Notice regarding Elections at the AGM
by Clare Jeffers on behalf of the committee

At the indoor meeting last November the Sussex Moth Group committee talked about a proposal for formalising the election of committee members. The idea was that any committee member planning to stand down from their position should ideally make this known well in advance of the AGM, so that any upcoming 'vacancy' can be advertised to all our members in the Autumn newsletter and/or at the Winter indoor meeting. The committee supposed that advertising vacancies in this manner would give all members an equal opportunity to put themselves forward for a position on the committee and the committee proposed that, in the interests of fairness, elections would then be carried out by secret ballot - either by placing ballot papers in a box at the AGM, or by 'postal vote' in sealed envelope to the secretary. As it happens, our current Chairman, Sam Bayley, announced at that meeting his intention to stand down at the next AGM and this fact was made known to all members through the distribution of minutes from that meeting; any members willing to take on the position of Chairman were invited to put themselves forward.

The situation we find ourselves in now is that only one member, Steve Teale, has put themselves forward for the Chairman's position and no one has expressed an interest in taking over any of the other positions on the committee; it therefore seems that the committee’s original proposal to elect the officers of the committee by ballot is impractical. We live and learn! So, what the committee now proposes is that, given none of the positions on the committee are contested, the officers of the committee are elected individually at the AGM via a process of 'proposing' and

Sussex Moth Group Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>Sam Bayley</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sam.bayley@btinternet.com">sam.bayley@btinternet.com</a></td>
<td>01306-627170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Clare Jeffers</td>
<td><a href="mailto:clarejeffers@aol.com">clarejeffers@aol.com</a></td>
<td>01323-423711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Alice Parfitt</td>
<td><a href="mailto:aliceparfitt@sussexwt.org.uk">aliceparfitt@sussexwt.org.uk</a></td>
<td>01903-740212</td>
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<td>01273-497521</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have been overwhelmed by the number of articles coming in for this newsletter, thank you so much for everyone’s time and effort in helping to make this such an informative and enticing newsletter. The Sussex Moth Group is blessed with such enthusiastic members! We have a really great programme of moth events this year, so please get along to some to share your knowledge or learn something new; we look forward to seeing you there. In the meantime please keep sending in your interesting finds, anecdotes and pictures ready for the autumn newsletter. Best wishes, Penny Green
Chairman's Corner: A Sad Farewell by Sam Bayley

After being a member of the group for five years, with three of those serving as Chairman, I am now stepping down from the committee as in the not to distant future I will probably be moving out of the county, to my regret, and heading north of the Watford Gap. Funnily enough I only found out the other week that this was actually a service station on the M1! I have much enjoyed my time as Chairman and felt that there were always things to develop, although filling Sarah’s boots was not only a squeeze, but a difficult prospect and a hard act to follow.

At the start I was admittedly petrified of chairing a group of far more experienced and knowledgeable peers, but thankfully I got into a groove and hopefully proved myself to the group. When I joined the group with Chris Glanfield, the first meeting we came to had about 12 attendees and I was by far the youngest and least experienced. Over the last few years the group has grown a lot bigger, with one meeting in 2008 hosting nearly 40 members, and funnily enough my age has changed and many of the new members have stolen the youngest member position!

Although still an amateur, I feel I have developed my skills well with the much needed help and advice from many in the group, especially Tony Davis, Chris Glanfield, Sarah Patton and Colin Pratt. I have also managed my fair share of exciting finds in the county including a first for West Sussex: Maize Moth (*Hymenia recurvalia*), and a first for Sussex: Grey Birch Button (*Acleris logiana*) amongst the myriad of other species that the county has to offer. I have some great memories of group meetings, such as hunting through abandoned buildings at Kingstanding, eating ice creams in the middle of the night at Warnham LNR, the spectacle of trapping near the cliff edge at Hastings Country Park, the influx of migrants at Pagham Harbour, Dave Burrows’ hibernating Camberwell Beauty and Robin Storkey’s amazing portable kitchen. I also remember my first National Moth Night on an appalling evening in May hunting desperately in freezing conditions throughout the night without sleep to only catch a measly 30 moths and a cold. I must have been keen!

I can only end by saying good luck to the new Chairman and the rest of the loyal committee and thank you all for having me.

Keep mothing, Sam.

2009 Membership Subscriptions

Membership subscriptions are now due for the year 2009/10, the cost remaining at £5.

There are two ways to pay: either bring your money to the AGM on 11th May or post it (with your details) to the Treasurer: Alice Parfitt, 1 Sunnyside Cottages, North Street, Storrington, W. Sussex, RH20 4PB.

Moths and the advisability of headgear with earflaps or cotton wool as a defence against hearing loss... by Mike Feaney-Brown

The first moth trap of the year at Woods Mill, on the night of 12th March, produced an overwhelming haul of 906 moths!
Extreme Moth Recording...and why it’s worth it! by Steven Teale

Watching moths in their natural environment is a very rewarding aspect of lepidopterology. I will always remember my first sighting of a Clouded Buff (Diacrisia sannio) on a warm summer morning walk on the Downs. But some of the more fascinating encounters with moths are on those dark evenings between autumn and spring, when torchlight is essential and only the most determined are not shut away safely in a warm house.

Saturday 22nd November 2008 was one such evening when I set out to Poverty Bottom on the north-eastern edge of Newhaven to scour some Ivy flowers for nectaring moths. It was clear and cold, about 6°C, and I didn’t expect to find many active moths. After a while I recognised a familiar glow in the beam of my head-lamp and noticed the shiny moth’s eye was about three metres off the ground on an Ivy flower. It was well out of reach, but I was next to a fence with quite sturdy posts, one of which was directly underneath my moth.

