

Collecting Lepidoptera in Britain during 1973

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Yet a third mild winter in succession ushered in the start of 1973. Almost the whole of January was unusually congenial with the thermometer often well into the 50's and the early geometers well out by the middle of the month, notably *Phigalia pedaria* L. and *Erannis leucophaearia* L. Even the early days of February were equally pleasant. It was only at the middle of this month that quite a cold snap set in, but it was only short-lived. The third week provided some quite warm days which encouraged the hibernators to awake from their winter sleep with the appearance of the first Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells. On the 20th at Juniper Hall near Box Hill among several geometers on the windows was a hibernated female of *Chloroclysta miata* L., quite a rare insect in this part of southern England.

A fine spell opened at the beginning of March which proved a first class period for the emergence of most of the early spring species, some of which were on the wing when I stayed near Ipswich with Mr William Storey on the 3rd; these included a good many *Alsophila aescularia* Schiff. 4th March saw the first appearance of *Achlya flavicornis* L., *Orthosia gothica* L., *O. incerta* L. and *Biston strataria* Hufn. with *Xylocampa areola* Esp. on the 5th. The sallows were well in bloom in many places by the second week of March with the warm weather continuing right through to the middle of the month. On the 21st *Archiearis parthenias* L. was flying on Horsell Common. But conditions deteriorated somewhat by the 23rd when I visited Dorset where nothing was seen on the wing nor in the New Forest on my way back on 27th March. However, the temperature was well in the 50's almost daily from the 4th April onwards rising to 65 deg. F. in the shade on the 15th when Mr J. Messenger accompanied me to the Chiddingfold area where *Gonepteryx rhamni* L. was in numbers, but the beating of the sloe blossom yielded very little of note.

For the Easter period we had arranged to revisit the Highlands but had to abandon the enterprise owing to unforeseen events. As we heard later, it proved to be a most inclement holiday period in those parts so that we were glad to spend it less far from home in the New Forest which we reached on 19th April with Lyndhurst as our headquarters. But even in this famous part of England the weather was far from propitious. The following day, Good Friday, was very dull and wet when we tried beating the sloe blossom near Burley. Near there we came across a fine large bank of bushes in full bloom which provided several nearly full-fed larvae of *Chloroclystis chloërata* Mab. That evening we tried our m.v. in Beeching Lane, just behind Lyndhurst, the scene of many marvellous collecting nights before the War. The only

species to be attracted was a single *Polyploca ridens* F. and a few *O. gothica* L. The next two days of the Easter holiday were even worse with sleet showers on the Sunday and no collecting possible by day or night. However the elements let up on 23rd April when we were able to beat further *C. chloërata* larvae in the vicinity of Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst. After dark we ran our lights at Tantivy Wood near Beaulieu in company with Mr Barry Goater, but again *P. ridens* was almost our only visitor with a single *Trichopteryx carpinata* Borkh. and a few *Eupithecia abbreviata* Stephens. Beeching Lane was once more our venue on the night of the 24th when somewhat more insects came to our light, as many as 13 species, including quite a run of *P. ridens* and *B. strataria* in very varied forms. A female *Orthosia gracilis* Schiff. of the grey type appeared which is unusual in the New Forest where the deep red-brown form is prevalent among the bog myrtle on the swamps. It is indeed curious how the habitat and the food-plant seems to control the colour of this species which is probably gradually diverging. Other visitors that night included *Chaonia ruficornis* Hufn., *Cerastis rubricosa* Schiff. and *Eupithecia nanata* Hübn. besides the common *Orthosias*. We returned to Surrey on 25th April with the thermometer standing a 63 deg. F. followed by two equally warm days, but the temperature fell rapidly the last days of April.

However, conditions recovered on 1st May when m.v. light in my sister's garden at Virginia Water produced *Colocasia coryli* L., *P. ridens* F., *C. ruficornis* and a female *Dasycampa rubiginea* Schiff. a very late date for this choice species from which I obtained quite a number of ova. These eventually produced some fine bred specimens. The week that followed was fairly bleak and wet. It was not till the 11th that the first Whites were seen, mainly *Pieris napi* L. and *P. rapae* with *Pararge egeria* L. in Alice Holt Forest on the 13th. The day temperature rose to 73 deg. F. on the 18th when *Anarta myrtilli* L. was careering over the Chobham heaths.

