

NEWSLETTER 23

September 1999

BUTTERFLY ATLAS FOR THE MILLENIUM

Members will be aware that there has been a considerable effort in recording the butterflies of the East Midlands over the last few years. With the completion of this year's season it is hoped that it will be possible to produce the definitive reference work on the occurrence of these familiar but, in some cases, seriously threatened insects in our region.

The recording effort is part of a national drive to establish the true status of butterflies in Britain and it has been only with the help of lepidopterist groups throughout the country that it has been possible to complete this mammoth task.

In the East Midlands, our local co-ordinator has been Adrian Russell who has not only collected and collated the records but, through the Lepidoptera Panel, has validated the records. This latter is essential if there is to be national confidence in the observations submitted by local recorders.

With the completion of this Millennium Project this year, there is no need to ease up on the recording effort! The data serves as a benchmark against which future expansions/declines of butterfly populations can be gauged – and only then will there be sufficient evidence to combat those who would seek to

destroy butterfly habitats.

Outstanding records for 1999 should be sent as soon as possible to Adrian c/o LMARS, Holly Hayes, Birstall, Leicester.

P.S. Have you seen any Painted Lady butterflies this year?

Moth Night a huge success!

Preliminary results are now available for the National Moth Night held 17th July. Across the country it seems that at least 773 species were recorded from about 300 sites (with no doubt a few more to come). Some outstanding lists were received including 151 species from one site in Nottinghamshire, 117 from Hickling Broad, Norfolk, 122 at Monks Wood, Huntingdon (none of which were micros!) and even 104 from our own Browns Hill Quarry.

If you have any trap records for the night of 17-18 July 1999 please send IMMEDIATELY to Adrian Russell so that the county report can be quickly produced!

Next copy date: January 15th 2000

Diary of a Leicestershire tipulist

Definition!

Some one who follows an interest in Craneflies!

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Order | Diptera |
| Sub-order | Nematocera |
| Section (super-family) | Tipulomorpha |
| Families | Tipulidae, Pediciidae, Limoniidae, Cylindrotomidae |

NB: an interest in Tipulomorpha does not eliminate an interest in everything else!

Spring 1999

The year got off to an early start on 16th March for me, a month earlier than last year. It was a sunny, calm day with an air temperature of around 20°C and much warmer than that when in the sun. I was rewarded with a male *Symplecta stictica* (Diptera, Limoniidae) - not usually an exceptional sighting but the first crane fly to go into the notebook for the season! Their larvae are probably aquatic herbivores and I have seen the adults as late as mid-July most abundantly on the reeds of lake margins or estuarine marshes. It is species widespread in Leicestershire especially by ponds and lakes.

The month ended with another warm day and so I headed off to the south of the county. Here I found five species of Liniid crane flies. The most pleasing of these was another member of the *Symplecta* genus, *S. hybrida*. This is given the status of "Local" by Rhodri Thomas in his "Provisional Check-list of Crane flies in the Peak District" and, since I only know it from five Leicestershire locations, it also seems to be local in our county as well!

RDB3 species!

A month later the season was in full swing and I was recording about ten different species at a number of sites. These included *Tipula summarmorata* (Tipulidae) at Narborough Bog and a new site for *Limnophila schranki* (Limoniidae) in the Charnwood area. Perhaps the most pleasing find in Leicestershire so far in the season was the *Eloeophila veralli* (Limoniidae), an RDB3 species, found in good numbers by an alder-bordered brook again in

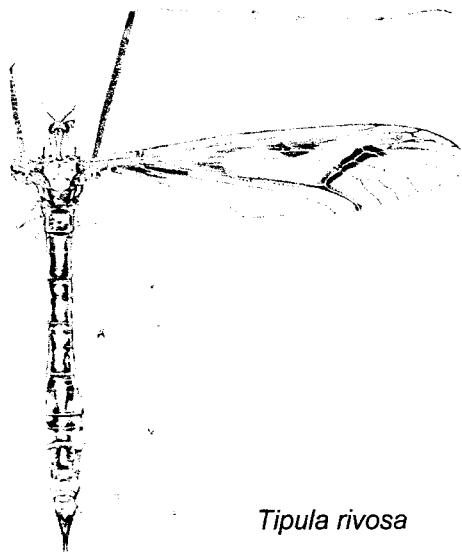
the Charnwood area.