I climbed with difficulty onto the post and immediately fell blindly backwards, almost landing on my dog, who thought I was playing a game and began to bark excitedly. I brushed myself off and climbed back onto the post, taking care to keep my balance this time. Once steady I located the moth and could tell it was a Noctuid, but it remained too far out of reach to tell which species it was.

I picked up a long twig and began to tickle the moth in an attempt to move it around slightly – perhaps a familiar wing marking would reveal its identity? It fell into the darkness of a Hawthorn thicket below. I climbed off the fence post onto the other side of the fence and peered into the darkness. Nothing. I kicked a few feet of deadwood out of the way and ventured into the thicket. Brambles and thorns dug into me, but by now I was determined to put a name to my moth!

I could see the ground fell steeply away in front of me and I was too tangled to venture any further forward. I also needed to tread carefully to avoid squashing the moth. I managed to get myself in a crouching position, close to the ground. A movement in front of me revealed the moth clambering along a mossy stick. I reached forward, pot in hand, and carefully captured my quarry.

All that was required now was to untangle myself, walk blindly backwards to the fence and climb over it without dropping the pot, all the time avoiding my dog, who was still barking wildly. Once this was done I took a close look at the moth and recognised it as a Satellite (Eupsilia transversa) in

With its several named forms (as illustrated in South’s “The Moths of the British Isles”), some so widely varied they look like different species, this cheerful little insect defies the cold and wet of winter by continuing to fly when little else does, sometimes appearing before Christmas, as it did last year on 22nd and 23rd December.

Some of my earlier memories of this modestly attractive moth are of finding them in good numbers just by searching tree trunks in local woods with a school mate at Shirley Hills, Croydon.

To highlight its hardiness in this colder than usual year I recorded my fiftieth Spring Usher of the season on February 17th.

No other moth rekindles, for me, the anticipation of a new “Mothing year”.

In Praise of Spring Ushers by David Burrows
**2009 Field Events**

**Saturday 4th April**
7.30pm  Bookham Common, Surrey  TQ125558

Drive north along Little Bookham Street until a 90 degree right hand bend where it becomes Church Road. Turn left on this bend (i.e. carry straight on) to a small road that appears to be unnamed! Over the railway bridge and carry on until you come to a 90 degree left hand bend. There is a small parking area on the right hand side on this corner.

The main purpose of the meeting is to look for Sloe Carpet. We will run traps but they rarely catch Sloe Carpet so please bring the best torch you have and a net if you have one. The site can be wet. Please arrive a little earlier if you have traps to set up.

Contact: Tony Davis  07837 412820  Target species: Sloe Carpet

**Friday 22nd May**
7.45pm  Private Estate near Kirdford.  TQ017269

Meet at the Forester’s Arm pub, which is in Kirdford village next to the village green. Grid ref given is for the pub. Part of a SxBRC recording event (which is actually on 23rd May).

Contact: Penny Green  07960 388096  Habitat type is hay meadow. Previously unsurveyed area.

**Saturday 30th May**
8.45pm  Leechpool & Owlbeech Woods, Horsham  TQ199317

Meet at small car park off Owlbeech Way by the play area.

Contact: Sam Bayley  07734 231003  Target species: Alder Kitten and Rosy Marbled.

**Saturday 30th May**
8.00pm  Park Corner Heath  TQ516147

Turn south off the A22 at the Landrover Man into Park Lane, turn right immediately into small private road, entrance is on the right. Grid ref given is for entrance of reserve. Limited parking.

Contact: Michael Blencowe  01323 423711

**Friday 6th June**
8.00pm  Brighton Wildpark and D. Stringer School  TQ307071

Enter Stringer Way from the west and we’ll meet half way down Stringer Way on the left (BN1 6PZ). We can then set up traps in the butterfly haven here, it is an area of chalk grassland created on what used to be a playing field, it has just under 100 wild flower species and has recently been grazed by sheep. Some others can go and set up traps at Brighton Wildpark up the road. Part of a SxBRC recording event (which is actually on 7th June) and the Springwatch weekend.

Contact: Penny Green  07960 388096

**Saturday 7th June**
8.45pm  Springwatch event at Stanmer Park  TQ340087

The Sussex Moth Group will be manning a joint stand with Sussex Butterfly Conservation. If anyone would like to help out, please contact Sam Bayley: 07734 231003. Thank you.

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**Unusual Forms Recorded in Denton by Steven Teale**

Every so often a moth turns up in the garden that has different markings to the norm. This can be explained away when looking at variable species, but some species exhibit only slight variability, where any markings outside of the norm are immediately noticeable.

I recorded two such unusual forms last autumn, with a Pale Eggar (*Trichiura crataegi*) on 27th September and a Scarce Umber (*Agriopis aurantiaria*) on 15th November. Both times I had to reach for my identification guides to make doubly sure I was recording the correct species.

Looking at the photographs in turn, the Pale Eggar has a fairly light ground colour, but the main features are the spot within the central band and an exaggerated kink on the innermost cross-line, which almost joins both cross-lines together.

The Scarce Umber is much darker than the other specimens I’ve recorded, with a great deal more mauve than the usual lightly speckled individuals I’m used to. The outer area of each forewing is predominantly mauve.

Colin Pratt comments that he has not seen moths with these markings before, although he is appropriately cautious about calling these aberrations – they may have been regularly seen by other recorders before. I would therefore be interested to hear from any reader who has recorded similar examples of either of these moths, especially so if recorded close to Newhaven.

Many thanks to Colin Pratt for his help and advice during the writing of this article.