Another warm day favoured me when I did a tour of the Surrey-Sussex border on 20th May, visiting the Petworth area and the Durfold woods where *Clossiana euphrosyne* L. was well on the wing with *Anthocharis cardamines* L. which was also plentiful at Horsell on the 22nd, another very delectable day.

On 25th May I set out for Central Italy returning on 12th June to be welcomed by a very congenial period well in the 70's. With the temperature at just on 80 deg F. on the 15th many geometers were flying on parts of Chobham Common, especially *Perconia strigillaria* Hübn. It was only a little less warm on 17th June when Mr Messenger accompanied me once more round the woods at Ebernoe and near Chiddingfold where we saw a few *Leptidea sinapis* L., *Clossiana selene* Schiff. and worn *C. euphrosyne* L. still on the wing at this late date, *Gonepteryx rhamni* L. and *Pieris rapae* L. were particularly plentiful, as was *Coenonympha pamphilus* L.

On the morning of 22nd June I set out early to cover the near 200 miles to Tavistock crossing Dartmoor by the Moretonhampstead road. The weather was ideal and the sun gave us its welcome warmth on the 23rd when Capt. Peter Gainsford kindly conducted me to a special locality where we found *Mellicta athalia* well out and in appreciable numbers. It was interesting to note how this race of this delightful butterfly differed from its eastern relative in generally smaller size and somewhat darker coloration. Butterflies were in plenty in brilliant sunshine, especially *Maniola jurtina* L. and *Pararge egeria* L. We also saw several *Argynnis adippe* L. In the afternoon we visited Glenofen, a hidden wooded valley a few miles west of Tavistock and I was again in this attractive spot on the morning of the 24th, though little seemed on the wing. That afternoon I travelled via Two Bridges, to Ashburton and Exeter to stay with Mr and Mrs George Woollatt at Limpstone near Exmouth. That evening under quite favourable conditions we ran our m.v. lights on the edge of Woodbury Common. Among 28 macro species seen up till midnight were *Stauropus fagi* L., *Pterostoma palpina* Clerck, *Drymonia dodonaea* Schiff., *Dasychira pudibunda* L., *Drepana lacertinaria* L., *Spilosoma lutea* Hufn., *Hadena contigua* Schiff., *Diarsia brunnea* Schiff., *Leucania pudorina* Schiff., *Pseudopteryx pruinata* Hufn., *Ortholitha plumbaria* Fab., *Perizoma affinitata* Stephens, *Alcis repandata* L. and *Biston betularia* L. Over 30 species visited Mr Woollatt's m.v. trap of which those of note included *Deilephila elpenor*, *Apatelepsi* L., *Cucullia umbratica* L., *Lycophotia varia* Vill., *Sterrhia interjectaria* Bois., *Xanthorhoe designata* Hufn., *Hydrelia flammeolaria* Hufn., *Lygris pyraliata* and *Bapta temerata* Schiff. Another glorious and warm day greeted us on 25th June when I went with my hosts to some woods to the north east of Exeter which again provided butterflies in good numbers and we were surprised to find *Argynnis paphia* L. already well out and quite numerous. *A. adippe* L. was also to the fore as were *Clossiana selene* and *Pararge egeria* with *M. jurtina* in great plenty. That afternoon I moved on to Blandford to stay with my relations and on the 26th I visited Mr and Mrs R. Hatton in their new home bordering a large heath at Holt, just north of Wimborne. Here I saw the first Ringlets of the season. On my way back to Surrey later that day I made a brief halt on one of the heaths at the Ringwood end of the New Forest. Here among the short bog myrtle I found several tents containing the full-fed larvae of *Orthosia gracilis* Schiff., usually producing the dark-brown form of this species. The few days had proved very gratifying, seeing so many of our butterflies once more after several seasons of comparative paucity.

The very fine weather continued for the rest of June with the temperature in the 70's daily. On the last day of the month among 34 species that came to my m.v. light near Bisley were an early-flying *Laethoë populi* L. female,

Thyatira batis L., *Cybosia mesomella* L.; *Spilosoma lutea* Hufn., *Leucania comma* L., *L. pudorina* Schiff., *Petilampa minima* Haworth, *Apamea crenata* Hufn., *Ligephila pastinum* Treits, and many geometers including *Sterrhia trigeminata* Haworth, *Comibaena pustulata* Hufn., *Euphyia unangulata* Haworth, *Mysticoptera sexalisata* Hübn., *Semiothisa liturata* Clerck, as well as several melanics of this insect. Among other geometers were *Plemyria bicolorata* Hufn., *Bupalus piniaria* L. with a good many females some of which were the melanic f. *funnebris*. A small pug proved to be *Chloroclysta chloërata* Mab., which has so far seldom been seen at light. A latecomer as usual was the large *Boarmia roboraria* Schiff. with a host of *Alcis repandata* L.

