, researchers at Nottingham University reckon that they have come up with a safe and effective alternative to potentially harmful man-made chemical pesticides. The toxin acts by interfering with the performance of the nervous system which inevitably leads to death.

The researchers believe that this form of biocontrol should be commercially available but Dr Paul Hillyard of the Natural History Museum gives a word of caution. "There has been some speculation that the inects may become immune to all spiders' venom and will no longer be susceptible to their natural predators". Well, any natural means of pest control must surely be preferable to currently used massive amounts of man-made chemicals!

*Ray Morris*

**Articles (of any length), photographs, drawings, observations, letters etc etc are always wanted and <u>always</u> welcome!**

**Please send to:**

**Ray Morris, 142 Hinckley Road, Barwell LE9 8DN**

# *Not much glowing in 1996!*

The first report of *Lampyris noctiluca*, the glow-worm, in 1996 was on June 6th with two glowing females at Charnwood Lodge with at least 56 on the 19th. In the long grass of the orchard at Roecliffe on June 14th, 11 were seen with one male. These were the only sightings noted in Leicestershire but were early and prolific. This western area had not suffered drought to the same extent as in Rutland where rainfall was markedly below average from March 1995 to October 1996. This probably affected the snails upon which the beetle larvae feed.

1995 had been exceptional nationally. Of the 20 locations reported in recent years in Leicestershire and Rutland good numbers had been seen at 11 sites (10 in Rutland) during 1995 after a damp spring and during a warm summer. In 1996, however, only 9 sites (7 in Rutland) were found to be glowing and with fewer beetle numbers. Rutland started later than usual, the first being one at Barrowden on June 18th and the last at the same site on July 18th. In some years glowing has continued into August! The fronts of the Barrowden verges, favoured for display by the female glow-worms, were unfortunately again mown at the height of glowing on July 11th. This resulted in an overnight reduction from 7 to 3 on the Drift and 2 to 0 on Back Road - numbers never recovered.

Loss of habitat at Ketton Quarry (due to the activities of geologists in the best glow-worm area! - Editor) was also very noticeable. No glows were noted in a recently scraped area which in the past had supported at least 25. Maximum numbers of 21 were recorded on July 7th over the rest of the site with 18 females and 4 females being recorded on six days later before the major part of the site development to expose rocks was undertaken. Despite the disturbance, and probable destruction of part of the favoured habitat, Ketton Quarry remains Rutland's largest, but significantly depleted, site for glow-worms.

Most male beetles have been reported from woodland rides. The small luminous green spots on male bodies are only visible when their wings are open. Apart from moth traps, one way to find them is to shine a torch briefly on each wingless female, in case a male is in attendance, before she "switches off" her own green tail-lights during mating. A colony over the border into Lincolnshire extended into Rutland in 1996 with 15 females and 14 males. One (?unfortunate) female was attended by 4 males with another assailed by three males!

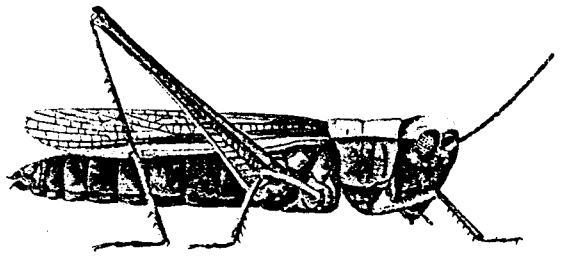
The only way to find glows is to visit a reported or potential site as often as possible during June and July at around 10.40 p.m. Glow-worms are a joy to see but are rare and vulnerable. If you should find any, or want more information, please contact us (tel: 01572-747302).

*Linda & Graham Worrall*
(Local Co-ordinators for the National Glow-worm Survey)

[Editor: the LES is grateful to Linda & Graham for their regular passing on to the Society of news of their work particularly in Rutland. Members of the LES can reciprocate by keeping an eye out for glow-worms especially when moth trapping!]

# *Lesser marsh first for Rutland*

Due to the fact that Steve Grover (Ecology Unit) is willing to identify grasshoppers and bush crickets collected within the county, I have been potting up a few specimens from each site I have visited. The Orthoptera are usually caught while sweeping rough grassland or beating shrubs and trees. They can even be collected by torchlight; all this whilst out collecting spiders!