**Pale Brindled Beauty by David Burrows**

Pale Brindled Beauties have a long flight period here, usually from early to mid-December through to March. This year out of over a hundred males to light, only one was this melanic form *monachana*. 
Wintry Moths by David Burrows

The wintry months of December 2008 and January and February 2009 have been “proper” winter months, with longer harder frosty periods and several bouts of snow followed by gales and flooding; weather appropriate for the season. But in recent years these early months have produced hardly any wintry conditions at all, resulting in increased insect activity to tempt the semi-dormant moth-er into action. So, I thought a comparison of moth numbers and species seen at the same site(s) in 2008, when January and February were mild, and in 2009, when January and February were cold, would be interesting.

Winter mothing here, between Battle and Rye, is a bit hit and miss; with no trap involved, just a 125w mv bulb suspended from a gutter bracket at six feet from the ground, north-facing and surrounded by much-sprayed farmland. Any moths attracted will settle on the wall or adjacent vegetation/clutter. This lamp is mostly used when weather conditions seem favourable and is usually switched off before midnight, but summer nights are different, when leaving it switched on will hopefully provide classy moths to drool over when returning late from those field trips that don’t provide!

Additional winter interest is sometimes to be had from checking a couple of low-powered wall lights in the village; one situated outside the local surgery (with its car park bounded by native hedging) and another on a white weatherboard wall by the hardware shop. These puny lights can sometimes attract double-figure counts of moth, and sympathetic glances from passers-by when I’m checking around. So how do the two years compare?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>JANUARY</strong></td>
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<td>“Moth nights”</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>123</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td><strong>FEBRUARY</strong></td>
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<td>“Moth nights”</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>364</td>
<td>195</td>
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<td>16</td>
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| 487 macros          | 305 macros          |
| (28 species)        | (14 species)        |

2009 Field Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 27th June</td>
<td>9.00pm</td>
<td>Rye Harbour TQ943191</td>
<td>Keith Alexander 01424 212894</td>
<td>Meet at the entrance to the reserve at grid ref given. Target species: Shingle moth species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 3rd July</td>
<td>8.00pm</td>
<td>Abbotts Woods nr Hailsham (public event) TQ557072</td>
<td>Michael Blencowe 01323 423711 <a href="mailto:sussegrayling@aol.com">sussegrayling@aol.com</a></td>
<td>An evening of moths, nightjars, bats...and burgers. There will be on-site barbecue facilities, toilets and torchlight walks to see what is lurking in the woods at night. Meanwhile moth traps will attract the many amazing moths for us to study. Please bring torches. Limited spaces so booking is essential. Directions: signposted off the A22 between Hailsham and Polegate and is also signposted off the A27 at Wilmington. Meet in main car-park. BC members only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 11th July</td>
<td>9.00pm</td>
<td>Beckley Woods near Rye TQ854214</td>
<td>Steve Wheatley 07747 780605</td>
<td>Meet at Forestry Commission entrance on Horseshoe Lane at grid ref given.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday 8th August</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Knapp Estate, West Grinstead TQ164212</td>
<td>Malcolm Stevens 01403 891212</td>
<td>Meet at the estate entrance gate just off A24 at given grid ref. The Sussex Wildlife Trust is working closely with the landowners to manage the extensive estate including the Knapp Millpond. Target species: Rush Wainscot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 14th August</td>
<td>8.00pm</td>
<td>Ashdown Forest Moth Survey TBA</td>
<td>Steve Wheatley 07747 780605</td>
<td>Sussex Moth Group members only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the event of adverse weather it is advisable to contact the event organiser to check the event is still going ahead.
Can you help us to look for Clay Fan-foot in July?
The moth is believed to be associated with small sheltered clearings and coppiced areas in woodland. Twenty recently coppiced sites in Rother are available to be surveyed during the July flight period. I need people to help undertake the surveys. Several local moth recorders have already volunteered their help but more help would be very welcome. The results of these surveys will help us to gather more information about the distribution and habitat preferences of this nationally notable UK Biodiversity priority species.

If you can help look for Clay Fan-foot this season please contact me. We also hope to record Dotted Fan-foot, Small Fan-foot and Common Fan-foot this year.

Steve Wheatley
swheatley@butterfly-conservation.org
01580 879958

Message from Michael Blencowe: "This may be our last year living on the edge of the Forest. Unfortunately we can’t have an event here but if any members want to visit and trap here please contact me on 01323 423711"

Saturday 29th August  8pm—11pm  Pulborough Brooks RSPB Reserve  TQ058164

Magnificent Moths. So you think moths are dull brown creatures that only come out at night? Well prepare to be surprised and discover the wonders of these amazing creatures. We will have several light traps running across the reserve, each with experts to show you different species of moth ‘up-close’. We will also have some simple ‘try this at home’ ideas, so you can discover your own Magnificent Moths! Refreshments will be available to purchase. Please bring a torch.

Cost: £3 Adults, £2 Children, £6 Family (half-price for RSPB or Butterfly Conservation Members).

Drab Looper
Although a rare species in Sussex and elsewhere, it is undoubtedly under recorded due to the lack of daytime fieldwork by moth recorders and we keep on (re)discovering colonies which are new or where there have been no records for decades. The larval foodplant is Wood Spurge and the moth can be seen flying near the foodplant in sunny weather or can be disturbed from the foodplant or adjacent vegetation. Observations have shown that it is capable of hanging on at sites with little Wood Spurge for considerable periods.

Speckled Yellow
A stunning little moth found in a variety of habitats from woodland to heathland and flying from mid-May onwards.

