



**Butterfly  
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment



## Mothy Mutterings – February 2015

One of the major initiatives we have been involved in over the last month has been to develop guidance on the moths (and butterflies) for advisers for the new Countryside Stewardship (CS) in England due to be rolled out from July 2015 onwards. Our Farmland Butterfly Initiative Officer (Katie Cruickshanks) is in place to liaise with Natural England (NE) staff to make sure that management for moths and butterflies is delivered successfully by the new scheme. This is the first time that moths have been included in the targeting for agri-environment schemes which is a significant step forward. So far, the work has involved providing distribution data to target the scheme and writing advice guidance notes for NE staff covering life history and habitat requirements (as far as is known) for a suite of species. Twenty-four species of Section 41 (NERC Act 2006) moths are covered by this initiative. We have been producing the guidance notes for 16 of these species, the remaining eight species being those that occur on five or less sites. For this latter grouping the current intention is that advisers will seek specific guidance from specialists (including Butterfly Conservation staff) on a site by site basis where CS can be applied. One of the more challenging aspects of producing the guidance for the 16 species (that are found on more than five sites) has been to assess which options from a pre-defined list (supplied by NE) are appropriate, and how these can be tweaked (where required and within the constraints given) to encourage landowners/site managers to take up these options and implement them on the ground to result in a positive outcome for the species in question. CS is likely to be phased over a number of years, each agreement lasting 5 years (or 10 years for woodland agreements or those with complex tenure). The focus will be to encourage landowners with expiring HLS agreements to enter the new scheme as they come up for renewal. There is less money available overall, compared to the previous agri-environment scheme, so it is expected that CS will be more targeted. However, we are extremely pleased that moths (and butterflies) are specifically highlighted in the new scheme, with the potential for positive outcomes for species such as Striped Lychnis, Marsh Mallow Moth and Grey Carpet.

This is the time of year for preparing for the coming field season. Permits and access permissions need obtaining and, where relevant, licences need to be sought. A provisional work programme for *The Action for Threatened Moths Project* (focusing on Priority species in England) has been compiled and forwarded to NE, who contribute funding to this project. We are unlikely to hear whether the project will be part-funded by NE for 2015/16 until after the General Election, but in the meantime Butterfly Conservation will continue to support this project. Costings for other potential projects are being put together, for example a planned continuation of the Sussex Emerald project, which was last year funded by five separate organisations/companies.

Site visits have continued during February. This has included the planting of several Barberry bushes, with the aid of a staff member from the Forestry Commission (FC), on an FC site; about 1 mile from the extant Dorset site (also an FC site). This site is thriving and particular thanks are due to local FC staff and their volunteers for undertaking appropriate management. Here, in 2014 larvae were found on virtually every bush sampled, including bushes within the woodland and on two bushes on an adjacent farmland. A Dingy Mocha site was also visited. There has been a growing trend in recent years to graze heathland sites in Dorset, and this has increased the risk to the Dingy Mocha which preferentially feeds on small sallows in open situations. At the site visited, larvae have been found easily on the small roadside sallows, but less easily elsewhere on the site. Unfortunately, it was clear during the visit, again accompanied by an FC member of staff, that the cattle had been preferentially grazing the grassy roadsides, including the sallows. Indeed some willow regrowth from previously cut bushes had been grazed back to the ground. As with other heathland sites supporting the moth this will be a difficult problem to resolve. This site is currently under an agri-environment scheme agreement which stipulates grazing. Protection of individual

bushes is not a practical or long term solution. This issue has since been raised with local Natural England staff and a further site meeting is planned to try to find a way forward.

It is over a decade ago that the rapid decline of common British moths was first revealed. At that time, almost nothing was known about the impact of the various potential causes of change in moth populations. Thankfully, since then numerous research projects have taken place, many of which are ongoing, and we are learning a great deal about how landscape features, management, climate change and light pollution impact on moths. One such project, which Butterfly Conservation is closely involved in, is a PhD being undertaken by Callum Macgregor to look at the role of moths as pollinators and the potential impact of light pollution on this role. His research is jointly supervised by the University of Hull, the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and Butterfly Conservation. Callum visited the Butterfly Conservation offices in February to discuss progress with his PhD and present a talk to staff covering the work to date. Although this project is still in its early days, it has already started to produce useful outputs, including an open access review paper on the role of moths as pollinators. This concludes that moths are important pollinators of a very wide range of plants in many ecosystems around the world ([read the review in full](#)). Callum has also completed his first year of fieldwork, carried out in the farmland of Oxfordshire, and the results of that are being written up for publication at present.

Given the generally cooler nights over much of the month reports of moths have been relatively thin on the ground. However, a quick scan of various moth group websites shows that Pale Brindled Beauty, Early Moth, Oak Beauty, Dotted Border, Spring Usher, Mottled Grey, Common Quaker, Hebrew Character and Angle Shades, along with a few hibernating species, have been reported. The Atropos Flight Arrivals [page](#) notes a Humming-bird Hawk-moth seen in Cornwall.

Roy Leverton has recently updated the Scottish macro-moth list. The list can be downloaded from the [guidance notes page](#) of the Moths Count website. The introductory text provides details of species added since the previous list, as well as a selection of notable records. Many thanks to Roy for putting this together.

Following on from the popular *British Moths and Butterflies* by Chris Manley (2008) comes the just published second edition, this time entitled *British Moths*. This edition of the book has expanded the coverage of the micro-moths considerably, has the images rotated so that the alignment of the moths is similar, and also provides a scale bar and thumbnail distribution map. It is, in effect, a new book, and an excellent one to dip into at this time of year thinking about the season ahead and should also encourage more people to record both the macro- and micro-moths. Chris (and his band of photographers) is to be congratulated on this publication which clearly demonstrates the variety and beauty of Britain's moths.

Finally, if you are aware of any old seedheads of Yarrow (or Sneezewort) in your area it may be worth taking a look to see if there are cases of *Coleophora argentula* present. Although larvae are said to leave the foodplant in late autumn, some will remain exposed on the seedhead to overwinter in the feeding place. An image of larval cases on a seedhead can be found [here](#).

The Moth Team