*Chorthippus albomarginatus*

Two of the tubes that I sent Steve each contained a single specimen of the Lesser Marsh Grasshopper (*Chorthippus albomarginatus*) which had been swept from rough limestone grassland at Luffenham Heath Golf Course (SK9502) on September 1st 1996. These are believed to be the first records for Rutland.

*Jon Daws*

# *Toad research helps spiderman!*

Carl Cornish has just finished his PhD at De Montfort University where he was researching amphibians. His particular interest was directed towards the diet of toads in a variety of habitats. Fieldwork was based around an estate in the parish of Osbaston (near Market Bosworth to the west of the county). The survey work included a vast amount of pitfall trapping to identify the invertebrate groups available to the toads. The contents of the traps were sorted into major orders and dried before being weighed to assess the percentage of each order in the total catch. This gave some indication of the potential diet of toads in the area. This could then be compared with the actual diet of the animals by examining their stomach contents!

*Rarities!*

I heard about what Carl was doing and contacted him to see if it was possible to have a look at his spiders before they were dried and weighed. He agreed and sent me several large batches of tubes containing spiders and harvestmen which were identified to species and returned to him.

A total of 70 spider species were recorded from his catches including several specimens of the Nationally Notable species (Nb) *Saloca diceros* and an ancient woodland indicator *Asthenargus paganus*. Both these species are members of the family Linyphiidae, the money spiders, a group not for the faint-hearted!

Carl has also offered to let me have a look at any spiders he finds amongst the stomach contents of the toads he gets. A habitat seldom investigated by arachnologists!

*Jon Daws*

# *What a gem!*

Extreme pressure of work has prevented use of the mercury light trap at Ullesthorpe during 1996 so my notes are minimal but of some interest!

Old Lady (*Mormo maura*) moths were frequently disturbed in the garage during August.

Blair's shoulder knot (*Lithophane leautieri hesperica*) was frequent at the kitchen window during October (found only in the light trap the previous year). Incidentally in my last note (LES Newsletter No. 16 p6) the date for this moth should have been 9.x.95 and not 9.v.95 (sorry! - Editor).

*Eulithis prunata*

The Phoenix, *Eulithis prunata*, (a moth not that common in the county) that came to the kitchen window on 15.viii.96 was the first record for the species in the garden. A female Holly Blue butterfly (*Celastrina argiolus*) was seen ovipositing on ivy buds on 22.viii.96, the first of this butterfly seen in the garden since a male on 10.iv.93 so perhaps they are increasing again.

*Hordes of migrants*

I need hardly mention the early abundance of Painted Lady (*Cynthia cardui*). These and the Peacock (*Inachis io*), Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) and Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) all had extremely good second broods in the late summer in my garden.

Apart from Silver Y (*Autographa gamma*), the Rush Veneer (*Nomophila noctuella*) was more abundant than I have ever seen in Ullesthorpe whilst Hummingbird hawks (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) were in the garden frequently throughout the summer, the last on 14.ix.96. However, the appearance of the Gem (*Orthonama obstipata*) (what a ridiculous name for such a dull little moth!) came to the kitchen window on 6.x.96, my first record for this migrant since I came to Ullesthorpe 22 years ago!

Several Chimney Sweeper moths (*Odezia atrata*) were seen among the *Chenopodium* in my meadow, another species which must be commoner than records for the county suggest.

Two new dragonflies for the pond were *Aeshna mixta* and *Aeshna imperator*, bringing the total to eleven.

*Clive Stace*

# *1997 courses*

A series of invertebrate workshops is being run at the Newton Field Centre, Newton, near Geddingon, Northamptonshire NN14 1BW during the spring and summer of 1997 which may appeal to LES members.

The dates for the meetings (five are evenings, one all day Saturday) are:

Tuesday 20th May 6.30-9.30 pm
Tuesday 3rd June 6.30-9.30 pm
Tuesday 17th June 6.20-9.30 pm
Tuesday 24th June 6.30-9.30 pm
Tuesday 1st July 6.30-9.30 pm
Saturday 5th July 9.30 am - 4.00 pm

No details of fees or the actual talks are known and I suggest that Tony Cook at the Field Centre should be contacted direct on 01536-741643.

*Maggie Frankum*

# *Notes from Rutland*

The following entomological notes for the last two months of 1996 are taken from *Fieldfare*, the journal of the Rutland NHS.