There are also species which do come to light occasionally but are much more common than light trap records suggest. Well known examples include Barred Tooth-striped and Sloe Carpet; two of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species, but another example I would give for our part of the world is Twin-spot Carpet. In Scotland you get lots at light but in Sussex I had never caught one until I took to going for a walk at dusk with a lamp and a net.

Of course if you start to look at micro’s as well there are many more, including stunning species such as Olethreutes arcuella which Michael Blencowe wrote about in the last newsletter. Many of these species are thought to be rare but are they really? We will only know if people start to leave their traps behind and go out moth hunting during the day!
Most of us these days rely on using light traps for all our mothing. Doing this means that you will miss out on a range of species which are not attracted to light. Below are a few species to look out for during the day time this spring.

Orange Underwings
There are two species, Orange Underwing which feeds on birch and the rarer Light Orange Underwing which is an Aspen feeder.

Both species tend to spend most of their time around the tops of their respective foodplants, which makes capture and identification somewhat tricky. If you are absolutely certain that there is no Aspen on a site, you are probably justified in claiming Orange Underwing without capturing it but I have never seen a site with Aspen that has no birch so any claim of Light Orange Underwing would have to be based on the capture of a specimen and examination of the underside of the hindwing.

Colin Pratt tells me that they are more prone to fly at lower levels early in the morning and I have seen it said that they are attracted to horse dung but have no personal experience of that! It is also stated that they can be disturbed from their trees by kicking the trunk in dull weather but all I have ever got from this technique is a sore foot!

Orange Underwing

Light Orange Underwing
Mothing Options for 2009 by Colin R. Pratt, F.R.E.S.

THE LOCALITIES

Sussex is unusually rich in the number and variety of its wild habitats but many sites have yet to be surveyed for their moths during the modern era. Such attractive environments exist across the county and the following localities are just some of those likely to yield important discoveries. Permission will be needed from the managers of some of these places to gain access.

EAST SUSSEX

All of the significant woods near Battle (Great Wood, Petley Wood, Powdermill Wood, and all three of the large woodland complexes surrounding Netherfield) are neglected. In fact, only a little entomological investigation has been performed here since the 19th century. What little has been done, for example at Powdermill Wood by Sean Clancy, quickly revealed the Dentated Pug A. sparata. This remains the only known site for this species in East Sussex... or has it spread into nearby woods?

The remains of the vegetated shingle beach at the Crumbles was last intensively worked during the 1920’s, although Mark Parsons did some pioneering modern-day investigations here during the 1970’s. Probably now best for unusual micro-moths, the habitat badly needs an intensive survey before it is completely lost under housing.

The heathland at Chailey Common has never been intensively researched, although occasional visits with mv light have been made over recent years by Caroline Pritty (should this be Karen Pritty?) and others. Worst of all, Ashdown Forest - the largest wild area in the whole of southeast England, with 1,000 acres of open heather alone - is also seriously neglected.

Almost no mothing has ever been done on the downs between Firle and Selmeston. Does the Light Feathered Rustic A. cinerea occur? Or the Chalk Carpet S. bipunctaria? Or the Barred Toothstripe T. polycommata? Again, little is known about the moths on the coast at Crowlink. The area has much potential in late summer for the Square-spot Dart E. obelisca and the Northern Rustic S. lucernea, and earlier on for those just mentioned under Firle.

The largest reed-bed complex in Sussex, at Hampden Park near Eastbourne, now called the Shiniwater Lake complex, has not been researched since the 1920’s. Does the Flame Wainscot S. flammea and Reed Dagger S. albovenosa occur, or even Blair’s Wainscot S. buettneri?

WEST SUSSEX

Nothing is known about the moths inhabiting the woods surrounding Henley, although Sarah Patton showed that nearby Fernhurst is rich in unusual species. And the surviving wild parts of Tilgate Forest have hardly been visited since the 1970’s.

The vegetated shingle beach at Shoreham used to be a nationally-famous Sussex locality for micro-moths but no significant research has been undertaken on the site for more than 100 years.

There were no similar influxes of this moth reported elsewhere in 2008 and in neighbouring Kent the only record for 2008 was of one on a wall in Orpington on August 19th (Ian Ferguson pers. comm).

For such a number of Clifden Nonpareil to be recorded in such a small area of Sussex during a period when nowhere else was reporting a similar influx leads an optimistic lepidopterist like myself to conclude that these individuals originated not from some continental aspen grove but from East Sussex itself and that, dare I say it, the Clifden Nonpareil could possibly be breeding again in England and has chosen our county in which to stage its return.

The more cynical among us will (and indeed already have!) raise another possible source for our C. fraxini which we cannot ignore. These moths could have been actively bred and released.

While researching this article I was surprised at the number of websites which can supply you with C. fraxini eggs. Why wait decades for the wondrous Blue Underwing to grace your garden when you can whip out your credit card and for the price of £9.95 (including postage and packing) 15 eggs can be yours.

The ‘smoking gun’ that will solve this mystery will be the discovery of Clifden Nonpareil larvae in Sussex. And I for one will be strapping a stepladder to the roof of my car and will be cruising the countryside on the lookout for aspen in 2009.

References


Many thanks to Colin Pratt for information on this species.
1868 was a good year for *C. fraxini* in Sussex with four records. One was found by a page boy at the Albion Hotel in Brighton, two were taken by fishermen out at sea and one flew into an open window in Eastbourne where it was trapped under a gentleman’s hat and “Impaled with a piece of hairpin”.

The moth was a very rare immigrant to the county in the early part of the century, and between 1936 and 1990 only one was recorded. Then in 2006, that great year for migrants, four were reported from Brede, Ticehurst, Fontwell and Icklesham.

