

English Moth Recorders Conference January 23rd 2010

The event was well attended by around 120 people including speakers and stand-sellers. Tim Norriss and Mike Wall attended as County Recorders for the Hampshire vice counties for macro and micro moths respectively. I also attended.

Maurice Avant, National Chairman of BC, gave the welcome address. He had consulted the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations for those related to moths, none of which (unsurprisingly) were at all complimentary. So many people have yet to discover the magic of moths! However the lectures by Richard Fox on the growth of the Moths Count project, Zoe Randle on the National Moth Recording Scheme and Dave Grundy as Garden Moth Scheme Co-ordinator illustrated the massive growth in the amount of recording now being undertaken. Richard reassured those present that Butterfly Conservation is committed to continuing the NMRS after lottery funding runs out, albeit with less staff and less training events. The lecture by Dr Eleanor Slade on a landscape-scale study of woodland moths undertaken by the University of Oxford and involving volunteer recorders on placement from HSBC bank had also had similar success in stimulating peoples interest in mothing. A county level perspective was provided by Adrian Russell talking about changing moth distributions in Leicestershire and Rutland.

Extreme Mothing was the title of the lecture given by Dr Paul Waring and it covered the ends of the spectrum like the most tranquil place, the noisiest place, the coldest, the hottest etc.. One African venue featured his highest moth count ever! All extremes were beautifully illustrated and wittily described by Paul.

Dr Adrian Spalding concentrated on the ecology of the Sandhill Rustic, which has four sub-species in its four different coastal locations. He has studied *leechi* intensively. Interestingly this sub-species was found at Loe Bar in Cornwall by Barry Goater in the 1970's. Adrian showed pictures of how the moth appeared to swim well and could also remain under water for some time. His observations have shown that the females do not fly much but prefer instead to walk over the sand from one plant to the next on which to lay.

The wonderful day of lectures was brought to a close by Dr Roy Sexton whose subject "Darwin, moths and butterfly orchids" was a fascinating and well-illustrated talk on the interaction between insects and orchids. He promised one day to write up his work but in the meantime he urged moth-ers take their traps to meadows with flowering orchids to identify the different moth species that pollinate them (just as Darwin's son had done over 100 years ago). Pyramidal, Fragrant and the two Butterfly Orchids are all moth-pollinated. In visiting the flowers for nectar the plant's pollinia become stuck to the moth's proboscis or eyes ready to fertilise the next flowers that are visited. These pollinia are easy to see and Roy will be pleased to receive peoples photos and reports. He already had a number showing this process quite clearly (including a remarkable shot of a Hummingbird Hawk-moth in flight leaving a Pyramidal Orchid with pollinia attached to its proboscis) but he is keen to learn of all the moth species that pollinate the different orchids. Another point of interest was that he had established that the different petals of the orchids produced different scents which he believed enabled moths to find the flowers in complete darkness and to locate themselves on the flower to best trigger the complex pollination process that in turn ensured the flowers are not self-pollinated.

Lynn Fomison