

West Sussex to Wester Ross in 1974

By T. J. RADFORD*

In August 1973 I moved from Nottingham to an area of West Sussex, well known for its variety of Lepidoptera and other insect life. Having already sampled some of the entomological riches of this area on week-end visits, I looked forward during the latter part of 1973 to my first full season in this exciting part of West Sussex.

January is usually the least productive month of the year, but 1974 was exceptionally mild, though characterised by heavy rain and hurricane force winds, I operated my M.V. trap in the garden on ten nights, and only once was it empty. The most regular visitors were *Phigalia pilosaria* Denis and Schiff. (which I had taken here as early as 21st December, 1973) and *Conistra ligula* Esp. *Thera rupicaprararia* Denis and Schiff. appeared on the 19th and also the first *Xylocampa areola* Esp. *Eranis leucophaearia* Denis and Schiff. followed on the 20th but was not common.

February was also mild, but the first part of the month was so stormy that the trap was not operated until the 12th. Some 15 species were taken on 12 nights. The first *Orthosia gothica* Linn. appeared on the 15th and many of the common spring moths were well on the way by the end of the month. One interesting capture was *Achlya flavicornis* Linn. on the 21st, but the most unusual occurrence was a single *Gonodontis bidentata* Clerck on the 16th.

March showed a pleasing increase in the numbers of moths but little that was unusual. The best nights were the 25th with 155 moths of 17 species and the 27th with 198 moths of 15 species. The most interesting newcomer was a single *Apocheima hispidaria* Denis and Schiff. on the 6th—a new species to me. Other species of interest to occur were *Trichopteryx polycommata* Denis and Schiff. on the 13th; *Lithophane socia* Hufn. on the 16th; *Orthosia populata* Fabr. on the 17th; *Dasycampa rubiginea* Denis and Schiff. on the 21st; *Gymnoscelis pumilata* Hübn. on the 25th and *Phlogophora meticulosa* Linn. on the 26th. *C. ligula* occurred regularly up to the 26th.

There were few butterflies in evidence before the 25th, but *Gonepteryx rhamni* Linn., *Aglais urticae* Linn., *Polygonia c-album* Linn. and *Nymphalis io* Linn. all appeared before the end of the month.

April was dry, warm and sunny, but the nights were frequently cool and dominated by north easterly winds, which are not conducive to good catches. *Orthosia advena* Denis and Schiff. was taken on the 1st, and a second *D. rubiginea* occurred on the 4th. On the 9th, however, the anticyclone began to decline as a shallow low moved up from France. The wind dropped, and in addition to good numbers of hibernated butterflies on the wing, *Anthocharis cardamines* Linn., *Pieris rapae* Linn., *Pieris napi* Linn. and *Pararge aegeria* Linn. were also seen. That

* Bramblings, West Walberton Lane, Walberton, Arundel, Sussex.

night was excellent, giving 199 moths of 23 species, including one *Orthosia miniosa* Denis and Schiff., one *Odontosia carmelita* Esp., two *Panolis flammea* Denis and Schiff., one *Chaonia ruficornis* Hufn. and one *Selene tetralunaria* Hufn. The first two were both new species to me.

The night of the 10th gave the highest total of the month with 266 moths of 19 species, but one *Polyploca ridens* Fabr. and two *Colocasia coryli* Linn. were the only newcomers to note.

After the 11th, numbers declined generally, picking up occasionally, but never again reaching the 100 mark. After the 23rd, numbers were always below 50, reaching an all-time low on the 26th with a mere six *O. gothica*. The most noteworthy species during this period were *Cucullia chamomillae* Denis and Schiff. on the 20th and 28th; *Cucullia verbasci* Linn. on the 27th; *Harpyia furcula* Clerck on the 20th and *Notodonta trepida* Esper., *Scoliopteryx libatrix* Linn. and *Clostera curtula* Linn. on the 30th.

Three more species of butterfly were seen before the end of the month; a solitary *Erynnis tages* Linn. sipped from a dandelion on the Downs near Storrington on the 23rd, a *Lycaena phlaeas* Linn. imbibed from my wallflowers on the 30th and a male *Celastrina agiolus* Linn. was smoked from an ivy-covered tree by my vigorous garden bonfire on the 25th. This was the only one of this species seen in 1974.

The first two weeks of May were cool and unsettled, and the nights were plagued by north-easterly winds. Generally there were fewer moths around than in March and the best captures in my garden trap during this period were the first *Laothoe populi* Linn. on the 3rd; *Lobophora halterata* Hufn. on the 7th; *Anticlea derivata* Denis and Schiff. on the 8th and *Eupithecia dodoneata* Guenée on the 12th.