2006 was also one of the best years in recent history for Camberwell Beauties in Sussex. Waring & Townsend note that the arrival of *C. fraxini* often accompanies the arrival of Camberwell Beauties who originate from Northern/Eastern Europe, the area also believed to be the source of our *C. fraxini*.

Compared to the excitement of the 2006 season the following two years have been very disappointing. Low numbers of migrants were reported in 2008 with even the commoner migrants being in short supply in many recorders’ light traps. Migrant butterflies were also thin on the ground, or rather in the air. There were two reports of Camberwell Beauty in Sussex in 2008 but one of these has been attributed to the release of a captive bred insect.

So it was with some surprise that against this low-migration background an amazing total of ten Clifden Nonpareils were recorded in Sussex in 2008.

From late August through to October 2008 Sussex Moth Group members in the far east of the county were recording Clifden Nonpareil with alarming regularity! It was then that the lure of *C. fraxini* struck and I found myself preparing to do something that I swore I would never do: twitch a moth! Yes, I confess! I was ready to travel across the county to see what someone else had caught. Luckily the gentleman in question very kindly brought the moth to me, so my desire to see *C. fraxini* was fulfilled and my credibility remained intact!

Much investigative work was performed during the final quarter of the 20th century on the moths that live on the heathland at Ambersham Common, and this proved just how exciting the site is. The discovery of the nationally rare Southern Chestnut *A. haematidea* and the Scarce Burnished Brass *D. chryson* confirmed its quality. The site has been ignored this century.

The downs at Harting are one of the most inviting yet under-worked downs in West Sussex but very little at all is known about its moths.

At the middle of the 20th century enthusiasts from all over the country visited the sand and shingle at West Wittering, where they certainly encountered some unusual insects. The best was the Portland moth *A. praecox*, which was breeding there during the mid 1950’s but has never been detected since. Sporadic moth-trapping has been done here during recent years, by Charles Dewhurst, Sarah Patton, and Martin Love, and they turned up some good continental immigrants and the fifth ever British specimen of the Pyralid *S. acutellus*.

And the reed-beds associated with the River Adur, from Shoreham to Henfield, have not been properly looked at for very many years.

**THE SPECIES**

There are many moths in Sussex which need modern updates to their monitoring as they are in serious decline, either nationally or locally, or, even worse, have completely disappeared from notice. The following are only a representative selection, as many additions could be made to the list. Species already well-known in currently well-worked localities are not included.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bordered Straw <em>H. peltigera</em></td>
<td>a long-established immigrant breeding on the Crumbles, but larvae have not been hunted since 2000. Do they still occur?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buttoned Snout <em>H. rostralis</em></td>
<td>a rare moth for many years in Sussex, but it may now be colonising bushy places in the north.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalk Carpet <em>S. bipunctaria</em></td>
<td>in county-wide decline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimney Sweeper <em>O. atrata</em></td>
<td>restricted to Ashdown Forest, and in danger of extinction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentated Pug <em>E. A. sparsata</em></td>
<td>only known from Powdermill Wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five-spot Burnet <em>Z. trifolii palustrella</em></td>
<td>in serious danger of extinction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flame Wainscot <em>S. flammea</em></td>
<td>currently colonising reed-beds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued……….
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxon</th>
<th>Status/Location Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goat <em>C. cossus</em></td>
<td>in danger of extinction, but does it still occur at Pevensey?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass Eggar <em>L. trifolii</em></td>
<td>now presumed extinct, but last seen at Normans Bay and the Crumbles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniper Carpet <em>T. juniperata</em></td>
<td>our most famous colonies are on Storrington’s downs, but do they still occur here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pug <em>E. pusillata</em></td>
<td>and Light Feathered Rustic <em>A. cinerea</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniper Carpet <em>T. juniperata</em></td>
<td>nationally famous at Camber Sands, but does it survive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniper Carpet <em>T. juniperata</em></td>
<td>colonies are rare and those at Vann Common and Earsham Wood are our best, but are they still extant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk <em>H. tityus</em></td>
<td>in serious danger of extinction and last seen in the far western woods in 2000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Rustic <em>S. lucernea</em></td>
<td>long-known on the coastal downs at Eastbourne, but does it occur elsewhere towards Seaford?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pale-lemon Sallow <em>X. xcellaris</em></td>
<td>are the recent records from Walberton immigrants or is it still established in Bognor?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland moth <em>A. praecox</em></td>
<td>established at West Wittering during the 1950’s, but undetected there since.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumed Prominent <em>P. plumigera</em></td>
<td>long-known from the wooded western downs, but does it still occur?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red-belted Clearwing <em>S. myopaeformis</em></td>
<td>recorded at Ambersham Common in about 1980, but not since.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarce Burnished Brass <em>D. chryson</em></td>
<td>at Ambersham Common during the early 1980’s, but none seen since.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sloe Carpet <em>A. distinctata</em></td>
<td>in danger of extinction, and only found in the north-west.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Black Arches <em>M. strigula</em></td>
<td>declining, and only found in our foremost mature oak woods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Eggar <em>E. lanestris</em></td>
<td>in decline, and only found near Ringmer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Chestnut <em>A. haematidea</em></td>
<td>restricted to a handful of colonies in the UK and currently colonising the far western heaths. Has it reached Ashdown Forest?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square-spot Dart <em>E. obelisca</em></td>
<td>long-known on the coastal downs at Eastbourne, but does it occur elsewhere towards Seaford?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-banded Carpet <em>S. lutuata</em></td>
<td>a Red Data Book species previously well-established at Vert Wood, but is it still resident there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-barred Clearwing <em>S. specformis</em></td>
<td>only found in north Sussex and unrecorded since 1991, but almost certainly overlooked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Tiger <em>P. plantaginis</em></td>
<td>in serious danger of extinction and undetected since 1992 on the downs between Chichester and South Harting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Tangled up in Blue** by Michael Blencowe

“As we approached closer we saw, to our amazement that the hind wings had blue bands and that it was, in fact, nothing less than a fresh looking and apparently perfect *Catocala fraxini*. For a moment or two we gazed at it in speechless admiration, fearing almost to breathe lest it should take fright.”