July opened with a day at 80 deg. F. in the shade. I joined Dr John Holmes that day near Bordon and under glorious conditions we proceeded to investigate the propensities of Ludshott Common and Waggoners Wells in the Hindhead district, both most attractive localities with great possibilities, both by day and night. But in spite of the warmth only a few *C. selene* put in an appearance with a lot of *Zygaena lonicerae* Scheven. However, that afternoon we penetrated the northern part of Alice Holt Forest which I had not been to before, *Limenitis camilla* L. was already well out, while *Plebejus argus* L. was flying in some numbers on a nearby common. The high temperatures continued for the subsequent week bringing the summer species out early. On the 5th with 81 deg. F. in the shade the Rev. Anthony Harbottle accompanied me to Alice Holt Forest but it was apparently just too early for the Purple Emperor; White Admirals and Ringlets were much in evidence and there were plenty of Silver-studded Blues to be seen on Chobham Common late that afternoon.

On 6th July there was one of the wet days during this period when I motored to Ashford in Kent. In the Orlestone woods that night 55 species came to my m.v. light up till 1 a.m. The most notable was a large attendance of *Tethea fluctuosa* Hübn. with several melanics. This uncommon form seems to be increasing in this locality. As usual among the earliest arrivals was *Angerona prunaria* L. in its many varieties. Other species worthy of mention included a good many *Deilephila elpenor* L. with the Prominents *Notodonta dromedarius*, *N. ziczac* L. and *Pterostoma palpina* L., also *Pheosia tremula* Clerck, one of the latest arrivals. Both *Tethea* or Schiff. and *T. ocellaris* L. were among the early species, while a couple of *Stauropus fagi* L. came about midnight. Both *Thyatira batis* L. and *Habrosyne detersa* L. appeared with the Arctiids *Miltochrista miniata* Forst., *Cybosia mesomella* L. and *Eilema complana* L. Among the noctuids were *Apatele leporina* L., *A. megacephala* L., *Amathes ditrapezium* Schiff., *Diarsia brunnea* Schiff., *Apamea lithoxylaea* Schiff., *Lithocodia fasciana* L., *Plusia iota* L. and *P. gamma* L., also two *Pseudoips bicolorana* Fuessl. and the Deltoids *Zanclognatha tarsipennalis* Treits. and

Paracolux derivalis Hübn. The geometers were mainly represented by *Geometra papilionaria* L., *Comibaena pustulata* Hüfn., *Hemithea aestivaria* Hübn., *Cidaria fulvata* Forst., *Bapa temerata* Schiff., *Eupithecia expallidata* Doubleday, *Campaea margaritata* L., *Plagodis dolabraria* L., *Alcis repandata* L. and *Cleora rhomboidaria* Schiff.

I visited Hoads Wood the morning of 7th July, but no sun was apparent and the only quarry was a few small larvae of *Tethea* or hiding between leaves of aspen fastened face to face with silk. That evening Mr George Youden joined me at Dungeness, but the night was far from propitious. However, there was a sprinkling of insects on the sugar posts including a few *Procus literosa* Haworth and *Eilema pygmaeola* Doubleday, both of which also appeared at our m.v. light on the shingle. The commonest visitor was *Pseudoterpna pruinata* Hüfn. A walk in the Orlestone woods the morning of 8th July provided several *Limenitis camilla* L. and many *Maniola jurtina* L. Later in brilliant sunshine at Mr Michael Tweedie's house near Rye I saw the first *Maniola tithonus* L. with many *Pieris napi* L. The thermometer reached 78 deg. F. in the shade on 9th July when I was once more in Hoads Wood, but little of note was flying. I returned to Surrey that evening. The warmth continued daily till the 13th when General Sir George Johnson drove me to Folkestone, but we saw nothing special en route. The following day we crossed to France and drove to Provence returning on 1st August, having missed a period of poor and wet weather in southern England during the latter half of July.