On the 13th I visited a corner of Arundel Park and was pleased to find a colony of *Hamearis lucina* Linn. As a northerner, it was my first acquaintance with this attractive butterfly. *E. tages* and *Pyrgus malvae* Linn. were common, and the first *Pararge megera* Linn. was noted.

On the 14th I visited Ambersham Common and saw my first Bee Hawk Moth, probably *Hemaris fuciformis* Linn. feasting on bluebell. It was quite unperturbed as I strode up with my net, but somehow it escaped and threw me "out of joint" for the rest of the day. I returned the following day and spent two hours waiting for it. It came down three times but must have recognised me for it zoomed up over the trees as soon as I moved a muscle. I had to be content with *Drepana falcataria* Linn. and *Semiothisa notata* Linn. netted nearby.

Plusia gamma Linn., possibly the first migrant of the year, appeared in my trap on the 14th. On the afternoon of the 15th I went to Rewell Wood and found several *Argynnis euphrosyne* Linn. on the wing. The night of the 15th was rather better for moths and the catch included *Acasis viretata* Hübn. and *Pseudo-boarmia punctinalis* Scop.

On the 16th, a weak front approached from the west and gave one of those rare nights when conditions are absolutely

ideal for moths. 200 moths of no less than 56 species turned up. There were no rarities but many species put in their first appearance, some of them decidedly early. The most numerous species was *Opisthograptis luteolata* Linn. Others included five *Dasychira pudibunda* Linn., four *Celama confusalis* H.-S., one *Peridroma porphyrea* Denis and Schiff., six *N. trepida* and one early *Apatete aceris* Linn.

On the 17th, pressure rose and there followed several warm, sunny days until the 21st. As the nights were cool and clear, the number of moths on the wing dropped dramatically. The only newcomers were *Smerinthus ocellata* Linn. and *Drymonia dodonea* Denis and Schiff. Butterflies were, however, much in evidence; in Arundel Park on the 20th I saw at least 16 species. In addition to good numbers of *H. lucina*, I saw many *Polyommatus icarus* Rott. and *A. cardamines*, several *Aricia agestis* Rott. and two *Callophrys rubi* Linn.

On 25th May I travelled with my family to Winsford in Somerset to stay for a few days with my wife's relatives. The moth trap was operated in their large garden at an altitude of 700 feet overlooking the steep wooded slopes of the River Exe. The season was obviously well behind compared with Sussex and many trees were not yet fully in leaf. The first night was very cool with an air temperature of 0° C. and only 22 moths of 12 species turned up. The following night was milder and 22 species were taken though there was nothing to cause excitement. *Hydriomena coerulata* Fab. was the best species and *Hadena thalassina* Denis and Schiff. was interesting because it had not yet appeared in Sussex.

The next three nights were all quite poor, the most interesting species being *Lampropteryx suffumata* Denis and Schiff., *Hada nana* Hufn., *Cucullia umbratica* Linn. and *Cerura vinula* Linn. Ten of the last named appeared on the 28th which was surprising, as I have never had more than one at M.V. before. The night of the 30th was the best with 29 species, but only two *Selenia lunaria* Denis and Schiff. were of any real interest.

Butterflies were very scarce in the area, even when it was sunny, but I did find several *Argynnis selene* Denis and Schiff. near the beauty spot of Tarr Steps.

I returned home on the 31st and set up the trap in the garden. The first *Mimas tiliae* Linn. was expected, but four *Caradrina ambigua* Denis and Schiff. were quite a surprise. Altogether 107 species of moths were taken in Sussex during May.

June 2nd was quite a good night, with 217 moths of 53 species. I was gradually beginning to realise that although most species were putting in an appearance, the actual numbers were low.

On the 3rd of June I set off for the Isle of Wight with the express purpose of finding one of our most local butterflies—*Melitaea cinxia* Linn. Providing the weather was favourable, I

did not anticipate any difficulty as its haunts are well known. I stayed with my wife's uncle at his house at Adgestone overlooking the River Yar. Naturally I had my M.V. trap with me and operated this in the garden, which had a good open aspect. The first night was clear and cool, and I considered myself lucky to take 34 species. *Agrotis exclamationis* Linn. was easily the most numerous species, but 19 *Caradrina ambigua* Denis and Schiff. put this species in second place.

A glorious sunny 4th of June found me on the undercliff at Niton where I was pleased to find *M. cinxia* quite numerous, and seemingly favouring the flowers of Bird's Foot Trefoil. All the usual butterflies were present, and the first *Vanessa atalanta* Linn. was noted. Later I explored some rather interesting ground at Bouldnor Cliff, near Yarmouth, where I took *Cosymbia annulata* Schulze. by beating the bushes. The next two nights were both cool and little of interest was taken, but a single *Arctia villica* Linn. on the 5th was the only one that I saw in 1974.

