

Argynnis paphia L. and *Limenitis camilla* L. in the New Forest in 1941/42

By the Rev. J. N. MARCON*

Two years ago Major-General C. G. Lipscomb wrote of an 'explosion' of *Argynnis paphia*, when thirty-five varieties were secured. It may be of interest to give some details of a similar 'explosion' in the New Forest in 1941/42. Few if any collectors who witnessed this are still alive, and thus able to compare it with what took place more recently.

Sudden expansion of Lepidoptera, indeed of all insects, occurs in many species at rare intervals. Mr. R. M. Craske tells of such in *Strymon w-album* in 1941, of *Thecla quercus* and *Lycaenopsis argiolus* in 1944. It did so with Silver-washed Fritillaries and White Admirals in 1881, again in 1918/9, in 1941/42, and as General Lipscomb records locally in 1976/77.

Differences can be drawn for the number of captures in that three collectors were at work in the recent 'explosion', whereas in the New Forest in those two years I know of twelve; possibly there were more. Moreover two woodland areas were successfully hunted in 1976/77, whereas in the New Forest they nearly all came from Dames Slough, Oakley and Roe Wood Enclosures in 1941, and from the large Park Hill, Pignal areas in 1942 (little being found the second year in the earlier places, or the later places the first year). This suggests the curious feature that variation was local.

1976 is remembered as an exceptional summer, nothing like it known before, sunny from mid-April to end-August, thus exceeding all previous records. This may be one of the reasons for the greater evidence of practically all butterflies in that and the following summer than for the past two decades. It was a year too when a number of rarities appeared on these shores — *Nymphalis antiopa* were seen, a *Lampides boeticus* caught, an *Argynnis lathonia* photographed. The previous winter was not exceptionally severe, as was the case in 1917/18 and 1939/40. But an important factor operated in these two, namely the onset of World Wars, which limited the usual trimming of rides and the cutting of brambles.

The New Forest has been visited in July every year from 1923 to 1943 (save for two summers in India). None were so prolific in varieties as 1941/42. An occasional one might have been caught in the intervening period — especially in *Limenitis camilla* — but it was a great rarity. How does this 1941/42 'explosion' compare with what occurred in a smaller area in the more recent 1976/77 period which General Lipscomb records?

Not every capture can be enumerated, but most collectors were spoken to in one or other of the several enclosures visited. Furthermore a letter from the late Mr. Castle Russell together with the notes made at the time suggest a fairly

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comprehensive tally. This is substantiated by checking those varieties now held by Mr. Watson of Boldre and Mr. Smart of the Saruman Museum.

In 1941 four days were spent in the middle of July and after a short gap another three: the excitement of the first period being so intense as to necessitate a start on the second at 5.30 a.m. on a motorcycle from Eastbourne.

Mr. Russell and Col. Burkhardt, being on the spot, collected every available day and, he (Russell) says, there was not one which did not produce a variety of some sort. He records over a score of good *paphia* vars. and some sixteen *nigrina* or *semi-nigrina*. My own score was nine *paphia* — two *ocellata*, one *ater*, six *confluens* — and five *camilla* vars. In addition Mr. Tetley took three *paphia* var. *confluens*; Mr. Clarke a pair of *ocellata*, a *confluens* and a *semi-nigrina camilla*; Mr. Johnstone an *ocellata paphia* and a *nigrina camilla*; Mr. Turner a *paphia* var. *nigricans*, three *confluens* and a *valesina* var. *glomerata*; Mr. I. Farwell one *ocellata* and one *confluens*; Mr. C. Farwell an *ocellata*; Mr. Jackson a *post-confluens*; and Mr. Watson a *camilla* var. *nigrina* and a var. *obliterae*.

In 1942 I enjoyed thirteen days there. Numbers were somewhat fewer, but up to the average of most seasons. In consequence the total number of varieties was fewer, though some taken may not be in my records. Little was found in the previous years enclosures; all captures were centred round one large stretch of woodland. In both years Island Thorn, the favourite resort of Russell and the venue of many collectors most years, was out of bounds, being used for training by the Armed Forces.