Our return was greeted with a shade temperature of 81 deg. F. the opening day of August, with plenty of Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells on garden buddleias. But the weather changed materially when I motored to Towcester on the 4th, and little was moving in the dull and rainy conditions. However, things improved by the 7th when I surveyed the Chiddingfold region where both White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries were still on the wing. Early on the morning of 10th August, Mr Russell Bretherton came over to Woking and we motored in ideal weather to Royston golf-course which was our halt for a picnic lunch. The only butterflies seen were *Aricia agestis* Schiff., *Maniola tithonus* L., *Thymelicus lineola* Ochs. and a handful of *Lysandra coridon* Poda, which was somewhat disappointing since this locality was at one time famous for the numbers and aberrations of this species. Our next halt was near Eriswell in the Breckland. I had remembered a large patch of *Silene otites* at the side of one of the principal roads and we were pleased to find it still flourishing. Searching the pods proved a blank, but we unearthed one full-fed larva of *Anepia irregularis* Hüfn., unfortunately stung. We then proceeded via Thetford and Norwich to the Barton Staithe Hotel on the Norfolk Broads where I had not stayed for many years. Mr J. Messenger had given us an introduction to Mr and Mrs Halfhead who were in resi-

dence at their delightful house and estate on the edge of Sutton Broad at Longmuir Point. They most kindly let us have full facilities for collecting with various types of apparatus including the plugging in of our static m.v. which we placed close to the huge reed-bed to very good advantage. Their garden was well sheltered by a small piece of woodland with large trees. We also ran two Heath lights right in among the reeds. But our first night was none too productive. The Heath lights, up till 11.30 p.m., provided many *Philudoria potatoria* L. as well as single specimens of *Nonagria algae* Esp. (*cannae* Ochs.) and *N. dissoluta* Treits. Among 42 species that came to our static traps were four species of the Notodontidae including *Pheosia tremula* Clerck, *P. gnoma* Fab., *Pterostoma palpina* Clerck and *Notodonta ziczac* L. Other more interesting insects were *Lymantria monacha* L., *Drepana binaria* Hufn., *D. lacertinaria* L., *Simyra venosa* Borkh., *Arenostola pygmina* Haworth, *A. phragmitidis* Hübn. in numbers, also *Coenobia rufa* Haworth, *Triphaena interjecta* Hübn., *Schrankia costae-strigalis* Stephens and the geometers *Acasis viretata* Hübn., *Abraxas grossulariata* L., *Selenia tetralunaria* Hufn. and *S. bilunaria* Esp.

August 11th was another glorious day when we revisited Longmoor Point and walked along a narrow path among the thick reedbed where there was almost a forest of *Peucedanum palustre*, the foodplant of the Swallow-tail. But no larvae were forthcoming and we concluded most had already pupated in the excessive heat of the previous weeks. Searching yellow loosestrife only yielded a single full-grown larva of *Anticollix sparsata* Treits. The night turned out much more propitious, though the Heath trap did not produce anything of real note. However, our static trap the next morning was a galaxy of some 175 insects comprising 63 species, nine of the Notodontidae with a couple of *Harpyia furcula* Clerck, *Clostera pigra* Hufn., and *C. curtula* L., also *Notodonta dromedarius* and *Lophopteryx capucina* L. Other species not previously recorded included *Laothoe populi* L., *Euproctis similis* L., *Arctia caja* L., *Eilema deplana* Esp., *Nonagria typhae* Thunb., *Gortyna micacea* Esp., *Apamea testacea* L., *Plusia chrysitis* L., *Sterrhia dimidiata* Hufn., *Ortholitha chenopodiata* L., *Lygris testata* L., *Eupithecia tenuiata* Hübn., *Dysstroma citrata* L., and *Biston betularia* L.

Another grand warm day greeted us on August 12, the morning of which we once more spent at Longmoor Point and had the good fortune to see and photograph a Swallow-tail feeding, with wings outspread, on a spike of buddleia, an unusual flower for this fine insect to patronise. We saw several others flying round the house and near the fen, while the Peacocks were also disporting themselves round the many flowering plants in the garden. That afternoon we went on a tour of reconnaissance to Hickling Broad, then via Horsey Mere to the sand dunes at Waxham which was our venue for night operations, but a cold wind got up and the marram

(to be continued)



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