During November and December of 1995, three species of butterflies were recorded by Rutland NHS members. In contrast six species were recorded in November 1996. A Green-veined White (*Pieris napi*) was in a garden at Langham and a late Small Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*) was seen feeding on ripe blackberries at Lyddington. Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) appeared as singles on several occasions in Uppingham and once at Langham. Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) was seen in Wing church, at Oakham, Langham and Barrowden (where the last was recorded on 28.xi.96). A worn Peacock (*Inachis io*) and a couple of Comma (*Polygonia c-album*) finished off the year nicely.

Surpriingly, the only moth record reported was of a Feathered Thorn (*Colotois pennaria*) which came to an Uppingham light on 1.xi.96. The next day a bumblebee was still flying at Barrowden as was an unidentified dragonfly. Cherry and common spangle galls were recorded on oaks in the Eyebrook Plantation on 14.xii.96.

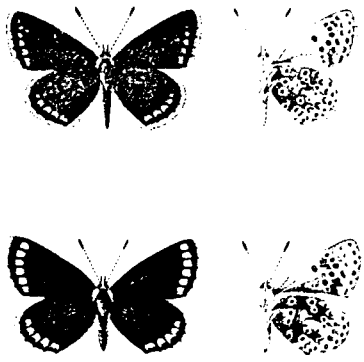
*Jean & Ron Harvey*

# *Berkshire butterflies*

It might be of interest to Leicesteshire lepidopterists to compare some observations of garden butterflies from Berkshire with their own observations. Like Leicestershire, Berkshire is a county with no coastline, but unlike Leicesterhisre, still has a varied and rich range of habitats. Although these have been dminished with the changes that have taken place over recent decades, they include considerable tracts of woodland, heathland and chalk downland.

The Upper Thames branch of the British Butterfly Conservation Society (now simply called Butterfly Conservation) has conducted surveys of butterflies in gardens and churchyards in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire for over ten years. The observations presented here are from my own garden at Wokingham (SU813651) and also from Finchampstead churchyard (SU792638). The garden backs onto woodland (mostly pine and birch with oak, sweet chestnut etc) with a heathy ground flora of heather and grasses.

Three skipper species (Small, Large and Essex) have all been recorded occasionally in the garden . Clouded yellows are infrequent but a female was feeding on wallflowers on 7.vi.96. The Brimstone is a regular visitor being seen at appropriate times through the year whilst the whites (Large, Small and Green-veined) breed in the garden, the first two using nasturtium the latter using honesty plants. The spring Orange Tip turns up regularly and the Small Copper is usually seen several times each year.



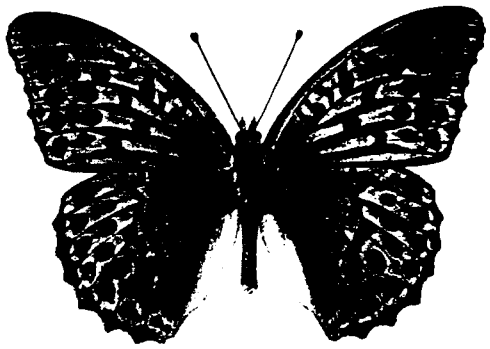
*Brown Argus*

*contd p6*

# *Berkshire contd*

A female Brown Argus, a downland species, visited storksbill growing in the garden on one occasion. Both Common and Holly Blue butterflies visit the garden and the latter may well breed here. The White Admiral has been seen on three occasions and once eggs were found on honeysuckle. The garden buddleias in 1996 suported many Red Admiral and Painted Lady butterflies but the Small Tortoiseshell seemed to be in lower numbers in both 1995 and 1996 than in previous years. The Peacock is a frequent visitor to the garden with the occasional Comma.

The Silver-washed Fritillary is a woodland species which has declined drastically, even in the south of England, over the past 40 years but even so there are two records for the garden in the last five years! The Speckled Wood has, in recent years, moved from woodlands into gardens and it regularly turns up in mine. The Marbled White, another grassland species, has been seen just once. The adjoining heath-type habitat probably accounts for the occasional appearance of the Grayling in the garden, a species which definitely does not occur in Leicestershire!