From “*A rare visitor comes to sugar – The Blue Underwing*” C.N. Hawkins, 1937

Of the thousands of moth species that live on or visit this island many are sought after for their beauty and many for their rarity, but only a handful combine the both. No naturalist would argue against the Clifden Nonpareil belonging to this elite lepidopteran aristocracy. For centuries the ‘Blue Underwing’ has been sought by collectors and naturalists.

For who can resist the lure of the Clifden Nonpareil? The moth ‘without equal’. My time came in 2008 when on September 27th I found myself staring down into a plastic pot at *Catocala fraxini*. It was larger and paler than I had anticipated but I swear time stood still as it lifted its forewings to reveal the famed underwing. Blue! The sheer audacity of one species of moth to claim one colour all for itself.

Not only does this moth have a unique appearance but its name is suitably exotic too. Its scientific name is partially incorrect. There’s no arguing that *Catocala*, meaning ‘beautiful below’ like other moths that share this name, suitably refers to its coloured hindwings, but *fraxini* refers to the ash tree. Linnaeus believed the moth’s larvae fed on ash, not the aspen or poplar that they actually feed on. Mr Linnaeus was, however, rather busy with his attempt to bring order to the planet’s creatures. We’ll have to allow him the occasional mistake.

Clifden was an earlier name for Cliveden in Buckinghamshire where Cliveden House stands overlooking the Thames. The house is now owned by the National Trust and leased as a hotel. It has been used as a location for movies such as The Beatles’ “Help!” but it’s most famous lepidopteran visitor was found “Hanging against the pedestal of a statue” on the grounds of the house; the first British record of the moth.

The French part of the moth’s name was an acknowledgment of its foreign origin. Nonpareil means having no match or equal; unrivalled.

Apart from its status as a scarce immigrant the moth has temporarily taken up residence in Britain on two occasions: in the Norfolk Broads in the 1930’s and at Hamstreet in Kent between 1935 and 1964.

In “A Revised History of the Butterflies and Moths of Sussex” Colin Pratt traces sightings of *C. fraxini* back to 1838 when one was found near Arundel “In a bottle of beer and sugar that was placed against a wall to catch wasps”. Like other *Catocala*, this species is readily attracted to sugaring. Eastbourne clergyman Rev. Anthony Harbottle recalls a story of one over-zealous lepidopterist accidently painting over the moth with his sugaring solution as it sat on a post.
Ace in the Hole by Graeme Lyons

On the 13th December 2008 I attended a Sussex Bat Group meeting primarily to help count hibernating bats in caves and tunnels in West Sussex. It took two hours to get out of the car park at West Dean College because there was so much rain that day several people got lost when they were diverted due to floods and fallen trees. We finally got to the first abandoned railway tunnel. The rain was torrential and there was little light. Abandoned buildings, crumbling concrete and rusted iron set the scene. Unfortunately we couldn’t get in to the gaping maw of the tunnel because the key didn’t fit the heavy iron door. Skip to the end of the day and we were heading towards another tunnel on the edge of the border with Surrey. The roads were flooded every few miles now making progress slow. We walked through ankle deep water for half a mile along another abandoned railway line. We passed a torrent of bright orange water cascading into the railway cutting. The smell of phosphorous was intense; this was surely fertiliser run-off from surrounding fields. Standing in the archway to the tunnel, rain pouring down our necks, hands too cold to tell what was going on in the poor light. This key also didn’t fit...

Fortunately the day was not lost as between the two failed attempts to access railway tunnels we went to the Sussex Wildlife Trust reserve, Marehill Quarry, which fortunately doesn’t need a key. There is however no public access to the reserve; any access into Marehill Quarry requires permission from Natural England and Sussex Wildlife Trust to avoid disturbing hibernating bats, and is therefore limited to the bat group’s activities. The quarry was active from the late nineteenth century up to the time of the Second World War and the sand was used in the casting of fine iron works. The caves themselves are unusual as every few metres there is a column of untouched sandstone creating a grid of tunnels. Walking round the cave system requires a stoop because it’s very low and we were soon plunged into darkness. It wasn’t long until we began to see hibernating Herald moths. Bats were thin on the ground but three Daubenton’s Bats and a Whiskered/Brandt’s Bat were recorded. As I had become quite excited by the Herald moths, the bat group were keeping an eye out for me for any other moths. We saw several Peacock butterflies, *Metellina meriana* (a type of cave spider) and some hoverflies (*Eristalis tenax*). Then I heard someone call out “There is a different moth here, a ‘brown triangle’ ”. I thought it would perhaps be a Tissue but I recognised it immediately as one of the larger snouts and certainly one of the snouts that I had not seen before. I confirmed it as Bloxworth Snout from the field guides and, after a call to Colin Pratt, found this to be the seventh record for Sussex and the fourth record for West Sussex. Whether this would be a hibernating migrant or a resident specimen could not be said but I will certainly be joining the bat group next winter to see if there are anymore surprises. It’s nice to find a rarity in mid-winter when moths seem like distant memories.

