

The Death of Benjamin Wilkes and the Publication of *The English Moths and Butterflies*

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Benjamin Wilkes' extensive colour-plate work, *The English Moths and Butterflies*, is one of the most significant of eighteenth-century British entomological publications because it is one of the chief primary sources of data from the era of the first Aurelian Society, that little-documented period between the books of Eleazar Albin and the work of Moses Harris (Wilkinson, 1966). Dr. William S. Bristowe's several papers on Joseph Dandridge (Bristowe, 1967a, b) leave little doubt that Dandridge (1664-1746) was the *doyen* of British entomology during this period, but he seems to have published nothing on the subject. Rather, Wilkes (who gave ample acknowledgement to his friend Dandridge) was the "aurelian" who publicised the haunts and methods of the London entomologists for the benefit of his scientific contemporaries, incidentally giving us what appears to be the earliest native account of the "clap-net" as a device for capturing insects (1742).

The English Moths and Butterflies was obviously issued in fascicles, but no date appears on the title-page, and none of these separate "numbers" (which are mentioned on the title) are known to have survived. Thus we have previously had no really positive evidence for the dates of the beginning and conclusion of Wilkes' major book. Various spans have been proposed within the years 1747-60, but this wide range has recently been restricted by the discovery of obvious dates of composition within the text, and a manuscript date of 1749 (perhaps a date of acquisition) on the last page of one of the copies (Lisney, 1960; Wilkinson, 1966).

It is now apparent that the entire book was complete and ready for sale in the summer of 1749. A previously unnoticed advertisement in the *London Daily Advertiser* for 4th July, 1749, reads as follows: "Whereas some of the Subscribers to Mr. Benjamin Wilkes, lately deceas'd, for his *Natural History of the English Moths and Butterflies*, have not completed their Sets; this is to give notice, that any Subscriber may have their Sets completed, by sending Orders to Mrs. Lowe, Sister and sole Executrix to the above Mr. Wilkes, at Mr. Lowe's, a Glazier's, in Russell-Street, Covent-Garden. Note, The Subscription Price is 5s. a Number; the Price of the whole Work is 9l. colour'd, or 4l.4s. uncolour'd; and the Price of the Book of the Natural History is 10s. 6d."

Thus we know from internal dates that the work was under way in 1748 and 1748/9, and the advertisement tells us much more; Wilkes died before 4th July, 1749, and we may presume that the remainder of his book was published at some time before that date, or Mrs. Lowe would not be reminding the subscribers that they had not collected their

* The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540; The American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York 10024.

final numbers. These are important facts; they do not solve all of the perplexing problems surrounding the publication of Wilkes' book, but at least we have a terminal date (which has been in question for over two hundred years), and we now know the year in which Benjamin Wilkes died.

References

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RECORDS OF MIGRANT LEPIDOPTERA TAKEN IN EASTBOURNE DURING AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 1977. — During the autumn of this year a number of species were taken at my Robinson trap which overlooks the sea at Eastbourne. Upon the evening of the 15th September a single male *Mythimna albipuncta* Schiff., later upon the 22nd October, four examples of *M. vitellina* Hübn., came to the light with two freshly emerged *Lithophane leautieri* Boisduval, which may have bred upon the juniper and cypress bushes in the garden. — M. HADLEY, 4 Royal Crescent, London, W.11.

MIGRANT LEPIDOPTERA IN WEST SUSSEX. — The following noteworthy lepidoptera were taken at my m.v. trap here in October 1977: *Palpita unionalis* Hbn., October 20th (2), 21st (2), 22nd (1), 25th (1). *Orthonama obstipata* F., October 18th (2), 20th (1), 21st (2), 22nd (1), 25th (1). *Mythimna vitellina* Hbn., October 9th (2), 13th (1), 19th (1), 25th (1). *M. albipuncta* D. & S., October 8th (1). — R. R. PICKERING, 123 Manor Way, Aldwick Bay, Bognor Regis.

THE LEAST CARPET (*IDAEA VULPINARIA* H.-S.) IN HAMPSHIRE. — On the night of 11th-12th July, 1977, I captured a specimen of *I. vulpinaria* in the m.v. trap in my garden at Ashurst. Mr. A. H. Dobson confirmed the identification. Mr. B. Goater informs me that this is the first record of this species for Hampshire. — Dr. J. C. A. CRAIK, Department of Oceanography, The University, Southampton.

MIGRANTS IN SOUTH DEVON, 1977. — During a holiday in Malborough, S. Devon, I had the pleasure of taking *Mythimna vitellina* Hbn. on the 13th July and another one on the 14th July. These were in a m.v. trap seething with hundreds of moths, mostly *Agrotis exclamatoris* L. and a few *Sphinx ligustri* L. to add to the melee. I also observed one *Macroglossum stellatarum* L. at Start Point Lighthouse on the 15th July. — ROBERT DYKE, 105 Manor Road, Enfield, Middx.



Wilkinson, Ronald S. 1978. "The death of Benjamin Wilkes and the publication of 'The English Moths and Butterflies'" *The entomologist's record and journal of variation* 90, 6–7.

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