A female *Tipula selene* (identified by Alan Stubbs), another RDB3 insect, was found lurking in a bit of wet woodland in Rutland at the end of May.

Summer 1999

Nedlimnomygia adjuncta seemed to have had a good year and turned up at six wet grassland/marshy sites investigated in June. In July, Charnwood Lodge NR yielded a female of the Nationally Notable crane fly *Tipula peliostigma*. From the available information, Leicestershire seems to be near the northern edge of the British distribution of both this species and the *Tipula selene* mentioned earlier.

New county sites have been found for a number of species of which three are worthy of mention: *Thaumostoptera calceolata* (Nationally Notable), *Cylindrotoma distinctissima* (Cylindrotomidae) and *Pedicia rivosa* (Pediciidae). The latter species, with predatory aquatic larvae, seems to fly on warm sunny days and at other times avoids the sweep net by staying low down amongst the *Juncus* tussocks. Other species which seemd to be thriving this year were the woodland *Epiphragma ocellare* and the grassland *Tipula unca*. Spring species down on last year was *Tipula vittata*.



Tipula rivosa

Contd p3

Some lepidopteran highlights of 1999

Ron Follow has recorded Rosy Footman (B&F 2037 *Mitochondria miniata*) in his Barrowden garden on July 8th and the previous Friday (July 2nd) (with Jean Harvey?) he took *Chilo phragmitella* (B&F 1290) at Rutland Water. Both appear to be county firsts. Specimens of both have been kept for verification and validation of records. The same group have taken Silky Wainscot (B&F 2391 *Chilodes maritimus*) on more than one occasion at Rutland Water recently. In discussions between Ron and myself, we have come to the conclusion that these species may have originated from the reed beds at Burley Fishponds some of which were used in the establishment of the reed beds at Rutland Water.

Ketton Quarry always attracts interest at the right time of year because of the large numbers of Marbled White (B&F 1620 *Melanargia galathea*) that can be encountered. Despite the obvious scrubbing up of the site (it really does now need some serious management to maintain the open

Tipulist diary contd

Out of county

I did three days of collecting with the Dipterist Forum in mid-June which gave me a chance to look at some coastal and stream habitats not found in Leicestershire. At a cliff seepage, the beautiful *Dicranomyia aquosa* was seen. These small flies have transparent purple wings reminiscent of those of the female *Calopteryx splendens* (Odonata: Banded Demoiselle). A bit of coastal grassland with sea thrift supported a population of *Dicranomyia albipes* – the crane fly has tarsal joints clothed in long white hairs enabling it to scuttle across the surface of water like a flying-boat. Since it frequents shaded places, it is known as the “white-footed ghost”! A female *Dicranomyia didyma* was observed laying eggs on the moss-covered boulders of a steep section of the same beck and the Nationally Notable *Eloeophila apicata* was found on the verge of a farm track bordered by the same stream. With half the season still to come, and a small back-log of specimens still awaiting to be identified, I wonder what else will turn up this year!

John Kramer

grassy habitat – Editor), the place was teeming with this butterfly on June 26th.

Adrian Russell

...and Barwell 1999

I have made a concerted effort to carry out more light-trapping in the garden at Barwell (SP438965) during the year with the mvl often being run at least three times a week. To a certain extent it has paid off. Although some species have not turned up others have been added to the garden list.

Dark Sword-grass (B&F 2091 *Agrotis ipsilon*) was taken in August along with Rush Veneer (B&F 1398 *Nomophila noctuella*). It's been a disappointing year for Painted Lady (B&F 1591 *Cynthia cardui*) with the sole garden record coming from one in the mvl run overnight on September 10th!