THE NEW NATIONAL MOTH SURVEY

The Sussex Moth Group’s recording for the new National Survey is preferably undertaken to the definition of a six-figure map reference, although, while we map to the tetrad, the countrywide survey will only illustrate species on a 10 kilometre square basis. The following map illustrates the 10 kilometre squares in Sussex that are currently relatively well-worked for their moths.
Dusking for the Winter Moth by Steven Teale

Many moth species overwinter as an egg, caterpillar or pupa. Some species, like the Herald (*Scoliopteryx libatrix*), feed up on the juice of autumn berries and overwinter as an adult, hibernating in places that are protected from the worst of the winter weather and re-emerging only when warmer weather returns. The Winter Moth (*Operophtera brumata*) is one of the few species that can be found on the wing on all but the coldest nights during the winter months.

Its Latin name, like its English, provides an insight into its behaviour. *Operophtera* roughly translates as ‘fruit-destroyer’, probably a reference to its larval habit of defoliating orchards, and *brumata* (from *brevissima*) as ‘shortest day of the year’ or ‘winter’, a reference to the adult’s flight season.

I was intrigued by this moth and wanted to learn more. It is described as a common moth, probably the most common of the winter species, yet in 2007/2008 I failed to record a single Winter Moth, despite regular trapping sessions, and only eight visited my garden between 19th November 2008 and 18th January 2009, during which time I ran 28 sessions with my light trap. If I relied solely on my light trap as an indicator of abundance, I would be beginning to think the Winter Moth was not very common in Denton.

Only the males will regularly visit light because evolution has rendered the females flightless. Therefore, the only way to record both sexes is to go out and find them in their natural environment, with a torch or headlamp.

I set out on the Downs behind Denton in Newhaven on a couple of suitable occasions during December and January to learn more about the ecology of this species. The larvae feed on a wide variety of food-plants and some of these, such as Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Cherry-plum (*Prunus cerasifera*) and Apple (*Malus* spp.) are present in the area I worked.

After a couple of failed efforts toward the end of November and early December, when the weather was quite cool, I wondered whether I would find any at all. But then a mild period developed in mid-December and the night of 18th had all the signs of being a good night for dusking. With the aid of my headlamp I counted 235 males between 19.00 and 20.45. I did not find any females, but was still very pleased to have found a sizeable colony. Perhaps I had stumbled upon a mass emergence of males, with females emerging at a later date? The males were so abundant that brushing against branches resulted in a small cloud of moths that reminded me of butterflies on warm summer days. The males cling feebly to the spindly twigs on the outermost parts of the scrub and appear to favour dense stands of hedgerow, rather than individual trees.

Temperatures plummeted on Christmas Eve and did not rise again until 11th January after the coldest spell of weather for at least a decade. I thought my opportunity to find a female, or better still a mating pair, had passed for another year. But noticing several active moths just after dark on 13th persuaded me to don my headlamp again. This time I worked some suitable-looking areas along Ranscombe Lane near Glynde and counted 62 in less than 30 minutes after 17.20. But still no females were seen.
It is February as I write and soon the moths will start to appear again. The tally of species for 2009 is likely to be different from earlier years. Among the many things I have learnt from this project is that a very ordinary looking square metre (and presumably any other bit of countryside or garden) is remarkably dynamic. Species that are abundant in one year often fail to return the next, though there are a few that are so reliable in their appearance that it is difficult to believe that it is not the same individual as the one that shared the sunshine with me the previous year.

List

Micropterix calthella  
Eriocrania unimaculella  
Hepialus humuli  
Ectoedemia subbimaculella  
Ectoedemia septembrella  
Stigmella aurella  
Nematopogon swammerdamella  
Adela reaumurella  
Psyche casta  
Nemapogon cloacella  
Monopis obviella  
Tinea trinotella  
Bucculatrix ulmella  
Caloptilia syringella  
Phyllonorycter quercifoliella  
Glyphipterix simpliciella  
Esperia sulphurella  
Depressaria pastinacea  
Teleiodes vulgella  
Syncopacma larseniella  
Mopopa locupletella  
Mopopa raschiella  
Cochylis dubitana  
Pandemis cerasana  
Acleris cristana  
Olethreutes lacunana  
Epinotia cruciana  
Pammene aurana  
Alucita hexadactyla  
Agriphila straminella  
Scoparia ambigualis  
Pyrausta purpuralis  
Eurhythra horultata

Shortly afterwards, back in Denton, I worked the same area as on 18th December and, in the space of 40 minutes after 19.00, I counted a further 17 individuals, including three mating pairs. I had finally found some females! Each of the mating pairs was found on Hawthorn, and was remarkably well camouflaged. I had mistaken one pair as a piece of flaking bark. The female’s body is much larger than the male’s and is darker with green banding, giving the appearance of algae on bark; a very effective disguise. Only the males’ pale wings in my torchlight betrayed their presence.

It has been suggested to me that the species distributes itself by the males carrying the females during mating, so that eggs can be laid on suitable foodplants in new areas. While I have not witnessed this behaviour myself, I certainly would not refute it, it makes evolutionary sense. However, my observations to date suggest that this practise may not be common. Males were witnessed in concentrated numbers at some locations but not in others, both where suitable foodplants are present. With such a range of foodplants (the term ‘polyphagous’ is used to describe the feeding habits of the caterpillar), it would not be unreasonable to expect the species to be ubiquitous.

The localised concentrations I have seen have led me to question whether the species is in fact more sedentary than has been suggested. Established colonies could grow very large in time, providing the habitat has not degraded.