I have no record of Mr. Russell and Col. Burkhardt's captures (noted together as they went to Mr. Russell) other than of two *paphia* var. *nigricans*, two *confluens* and one *camilla nigrina*; Mr. Tetley had to his credit a *paphia* var. *confluens* and a rare gynandromorph largely ♂ with a small patch of *valesina* on both forewings. Mr. Turner caught a *paphia* var. *nigricans* and Mr. Jackson a *post confluens paphia*. The count that fell to me was six *paphia* one *ocellata*, one *ater*, four *confluens* — and four *camilla* varieties. This tots up for the two years to sixty-five *paphia* vars. and thirty-one *camilla*. Vintage years indeed!

I do not know how many were caught sight of but never captured: no doubt a few were missed and some not seen. Mr. Russell spoke of a lovely ♂ *paphia* seen in 'middle' Oakley, forewings with a few spots — appearing almost totally fulvous — and hindwings black; it got up as he approached and flew down the ride. He shouted to Burkhardt, who waved his net at it, unsuccessfully; it was never seen again, though they hunted the area for the rest of the afternoon. Mr. Johnstone also caught a *Maniola jurtina* var. *atrescens* at the opening of Park Hill and said he had missed a 'black' *Polygonia c-album*: that too escaped the human predator!

With the aid of a motorcycle one was able to move around, but a near catastrophe parking it in one ride was the discovery on returning to find it on its side, with precious petrol leaking out! On another occasion a bit of bracken caught a *paphia* var. *ocellata* as it was being netted (my stupidity and excited carelessness), chipped out a small fragment of wing, which took ten minutes of search over a six inch square of grass to discover! So ended two memorable trips with a satisfying result!

Bug-hunting is a fascinating hobby, though the years of plenty recede behind us, nor does the future look promising. Nevertheless the delight and recreation of walking the woods and downs and capturing some of the beauty and expanse of nature, even though the capture of our quarry is now of much rarer occurrence, is a thing of joy for which we can always be thankful.

GAINSBOROUGH'S MISTAKE. — I went recently to the Gainsborough exhibition at the Tate Gallery and was much interested to see picture no. 22 . . . Gainsborough's young family chasing a butterfly. We have caught out the painter in this, however, for he has depicted a *dead* female *Pieris brassicae* L., and moreover he has killed his model by pinching! The butterfly is upside down with the upperside partly showing. I have written to the gallery and I hope they do not find any more models in rigor mortis! — Canon P. C. HAWKER, St. Botolph's Vicarage, Lincoln LN5 8EW.

RHYACIA SIMULANS HUFN. AND OTHER INTERESTING LEPIDOPTERA AT A NORTH WARWICKSHIRE SITE. — Regular trapping using a 6W 9V actinic lamp at Woodlands Quarry, Hartshill, near Nuneaton has produced several records of *Rhyacia simulans* Hufn. These are: 1978: 12th August, one ; 13th August, one; 19th August, one; 4th September, three; 6th September, one. 1980: 13th August, one; 15th August, one.

Woodlands Quarry, and SSSI on account of the rare Lyolithid fossils found within a limestone band, also produces frequent records of *Gnophos obscuratus* D. & S., *Larentia clavaria* Haw. and *Eremobia ochroleuca* D. & S. *Spaelotis raveda* D. & S. has occurred, with one trapped on 13th September 1980.

The adjacent Hartshill, Hayes, a predominantly sessile oak wood with a wide variety of other trees and shrubs, including much small-leaved lime and occasional wild service tree, also contains much of interest. *Abraxas sylvata* Scop. is still present in some numbers despite the ravages of Dutch elm disease. *Bena prasinana* L. and *Drymonia ruficornis* Hufn. are occasionally trapped and *Cosmia pyralina* D. & S. came to light in August 1977. A survey of Macro-lepidoptera carried out at Hartshill by the writer over the past four years has shown that over 250 species occur. — R. J. THOMAS, 23, Trentham Road, Hartshill, Nuneaton, Warwicks.



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