*Silver-washed Fritillary*

The little brown butterfly, once commonly called the Hedge Brown but now more usually the Gatekeeeper, is a regular occupant of the garden and may, indeed, be breeding there. Two other brown butterflies have been encountered: the Meadow Brown is fairly common with females having been seen laying eggs on dried grasses in the lawn. In contrast the Ringlet is less common but has been noted visiting the garden.

*In the churchyard*

Butterfly recording at Finchampstead churchyard only started in 1996. Even so, the excellent weather ensured that it got off to a good list! On 25.viii.96, during a short visit, Holly Blue was present in good numbers as where Green-veined Whites. More interesting, however, was the presence of Purple Hairstreak. Painted lady, Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood were also seen.

All in all, 27 species have been recorded from the two sites (somewhat better than the average garden site in Leicestershire - Editor) with 19 being fairly common. Other species such as Wall and Small Heath have yet to be added to my lists!

*Pine hawks*

Although moths have not been recorded systematically, some interesting species have been seen. Most notable has been a fully-fed (wandering) larva of the Pine Hawk found beneath a pine tree in the garden in 1995. It gave rise to a female adult on 29.vi.96 to which a male was assembled and mating occurred on the night of 29-30.vi.96. The female laid 40 eggs before being released on 6.vii.96. My only previous experience of this species in Britain was in about 1956 when I found a mating pair at Chobham Common, Surrey. Eggs were obtained and some livestock was sent to my friend Hubert Barrow of Queniborough in Leicestershire. More recently, a male was given to me by a friend at Cookham in Berkshire where it was found at rest on a parked car 25.viii.96!

*Tom Robertson*

# *American visitor at Rutland Water?*

The rarest butterfly recorded in Britain last year seems to have been an American Clouded Yellow seen on 17.viii.96 at Rutland Water! Unfortunately this is probably either an escape or, even more irresponsibly, a deliberate release. Past records of Indian Red Admirals in the county also should be regarded with scepticism. The growth of butterfly farms and displays inevitably will lead to unusual sightings and to the introduction of non-native genes into local insect populations. Be wary!

*Ray Morris*

# *Migrants in 1996 - quite astonishing!*

Mention has already been made of the unprecedented numbers of Painted Lady butterflies in the county during the summer of 1996 but this all pales into insignificance compared with the report of 50,000 at Portland, Dorset during August! Clouded yellows (of several varieties) also reached the British Isles (including Leicestershire) as did a good number of other unusual visitors to these shores.

Camberwell Beauty arrived around the same time as the Painted Lady and, as the season progressed, were being reported throughout the country. Initial reports from Leicestershire and Rutland show that we had a few ourselves! Recorded from Preston in Rutland and from the Hinckley area. Others will no doubt emerge as outstanding records are received. Rare Queen of Spain Fritillary was also a migrant being recorded mainly from East Anglia with up to five at Minsmere on 17.viii.96. None for us however.

Moth trapping during the migratory period turned up good numbers of Ni moths, Bordered Straw and Gem. The latter two of these were also recorded in Leicestershire - about half a dozen of the first and a couple of the second species. A Passenger Moth (a most spectacular looking species) at Portland on 14.viii.96 was only the fifth UK record!

*Passenger moth*

Hawkmoths were particularly noticeable migrants with Convolvulus in double figures at Rye Harbour (Sussex), Cley, Herne Bay (Kent) and Portland. Striped hawks were on the Lizard in Cornwall (two on 19.viii.96), Portland and Herne Bay. Death's Head are regular visitors but only turn up infrequently in Leicestershire (Desford in September) whilst the more common migrant hawk, the Humming Bird, was at unprecedented levels everywhere including Leicestershire (over 20 records so far).

A Portland moth at Winterton was the first Norfolk record for 60 years. Marbled grey was at Dungeness, while Dewick's Plusia, Scarce Brindle, Small Spotted Willow and Scarce Silver Y were visitors to Shetland.

[These notes have been gleaned from Bird Watching Magazine 1996. My thanks to Jane McPhail for drawing my attention to them - Editor]

# *Unusual harvestmen in the city*

The autumn of 1996 has seen a small run of records for the harvestman *Oligophus hanseni*. They have been mostly collected from beneath pieces of fallen bark and leaf litter around the base of trees and from tree trunks by torchlight at night. Habitats have included woodland, spinneys and hedgerow trees. The important factor seems to be mature trees being present, rather than conifers as stated in the literature.