Back in Sussex again, little of interest occurred until the 11th, when 69 species turned up at the garden trap. These included *Eupithecia intricata* Zett., *H. coerulata*, and my first ever *Moma alpium* Osbeck. A second specimen of the last named species occurred on the 13th, and on the 12th I took a single *Haplotis venustula* Hübn. in the trap.

On the 8th, I took my moth trap and generator into Arundel Park. The night looked promising, but shortly after I switched on, a cold wind rushed down the hill, dashing any hopes of success. I persevered until about 1 a.m. but I have never before been so cold on a nocturnal mothing expedition. Remarkably, 32 species arrived, mainly when the wind dropped temporarily, but I doubt if there were more than 60 moths altogether. The prize constituted two *Sphinx ligustri* Linn. and one late *N. trepida*.

A more successful expedition occurred on the 15th, when I took my equipment on to the Downs near Storrington. The day had been very warm and I anticipated a good night. Moths were slow to arrive at first, but after 11 p.m. there was a steady flow of species. By 2 a.m. I had taken 77 species. The most interesting of these were *Epirrhoe galiata* Denis and Schiff., *Eupithecia subumbrata* Denis and Schiff., *Horisme vitalbata* Denis and Schiff., *Cybosia mesomella* Linn., *Melanthia procellata* Denis and Schiff., *S. ligustri*, *Deilephila porcellus* Linn., *Anaplectoides prasina* Denis and Schiff., *Agrotis denticulatus* Haw., *Pyrrhia umbra* Hufn., *Hadena lepida* Esp., *Hadena conspersa* Denis and Schiff. and a ♀ *Macrothylacia rubi* Linn.

On the 20th I travelled to East Sussex, and near the Long Man of Wilmington, searched for the small colony of *Cupido minimus* Fuessly which I had discovered the previous year. Perhaps it was rather late in the season, but I only managed to find one male. From there I went to Beachy Head, where I saw a second specimen. My main aim was to see *Procus globulariae* Hübn. which I had discovered there in 1973. On that occasion

I took a single male, but this time I was luckier in finding several of both sexes on the wing. To my surprise, I also saw one each of *Argynnis aglaia* Linn. and *Melanargia galathea* Linn. at what seemed to me to be a very early date. *Perizoma albulata* Denis and Schiff. was also a nice find.

On the 21st I saw several *A. aglaia* on the wing at Harting Down in West Sussex. On the night of the 21st I took my trap and generator to Houghton Forest and took 73 species, notable amongst which were *Agrotis clavis* Hufn., *Tethea fluctuosa* Hübn., *Lophopteryx cucullina* Denis and Schiff. and the dark form of *Hydrelia testaceata* Don. At least 12 *Stauropus fagi* Linn. also came to the trap.

The nights of 22nd and 29th June were mostly quite good and there was usually something of interest in the garden trap. *Cepphis advenaria* Hübn. occurred on the 26th and other interesting species were *Eupithecia venosata* Fab., *Polychrista moneta* Fab., *Lophopteryx cucullina* Denis and Schiff., *Apeira syringaria* Linn. and *Hadena bicolorata* Hufn. *C. ambigua* continued to occur in small numbers.

On the 30th I again went to the Downs near Storrington, but the night was much less successful and only 58 species were noted, of which *Apamea sublustris* Esp. and *Gastropacha quercifolia* Linn. were the most interesting. Altogether in June, I had noted 207 species of moths in Sussex.

On 5th July, having farmed out the children for the weekend, my wife and I set out for Beachy Head to try out the caravan in which we were hoping to tour Scotland later in the year. The car broke down at Brighton but mysteriously repaired itself when an A.A. man appeared. It was late when we arrived at Beachy Head and as a force 8 gale was blowing it seemed pointless to operate the trap. The next day the gale continued unabated, though it was clear and sunny. The only butterflies to be seen were several early *Maniola tithonus* Linn. sheltering in a hedge. As evening approached, the wind died down a little and a fairly sheltered spot was found for the trap. As soon as I switched on, the wind sprang up again, and although I stood frozen stiff for 1½ hours, not a single moth entered the trap. This is something that has never happened to me before in any month from March to November, even up in the bleak North!

The next day, the 7th, was sunny and quite warm. Butterflies abounded in the sheltered spots and *M. galathea* was abundant. *A. aglaia* was quite common and I netted a solitary *Thymelicus lineola* Ochs. As I scrambled about on the steep slopes, a moth rose up and was caught by the wind and swept some distance away. I gave chase and eventually caught it, and as I suspected, it was a male *Diacrisia sannio* Linn.—but a moth I do not usually associate with chalk downs.

(To be continued)



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