While the male could conceivably carry the female in flight, the female must be quite a burden; her body is noticeably larger than the male. Only short flights may be possible, but then again some males are larger than others, so they may be capable of stronger flight. Also, if males do emerge before females, it may be that the males disperse to new areas and find sedentary females to ensure genetic ‘mixing’.

Of course, without witnessing this behaviour first hand, one can only guess at what actually happens.

I did note some interesting behaviour in the mating pairs. The species is quite sensitive to light and sought the shade whenever I shone my headlamp on them. This is sensible because they are vulnerable during mating. The females were very much in charge of these manoeuvres, the males being dragged along by the larger, stronger mate.

Finally, the locations where I found the mating pairs on the Hawthorns were interesting. I expected to find them on the trunk, but found only one of the three pairs in this position. One of the other pairs was found on the top of a primary branch in a fairly open situation and the other pair was clutching a spindly twig in the same manner as the males described above.

I have been afforded a glimpse of this moth’s behaviour and although some of my questions have been answered, there are inevitably many new questions that I hope will be answered as I continue to study this species in future years. I would certainly encourage others to do the same – even if it only provides an opportunity to watch moths at an otherwise barren time of year.

Many thanks to Colin Pratt for his help and advice during the writing of this article.
**Beckley Woods Update** by Steve Wheatley

Work is almost complete on the Beckley Woods Ride Restoration Project in Rother. Beckley Woods is an important woodland for butterflies and moths. The wood holds the UK record for the most moths recorded in a single survey: 435 species! The wood was severely affected by the 1987 storm, leaving lots of open space to which butterflies and moths responded very positively. In the following years the Forestry Commission embarked on a vast tree planting exercise and the resulting crop has almost eliminated the open space, leaving only narrow, shaded rides between the increasingly tall trees.

The Rother Woods Project last year raised over £10,000 for ride widening and glade creation work in the wood. The funding came from the Butterfly Conservation, Forestry Commission and also generous donations from BC Sussex Branch and Sussex Moth Group. Importantly, the High Weald Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) provided 75% project funding which could be matched against the other contributions; this meant for every £1 raised the SDF contributed a further £3, so even relatively small donations became very useful.

Volunteers also got involved in the habitat restoration work, using bow saws and loppers to clear an important south facing bank and widen an already flower-rich ride. The target was to generate 20 days of volunteer time but, thanks to great enthusiasm and a lot of tea and coffee, we exceeded this target by 35%. This impressive display of commitment by the volunteers has now produced a further contribution of £785 from our funders.

The total project will create three acres of open space within the wood and substantially widen approximately 1.5 miles of rides. Thank you to Sussex Moth Group for their valuable contribution towards the project and to the Sussex Moth Group members who came along and helped with the work.

The wood is Open Access and can be visited at any time. A moth survey will take place at Beckley Woods on Saturday 11th July. Any members of Sussex Moth Group are very welcome to join me. Last year’s survey recorded many fascinating species including Olive Crescent, Clay Fan-foot and Scarce Merveille du Jour. In September we conducted a larvae search; Olive Crescent larvae were found by 7 year-old Finlay Wheatley. I was with him and didn’t find any!

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**Moths from a Sussex square metre** by Patrick Roper

For the past five years I have been giving very close scrutiny to a square metre of ground in our garden in Sedlescombe, East Sussex and have discovered that regular attention to such a small area delivers unexpected results in terms of flora and fauna.

This square metre is of fairly non-descript grassland with a range of other plants, all of which occur there naturally. It is in a sunny position and backed by our garden hedge. More details can be found on the weblog: [http://squaremetre1.blogspot.com/](http://squaremetre1.blogspot.com/)

I have so far recorded 55 moth species and these have all been found by searching, sweeping or netting. I have not used a light trap or any other kind of artificial attractant and my list is very different from the one I would have obtained if I had placed a light trap in the square. There have been relatively few Noctuids and no Hawkmoths or Prominents, but a wide range of micros, many of them day-flying. Quite a number of species have been found as larvae, bred on to maturity, identified and released. Many records are of species seldom recorded in Sussex.

Some of the highlights have included a female **Ghost Moth**, *Hepialus humuli* (now a declining BAP species) found just after she had emerged and expanded her wings. The pupal case was still projecting from the ground and it is difficult to understand how the larva managed to obtain enough nourishment from the grass and other roots. Two species that are obvious as larvae are the **Golden Pigmy**, *Stigmella aurella*, which always has a few mines on the Bramble leaves and the **Parsnip Moth**, *Depressaria pastinacella*, whose larvae make a mess of the Hogweed flowers before boring into the stem. Another leaf miner is the tiny, but very beautiful **Johnsworth Pigmy**, *Ectoedemia septembrella*. I bred one of these from a St John’s-wort leaf and when released it fell like a chip from a coloured jewel into the grass.

On another occasion a **Dusky Plume Moth**, *Oideaematophorus lithodactyla*, flew out from under a rock when I lifted it. The larvae feed on Fleabane and, apart from one record from our garden, there are only 14 other records in the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre database.

On summer days flowers, particularly of Hogweed and Ragwort, attract many smaller moths. One of the prettiest is the **Orange-spot Piercer**, *Pammene aurana*. There must also be many night visitors and so far I have bred seven species of Pug moth from caterpillars found very well camouflaged among the flowers.

One particularly pleasing episode was the discovery of a **Rosy Footman**, *Miltochrista miniata*, with a damaged wing. Because she could not fly she had laid several neatly arranged rows of eggs on a leaf and I managed to raise several of these to adulthood feeding them on lichen from the Medlar tree that grows beside the square metre.

Continued.........