The four 1996 records (below) are a substantial addition to the county distribution of this apparently rare species detailed in my earlier review on Leicestershire harvestmen (LES Occasional Publications Series no. 8, March 1994).

23.viii.96 Cemetery, Eyres Monsel (2f, 1 imm)
6.x.96 Recreation Ground, Eyres Monsel (2m, 1f)
7.x.96 Knighton Spinney (1f)
12.xi.96 Leicester General Hospital (3m)

The harvestmen are a reasonable group of invertebrates to get to grips with and 20 out of the 24 British species have been found in the county. I am always interested in receiving specimens from anywhere within Leicestershire and Rutland for identification. They can be sent to me (at least for the time being) at Biology, Leicester Museum, New Walk, Leicester and I will do my best to identify them!

*Jon Daws*

# More county spiders

Since "*The Spiders of Leicestershire and Rutland*" by John Crocker and Jon Daws was published (1996), five more species have been added to the county listing. The records for these additional spiders are detailed in the table below.

*Cheiracanthium erraticum* was beaten from a rose bush, adjacent to a piece of lichen heath, which in turn existed alongside a live railway line on what had once been sidings. *Theridion hemerobius* was collected by torchlight from a post and rail fence separating a grazing field from a fishing complex in the Soar Valley. The fishing complex is on a site previously worked for gravel extraction. This vast area has been constructed with conservation in mind with large areas of marsh, wet grassland and scrub being left. So far in Britain, this species has been found only at a couple of sites in Sussex but may have been overlooked in the past when it could have been confused with *Theridion pictum*. The true distribution of this spider will probably come to light over the next couple of years as older collections of *T pictum* are investigated and arachnologists find its preferred habitat niche.

*Atea triguttatus* was collected when an orb web was spotted on the lower branches of an oak tree adjacent to the fairway on the 18th hole at Luffenham Heath Golf Course. The branches were beaten into a sweep net and this colourful member of the Araneidae family was potted up.

*Jacksonella falconeri* was found in pitfall traps in two parts of the county, the traps being set in heathland habitats. At Charnwood Lodge Nature Reserve the trapline was set amongst patches of tall heather in a low-lying area of heathland that also contained *Sphagnum* moss. At Buddon Wood, the pitfall trapline was set amongst heath grassland with some bracken, beneath an open canopy of young birch and oaks.

*Centromerus cavernarum* is a RDB3 species which was found at Buddon Wood in the same trap line as the three male *J falconeri*. This is a woodland species, usually associated with ancient woodland, in this case sessile oak and birch.

These additional species takes the county list to 331 species with a considered optimum of around 356 species eventually. I hope to find a few more of these in the future!

*Jon Daws*

| Date | Species | Sex | Location |
|---|---|---|---|
| 20.vi.96 | *Cheiracanthium erraticum* | 1f | South Wigston Triangle SP592987 |
| 6.ix.96 | *Theridion hemerobius* | 1f | Wanlip Gravel Pits SK606115 |
| 7.vii.96 | *Atea triguttatus* | 1f | Luffenham Heath GC SK959027 |
| 3.v.96 | *Jacksonella falconeri* | 3m | Buddon Wood SK558150 |
| 10.7.96 | | 1m | Charnwood Lodge SK473149 |
| 3.v.96 | *Centomerus cavernarum* | 1m | Buddon Wood SK558150 |

# 1997 earlies

In the first five weeks of 1997 a surprising number of lepidopteran sightings have been made! Five Peacock butterflies have been noted in the county already. The first (17.i.97) was near De Montfort University heading into town! Two others (25.i.97) were flying in sunshine in Loughborough with another two found in a Birstall house on 4.ii.97, flying about having been woken from their winter sleep.

Members of the Lepidoptera Recording Panel, meeting at the Ecology Unit, Holly Hayes, Birstall on 30.i.97 were treated to the flight of the micro-moth *Mompha subbistrigella*. It alighted briefly on several othe Panel nefore returning to its hidey hole behind the plant pots on the window sill.

Two light traps at my Kirby Muxloe garden on 18.1.97 attracted single specimens of Mottled Umber (*Erannis defooiaria*) and an Early Moth (*Theria primaria*).

Any others to add to the list?