Of particular satisfaction is the recording of the Black Rustic (B&F 2232 *Aporophyla nigra*) on several occasions in the autumn for the third year running. Most have been in excellent condition seeming to indicate that there is a local breeding colony.

The pyralid *Epiphyas 0998 Epiphyas postvittana*, first reported in Leicestershire by Jane McPhail in September 1989 (LES Newsletter 1990 number 4 p6) was trapped at Barwell on 12th September (identification by Jane). A nice addition to the slowly expanding micro-list for the garden.

Blair's Shoulder-knot (B&F 2240 *Lithophane leautieri*) is now a common autumn visitor to the garden even flying when torrential rain and strong winds keeps everything else down!

Ray Morris

Stag beetles

Rumours of the occurrence of this county rarity continue to be heard – Walcote area over the last few years (apparently quite good emergences) and Bradgate Park in June of this year are examples.

Specimens are essential to confirm records

Religious spider phoning home?

Up until the beginning of 1998, the distribution of *Theridion blackwalli* in VC55 was limited to two records from the far east of the area:

- Great Casterton churchyard – 1 male May 1994
- Ketton churchyard – 1 female July 1995

In the autumn of 1997 I was working as a telephone box cleaner with Amalgamated Cleaning Services. This involved cleaning three groups of between 45-64 boxes in rotation, twice a week, working Monday to Saturday. One group of boxes was in the south of Leicester, a second group was centred around Market Harborough/Lutterworth whilst the third took in most of the villages in the south-east of the county and into Northamptonshire. As one would expect (!) I collected interesting looking specimens as I cleaned and since my rounds also included rural boxes, I occasionally stopped off at the odd churchyard to see what was about!

Theridion blackwalli from churchyards

| Churchyard | Date | Comments |
|------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Countesthorpe | 4.v.98 | 1 sub-female |
| | 4.vi.98 | 1 female |
| Fleckney | 30.v.98 | 5 males |
| Twyford | 6.vi.98 | 1 male |
| Wigston cemetery | 8.vi.98 15.vi.98 | 1 male (chapel) 2 males (toilets) |
| Bitteswell | 12.vi.98 | 2 females |
| Narborough | 28.iv.99 | 1 sub-male |
| Desford | 19.v.99 | 1 male |
| Fenny Drayton | 25.v.99 | 1 male, 1 female |
| Sibson | 25.v.99 | 1 male |
| Asfordby | 26.vi.99 | 1 female, 1 sub-female |
| Claybrooke Parva | 1.vi.99 | 1 male |
| Frolesworth | 1.vi.99 | 1 male |
| Dunton Bassett | 1.vi.99 | 1 female |

At the beginning of May 1998 I collected a few spiders from Countesthorpe churchyard amongst which was a sub-adult male *Theridion*. Due to

its coloration I identified it as *T blackwalli*. Further visits to churchyards (see table above) produced further records of this small spider. The spider was also recorded from a number of telephone boxes (see table below).

Theridion blackwalli from phone boxes

| Location | Date | Comments |
|-------------------|---------------------|---|
| King's Norton | 3.vi.98 10.vi.98 | 1 male 1 male |
| Kilby | 5.vi.98 | 1 male |
| Hallaton | 6.vi.98 | 1 male |
| Market Harborough | 9.vi.98 | 1 male (High St) 1 male (Fairfax Rd) |
| Medbourne | 10.vi.98 | 1 female |
| Theddingworth | 10.vi.98 | 1 female |
| Ashby Magna | 16.vi.98 | 1 male |

The spider was also recorded elsewhere including hanging from the mirror of the van (2.vi.98). Several of the records were of "aeronauts" i.e. those that produce a wisp of silk and get carried on the wind. The number of these travellers seems to indicate that the species uses this method of dispersal more than had previously been recognised.

Theridion blackwalli has a short maturity season with recognisable sub-adults found from late-April to late-May and adults from mid-May to the end of July. The limited evidence seems to suggest that males tend to mature a few weeks earlier than the females and that both sexes are aeronauts when adult.

Jon Daws

[This item is a heavily edited version of the original article submitted by Jon because of space restrictions. It is hoped that he will produce a more detailed study report of the spiders of phone boxes as another in the LES Occasional Publications Series – Editor]

No winners!

15.30 on October 5th Barwell – wasp hits spider web – spider pounces and bites wasp – wasp stings spider – both die – nature is not very even-handed is it?

A new meaning for the term "mother"

I think we all agree that holidays are good for us. The "feel good" factor leaves us refreshed and ready to take on the world on our return. That's the theory at any rate! Little did we know just how much our holiday this year would change OUR lives! Having enjoyed "birding" for many years, this year's choice of holiday was easy – two weeks on a 7-acre reserve owned by a "birder" with option to travel further afield if the mood took us – bliss! The weather was good as was the "birding" - we enjoyed "flick netting" and watching the fruits of our exertions being "ringed", recorded and released.

We also enjoyed taking part in our hosts' newly acquired hobby of "mothing" - two hours each morning examining and recording the night's catch with three traps to check. Initially we were unsure how our youngest, 6-year old Thomas, would take to this lengthy process. However, with the excellent memory 6-year olds seem to have, coupled with his interest in anything to do with nature, it was usually he who was at the traps before anyone else. The only downfall was his exuberance at wanting to see what else was under the egg cartons before our host ("moth Martin") could note all the names. The wait was usually rewarded with a hawk moth being placed on Thomas' hand, delight and then, as the moth warmed up and took off, disappointment. And so it followed that accompanying us on our return from holiday was not the usual memorabilia but armfuls of information on "mothing".

The relaxing end to the holiday was short-lived – Thomas badgered me to supply him with a moth trap. So the dilemma – was it to be a passing interest or was it to be taken seriously and a moth trap bought? I decide to take the cheap option and make one! Looking back I suspect that it would have been cheaper to purchase one! The result of my toil was a box made of polycarbonate and held together with Velcro thus allowing safe and easy assembly and dismantling by little fingers. The lighting was a little more tricky until a trip to JR Camping and the purchase of a fluorescent tent pole light proved to be just the thing. When the unit was taken apart, the components placed in a box and the tube attached to a wooden pole using tension clips, it looked quite professional! Making the baffles and mounting the tube was

interesting but hunting down an old motorbike battery and getting the whole thing working was very rewarding.

To a 6-year old a minute's wait is too long and the week-long construction was impossible – so I had to improvise. A large plant pot on top of which lay a piece of hardboard into which a funnel was dropped. We suspended a UV forged-banknote detector from inside a coke bottle and dangled it over the hole – and there you have it – the "Heath Robinson" as my husband called it! Thomas managed to catch about six moths a night – bliss to him and also a manageable number to identify using a rather old Observer book as reference.

So to the Rutland Water Bird Fair in search of that well-known book by Skinner. £45 seemed a lot but we got an old edition for half the price! Finally with our "Heath" complete and Skinner in hand, we were up and running. Not massive catches but believe me that is an advantage. A 6-year old potting moths for identification and demanding it be done "now!" is a little daunting when this is at 6 a.m., in the porch, before school and work! What did I do with my time before? We have already been invited to "moth" in friends' gardens. One such occasion we collected 130 moths – it took two hours to go through them and proved educational as well as great fun for children and grown-ups alike.

In early September we decided to treat Thomas to a real "Skinner" trap equipped with mv light (its use we carefully supervise!). We placed it in my mother's very large garden with instructions regarding turning on and off and closing it in the morning – another convert! We continue to leave the "Heath" in our garden – one memorable day Thomas arose at 5.45 a.m. to check the catch and found it almost empty and disappointment abounded. Suddenly he ran into the house asking for the biggest jar we had. What had he got we wondered. From the trap he produced the biggest moth he had ever caught which was quickly identified as a *Convolvulus Hawk*. Such a prize had to accompany us to school! A very cheerful Thomas passed it round and for the first time gave him the opportunity to discuss his new found hobby with his classmates and teacher. All that week we had to take in our catches so that he could pass them round to test the children following the previous day's moth identification lecture.