*Jane McPhail*

# Bamboo tiger caned!

October 1996 was mild and my runner beans produced a bumper crop for once, without sharp frosts "doing for them" prematurely. The big clean-up session came next with bean plants pulled up and composted, the canes being stored away for another year. The 7-spot ladybirds would have to find somewhere else to hibernate instead if packing in tight round the twine at the top of the cane "wigwams".

After spending lots of time removing canes and tidying them away, the top section of the next cane suddenly snapped off in my hand and threw me off balance. The canes had been bought at the local nursery during the summer and I was not exactly anticipating their disintegration for several years to come! So, clutching the small end piece of the cane in my fist, I peered at the main cane, wondering how this could have happened! It's as well that I did because a pair of antennae were waggling out of a hole in the next frass-filled section of cane and an insect of some sort heaved itself out. *It's amazing that there is never a tube handy when you want one!*

*Slow boat from China!*

Determined not to lose my prize specimen, I negotiated a route across the garden to the greenhouse, with the wiggly carefully balanced on top of the piece of cane and I popped into a jam jar. It was a beetle with beautifully patterned yellow and black elytra and long antennae. It looked fantastic under the microscope! Was it alien? I'm not a beetle person but I know a man who is! So at the next LES meeting I gave the beetle to Derek Lott to identify and keep for the museum collection.

Derek has now confirmed that the beetle is an alien species - a Bamboo Tiger Longhorn. It is very similar to another one in the museum - *Chlorophorus annularis* - although the antennae are different. That one had emerged from a bamboo tankard some fourteen years after it had been given as a present from Malta! The beetle actuially comes from China, Japan and Borneo!

*Maggie Frankum*

[Have you any unusual stories of, not necessarily alien, invertebrate occurrences? All are welcome!]

# Woodlice galore

I visited the village of Welham in south east Leicestershire on 15.xi.96 to record, amongst other things, woodlice. In all, ten species of this curious group of crutaceans were recorded. Three of these are of particular interest.

*Porcellio spinicornis*, a calciphile, was found in the mortared walls of the churchyard while just down the road, on the banks of the River Welland, *Ligidium hypnorum* and *Trichoniscoides albidus* were discovered. They were found beneath pieces of drift wood, in an area of cur nettles, adjacent to where the road crosses the river. The two latter species are both second county records with *T albidus* being a Nationally Notable Nb species.

The River Welland, although havng been extensively messed around with in the past, is worthy of much further study by Leicestershire's naturalists. I, for one, will be visiting a further stretch in the near future!

*Jon Daws*

# Some Wigston records

Has 1996 been a good year for the shield bug *Elasmostethus interstinctus*? I have seen this insect frequently throughout the year at both Countesthorpe and Wigston.

After a slow start to the moth recording year, things finally picked up. The usual moths turned up plus a few new records at my Wigston garden. These included Twin Spotted Quaker (*Orthosia munda*), Puss (*Cerura vinula*), Small Elephant hawk (*Deilephila porcellus*), White Satin (*Leucoma salicis*) and the Phoenix (*Eulithis prunata*).

The best record was the Phoenix which appears to be uncommon in the county.

*Adam Poole*

**Early notice!**
**November meeting**
**AGM**

# *Have you seen?*

Two articles which appeared in the 1996 literature may be of interest to readers.

—ooo—

*Some notes on the galling of willowherbs (Onagraceae) by moths of the genus Mompha (Momphidae) in Britain* - J Robbins in *Cecidology* (1996) vol 11 no 2 p30-32.

A short but interesting article which is a timely reminder that there are other ways to record insects other than catching the adults! 15/17 of the British *Mompha* species feed on willowherbs, a group of plants little used by other lepidoptera. Most live within the plant tissue and are leaf miners. Five are gall inducers and brief descriptions of the galling properties are listed. The stem gall caused by *Mompha nodicolella* is particularly noticeable because of its red colouration in mid-summer.

—ooo—

*Notes on the natural history, distribution and identification of British reed beetles* - IS Menzies & ML Cox in *British Journal of Entomology & Natural History* (1996) vol 9 p137-162.

A substantial examination of the beetles associated with reeds. The 21 species of the Donaciinae, are mostly conspicuous, metallic-coloured, medium-sized chrysomelid beetles that are often found resting, apparently often in large numbers, on the foliage of water plants in the summer months. Identification can, however, be a problem and the paper sets out extensive keys to get over this difficulty.