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Experiences with Clearwings

I was interested to see that Clearwings were to be targeted for recording in Leicestershire in 1999. Until recently I had rarely encountered these moths and assumed that they were absent from my area. However, a couple of years ago I was talking to some fellow entomologists who maintained that Clearwings were much more common than was generally supposed and simply needed looking for! I decided to put this to the test and thought that members might be interested in the results.

Sesia bembeciformis (Lunar Hornet)

This was the first species that I came across. Over the winter we had been cutting down some small Sallows that were overhanging a woodland ride in Easton Hornstocks Wood (Northants). I noticed a number of round tunnels in the cut stumps and after spotting these we cut the remaining trees at about 1.5m which seemed to leave the tunnels intact. Thinking that the tunnels may have been caused by Clearwings, I checked in MBGBI vol 2 where it suggested that the moth may be found early in the mornings around the start of July. It so happened that I had a meeting in the wood about that time and went down at 8 a.m. to have a look round the area where the Sallows were. I had only been 50yds when I saw a newly-emerged Clearwing sitting on one of the cut stumps. So unexpected

Nothing contd

Finally, Thomas was asked to put the trap up at school. Alas, only one moth was caught but he was asked to stand up and tell the children how his moth trap works. Next term he will set it up again to coincide with the curriculum on insects and animals.

I always thought the term "mother" meant finding elusive socks and underwear, cleaning shoes, locating missing homework and the sensitive treatment of bruises, ailments and ills. However, our son's new hobby has certainly given a whole new meaning to the term "mothering"!

Angie Middleton

[Angie – you don't know what you've let yourself in for! You'll be hooked for the rest of your life!]

was this success that I hadn't even brought a specimen tube with me! Fortunately the moth was even more unprepared for the encounter and I managed to gather it up in my hands and get it back to the van where it was potted. It was a male Lunar Hornet.

Synanthedon culiciformis (Large Red-belted Clearwing)



I was alerted to the possible presence of this species by a colleague who had seen an unidentified insect flying about at high speed in a coppice clearing in Easton Hornstocks Wood. The description certainly matched this species although a variety of solitary wasps e.g. *Ammophila*, also occur in the area. A couple of visits produced no sightings but later in the year I was in the same clearing and saw distinctive larval feeding signs on the stumps of coppiced birch trees. These consist of piles of frass between the bark and sapwood and are quite unmistakable. A very high proportion of the stumps had been colonised although not those in the most recently felled area. I never did see an adult moth but John Ward, the County Recorder for Northants, visited the site the following year and did encounter the adults which were extremely lively and hard to see let alone net. This confirmed the species as new to Northants.

Sesia vespiformis (Yellow-legged Clearwing)

Flushed with the success of the last species, I read in MBGBI that *vespiformis* larvae feed in oak stumps in exactly the same way. A visit to a small coppice clearing at Castor Hanglands NNR produced results within minutes! Only a few small oaks had been felled but at least two had larvae in them, and in this case I also found empty pupal cases which confirmed the identity of the culprit. I'm sure that both this species and the last must live at low densities in many woodlands on broken branch stumps, burrs and so on. But give them a coppice clearing or fell a few trees and they seem to materialise out of nowhere!

Sence Valley

This relatively new addition to the county's natural history sites is starting to give some useful records. Lepidoptera records have been sent on to Adrian Russell, County Lepidoptera Organiser. The Odonata, in particular, are frequent at the site and include the following:

Dragonflies –

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| Brown Hawker | Migrant Hawker |
| Black-tailed Skimmer | Common Darter |
| Broad-bodied Chaser | Ruddy Darter |
| Four-spotted Chaser | Southern Hawker |

Damselflies –

| | |
|-------------------|-------------|
| Banded Demoiselle | The Emerald |
| Large Emerald | Common Blue |
| Large Red | The Azure |