**Leicestershire reed beetles**

***Donacia dentata*** **- Nb - on arrowhead**

***Donacia vulgaris*** **- on reed mace, bur-reeds**

***Donacia semicuprea*** **- on reed meadow grass**

***Donacia simplex*** **- on bur-reeds**

***Plateumaris affinis*** **- Nb - on *Carex* species**

***Plateumaris braccata*** **- Na - on *Pharagmites***

***Plateumaris sericea*** **- on bur-reeds and yellow flag**

Each species is described in fair detail complete with an outline of the beetle with a very useful size bar against each. Accompanying the description is a map of the known distribution of each species on a vice-county basis, surprisingly clear despite the whole of Britain being contained in an area of 4x3cm! Records since 1970 suggest that only six of the species have been found in VC55, three of them notables! Plenty of room for some field work here I think! Also helpful is an excellent collection of colour photographs of 16 of the species.

If you would like a copy of either paper please contact me.

*Ray Morris*

# *Garden spiders*

From December 1995 to October 1996 we rented 25 Pen Close, Leicester, situated on the southern boundary of the city. This is a post-war cul-de-sac with ex-council houses lying between the Eyres Monsel and Newry estates. A sort of no-mans land, occasionally visited by the surrounding populus of thieves, druggies and joy riders. The back garden was very open with a large paved patio on two levels adjacent to the house followed by two small flower beds. The rest of the garden consisted of an infrequently mown lawn with chestnut paling fences on either side, except for a two metre wide strip of rough ground at the rear behind the shed. To the front was a square of grass fronted by a privet hedge.

This slightly (!) unappetising looking habitat produced a surprising list of spiders, 54 species in all, including a few local rarities. The ant mimic, *Micaria pilicaria*, was seen scurrying across the patio on hot summer days as they left the safety of one crack for another. Altough they superficially look and move like ants they do not fool the ants themselves!

Two females of the large house spider, *Tegenaria saeva*, were collected from the house and garden being only the 2nd and 3rd confirmed county records! This is almost identical to the more familiar *T duellica* seen in houses in the autumn (separated by genitalia).

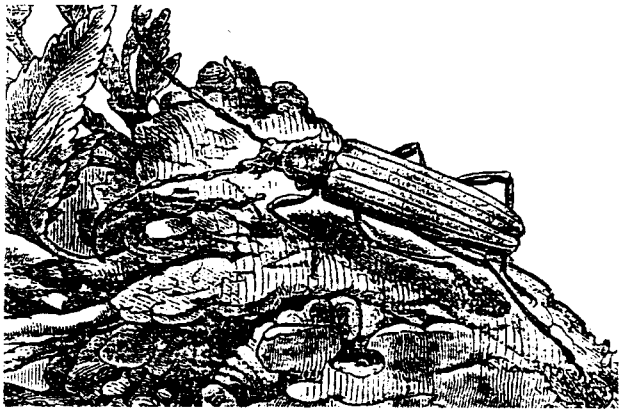
The money spider, *Microtenonyx subitaneus*, was collected in pit fall traps in the lawn. The garden is the sixth county site for this species with two of the other sites also being gardens. At the moment, Jenny Owen's garden on Scraptoft Lane has the longest spider list at 74 species. If you want to know about spiders in your garden, I am willing to check/identify specimens.

*Jon Daws*

# *Musk beetles*

[The following is adapted from an article which appeared in *The Countryman* in the summer of 1996]

The Musk Beetle, *Aromia moschata*, is a nationally notable species. It is one of the largest of the longhorns being about 1 inch long and very handsome - it is stunning metallic green or bronze. The thread-like antennae of the males are half as long again as the body whereas those of the females are shorter. The beetle emits a strong musky odour derived from the consumption of salicylic acid in willow leaves. Although fairly widespread, the beetle is very local in distribution.



It was first recorded in Leicestershire by the parson-poet George Crabbe (1754-1832) who was the live-in chaplain to the then Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle. He added the beetle to the county list in 1795, one of 37 species he identified in the county. Fifty years later, the Musk Beetle was rediscovered by Henry Walter Bates (1825-1892) of Amazon and mimicry fame. In 1843, at the age of 18, Bates published his "*Notes on coleopteran insects frequenting damp places*" saying that "the Musk Beetle is to be found in willow trees in the county's river valleys".