Grasshoppers –

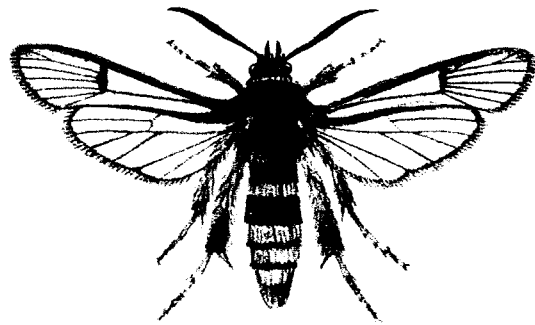
| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Common Green | Meadow |
| Common Field | Lesser Marsh |

The Lesser Marsh grasshopper is fairly uncommon in VC55 although on the increase. The identification was confirmed by Helen Ikin.

Also seen was the Birch Sawfly (*Limnephilus elegans*).

Alan Main

This one was more of a challenge although the evidence is much the same as the last species: pupal cases half-protrude from the stems of the foodplant, Wayfaring Tree (*Viburnum lantana*). The venue for the search was again Castor Hanglands where the shrub occurs sparingly. No doubt some would argue that I start with an unfair advantage in having such a noted entomological locality on my doorstep. However, the Reserve has been scoured by countless entomologists since the early 19th century – yet not once had this species been recorded, so I was not particularly optimistic. An hour's searching found plenty of holes which could have been old emergence holes but nothing conclusive. Moving to a different bush, there it was – another empty pupal case. This was in a young shoot barely 1cm across and not amongst the older stems. This is the first report of the species for Northants since 1962 although the moth itself has not been seen which, according to the literature, is fairly typical.



Sesia bembeciformis

Conclusions

Five species of Clearwing in less than half-a-day's searching during the year must be a reasonable average. The only species I failed to locate was the Currant Clearwing (*Sesia tipuliformis*) which I scoured some wild currant bushes for but I am told is usually common on old allotments. Admittedly, I saw more early stages than adult moths but for those who need proof positive, once you have located the breeding habitat then the old technique of sleeving would surely be worth trying.

The challenge this season will be to repeat these successes within the boundaries of VC55. As the Rutland border is less than 10 miles from the sites mentioned, it is surely a case of where, rather than whether, they occur.

Chris Gardiner

Clearwings contd

Sesia myopaeformis (Red-belted Clearwing)

My entomological friends said that this was the commonest and most easily found species and this proved to be the case. The trick is to look at areas of cracked, peeling or damaged bark on almost any old Apple tree. Broken or old pruned branches are often favoured. The pupal cases can be seen protruding from the wood long after emergence and so trees can be searched well after the flight period, at least until September. I found the cases on garden trees in Stamford (Lincs) and Shillington (Beds) and on a venerable old Crab Apple in a field near Wittering, Northants – only the second 10Km square for the county.

Sesia andrenaeformis (Orange-tailed Clearwing)

WINTER PROGRAMME 1999-2000

All meetings are held at Holly Hayes, Birstall starting at 7.30 p.m.
Exhibits are always welcome and refreshments are included.

- THURSDAY 14 OCTOBER** MEMBERS' NIGHT – exhibits, slides etc
– it's your show!
- THURSDAY 18 NOVEMBER** FARMERS GROW GREENER
(INTEGRATED CROP MANAGEMENT)
Anthony Biddle
The role of insects as pests in agriculture
- THURSDAY 9 DECEMBER** ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Followed by your slides
- THURSDAY 13 JANUARY** POST-GLACIAL BRITISH CYNIPIDS
Chris Leach
Everything you need to know about those devilish
little gall wasps from the Secretary of the British
Plant Gall Society!
- THURSDAY 10 FEBRUARY** FLEAS AND OTHER ECTOPARASITES
Frank Clark
If you want to have a good scratch then this is the
talk for you! Please do not bring the dog!
- THURSDAY 9 MARCH** MOTHS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR
Peter Gamble
After nearly half a century of natural history in the
county Peter is the man who knows about our
moths!
- THURSDAY 30 MARCH** WORKSHOP SESSION FOR MEMBERS
The topic(s) has/have yet to be decided – let us
know what you would like help with and we'll see
what we can do about it!

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