Both Crabbe and Bates were afflicted with "beetlemania" and Leicestershire has never been short of entomologists willing and able to follow in their footsteps. In the 1940s the musk beetle disappeared for a while from a well-known site on the River Soar only to turn up again in the 1980s puzzling the county coleopterists.

The Musk Beetle lays its eggs under the bark of young sallows and willows, particularly the lithe stems that shoot up from coppice stools. It is suspected (by Derek Lott!) that the beetle's traditional riverside patch had become overgrown. The trees were too old for the beetle's liking. In the early 1980s, a Scout troop were allowed to use the site for their meetings and they cleared the scrub and cut willow branches for their campfires. Unwittingly they had reintroduced the favoured habitat for the Musk Beetle and they returned! They do say that Scouts are supposed to do good turns!

The Musk Beetle spends many months inside the willow as a larva, feeding on the core wood. In midsummer, it bores its way out and emerges as the adult beetle, to live its short life on the wing, to mate, to lay eggs and to die. Signs of the beetle's presence are the distinctive shot-shaped exit holes. The adult, like many other longhorn beetles, feeds on flower pollen so that the best place to look for these handsome creatures is on flowerheads.

There are just over 60 longhorn species in Britain compared with the 20,000+ worldwide! They form a small part of the total beetle fauna with over a quarter million species and probably many more to be discovered. When asked for his view of the Creation, the great scientist JBS Haldane is said to have replied "God must have had an inordinate fondness for beetles!"

*Ann Tate*

# *Here's a thought!*

Every year we naturalists are regaled by appeals for funds to buy important wildlife sites. Nothing wrong with this you might think! But have you stopped to consider how effective such appeals are? OK, so a site gets saved but then the struggle is on to purchase the next one before builders move in or unscrupulous farmers/ landowners start ploughing. And it seems that legislation is not strong enough to prevent loss of much of our important habitats.

Yet there is £500 million plus to be spent on a millenium project at Greenwich and another £60 million on a royal yacht. Enough, I would have thought, to put ALL our important wildlife site in safe hands!

What are our priorities?

*Ray Morris*

# *Summer programme 1997*

Meetings will begin on site at 10.30 am. It will be advisable to ring John Mousley (work: 0116-267-1950; home 01509-231828) to check that the meeting is still on and who will be leading it.

***Please note that all field meetings this season are on SUNDAY!***

In addition it is anticipated that moth trapping can also be carried out at each site in the evening.

**APRIL 20th 1997**
**Sunday 10.30 a.m.**
**SHEET HEDGES WOOD**
County Council owned ancient wood now with greater public access. Parking may still be difficult on the Groby to Newton Linford road at SK521087 if the new car park has not been completed!

**MAY 18th 1997**
**Sunday 10.30 a.m.**
**SEATON MEADOWS**
Now owned by the national organisation Plantlife. This is a very good river valley grassland/marsh. Park near the viaduct at SP913978 on the B672 or the minor road to Harringworth. Footpath leads into the site.

**JUNE 8th 1997**
**Sunday 10.30 a.m.**
**BURLEY WOOD**
Largest woodland in Leicestershire and Rutland with some of the largest rides and trees. Park at the gateway at SK891093 on the north side of the A606.

**JUNE 22nd 1997**
**Sunday 10.30 a.m.**
**BURLEY WOOD**
Second visit to this important site.

**JULY 13th 1997**
**Sunday 10.30 a.m.**
**LAWN WOOD/OLD WOOD**
The grounds of Bradgate House adjacent to Lawn Wood and Old Wood are little known but there are old trees and wet bits. Park off the A50 along the drive at SK106089. We hope to be accompanied by Ron Foster who is responsible for nature conservation within Redlands.

**AUGUST 10th 1997**
**Sunday 10.30 a.m.**
**INGLE PINGLE POOL**
Charnwood Borough's latest Local Nature Reserve. A disused brick-pit now flooded and surrounded by mature willow trees. Park at the west end of William Street, Loughborough near the Primary School (SK529193).

**SEPTEMBER 7th 1997**
**Sunday 10.30 a.m.**
**SEATON MEADOWS**
A second visit to this Plantlife site to see how things change with the seasons.

Moth trapping occurs throughout the season at a variety of sites. Anyone interested should contact members of the LES who carry out such recording who would be more than grateful of the company! If in doubt give the Ecology Unit (0116-247-1950) a ring - they may know of what's on at any one time!