

Butterfly Conservation Upper Thames Branch

Priority Moth Species Report 2019

By Peter Cuss, Priority Moth Species Champion

Sloe Carpet

This species was last recorded in 1984 near the 'Devils Highway', Mortimer, Berkshire. An attempt to find out if this species is still in the area was made by searching blackthorn blossom by torchlight. Berks Moth Group kindly agreed to help with the search. The first scheduled search on April 2nd had to be cancelled due to poor weather. One search did take place on April 13th on the Highway. The moth was not seen, but it was very cold and far from ideal conditions. Searches were also carried out in two other locations with extensive amounts of blackthorn, at Wittenham Clumps and on the Mapledurham estate, both in Oxfordshire. The moth was not recorded at either location.

2020: I would like to continue searching for Sloe Carpet in the Mortimer area. I would also like to search other areas with extensive amounts of sloe such as Otmoor and to incorporate the use of actinic traps this time, as well as using torchlight searches.



Searching for Sloe Carpet



Heart Moth

Heart Moth

One trip for Heart Moth was undertaken at Windsor Great Park in the area of Queen Anne's Ride. Present were Dr Marc Botham, Paul Black and myself. Conditions were far from ideal with temperatures of around 7C, a full moon and clear skies. Despite this we did manage to attract one female Heart Moth.

2020: I will try to get permission and permits for searches in several locations in the Park over several nights. Going forward it may be best to monitor the population on a three year cycle.

Pale Shining Brown

This species may still exist in the Stonesfield area of Oxfordshire but it has not been recorded for a number of years despite a considerable search effort. On June 22nd Dr Marc Botham, Paul Black and I ran several traps in the Ditchley Estate area. On the July 2nd Steve Wheatley and I ran traps on the Cornbury Estate. Julian Howe trapped a couple of times at Perdeswell Farm (where he recorded the moth in 2013). Vicky Wren now has the TVERC funded traps for PSB searches. Other trapping took place for which I don't have the details. Despite this effort the species was not recorded this year.

2020 target; I hope to continue helping with the search for PSB. Possibly extending the search area outside previously known sites.

Drab Looper



Drab Looper

I recorded 2 Drab Looper at Mirams Copse on May 19th. Berks Moth Group carried out a search on the May 25th and recorded 5 at Mirams Copse (SU577730), 7 at Moor Copse (SU637739), 1 at Greyfield Wood, Beenham. Ashhampstead Wood was also searched but without success despite plenty of food plant.

2020: carry out further searches

Four-spotted.

I carried out two daytime searches during the flight period along the Upton to Didcot disused railway as well as some of the tracks leading from it. No sighting was made. Chris Tyler Smith recorded the species at Moulsoe, North Bucks and Will Atkinson had one to light (Oxon). Are these single sightings likely to be immigrants?

2020: I would like to search/trap around the Appleford, Oxon, area.

Striped Lychnis.

Peter Hall, with the help of a good number of volunteers, has in the past carried out extensive surveys for this species. It would be difficult to replicate the scale of surveying done by Peter without a large team of helpers but a good start was made. Sue Taylor put in some sterling work organising searches on the Bradenham, Yoesden and Watlington Hill. Tony Gillie and Brenda Mobbs continued with surveys at Holtspur. I have started to work through key sites from Peter Hall's reports.

This year I searched Stoner to Henley Road, Homefield Wood, Hambleden Valley, Dairy Lane near Henley, West Wycombe, the Wormsley Estate and Green Farm in the Hughenden Valley. Green Farm, a NT site let to tenant farmers, was described by Peter Hall as the best site in the county but has become much degraded.

The table below records the numbers of flower spikes and larvae recorded during this year's surveys.

2020: extend surveys to other key sites and to work with land owners. Nick Bowles will be setting up a meeting with the NT to see if it is possible to improve the Green Farm site for Striped Lychnis. I am hoping to contact land owners in key areas to raise awareness of the moth, get permission to survey and possibly look at habitat creation and enhancement. This is a species that is very happy in field margins and roadside verges as long as the larval foodplant is present. I even found the larvae on single Dark Mullein plants in places along the Hambleden Valley, and I believe it would be quick to colonise any new suitable habitat within its range.



Juvenile Striped Lychnis larva



Fully grown SL larva

STRIPED LYCHNIS 2019

| SITE | DATE | FLOWER SPIKES | LARVAE | RECORDER/ NOTES |
|---|-----------------------|---------------|--------|---|
| HOMEFIELD WOOD | 14/7/2019 | 1233 | 26 | Peter Cuss |
| HENLEY TO STONER ROAD | 14/7/2019 | 289 | 21 | Peter Cuss |
| HOLTSPUR | 21/7/2019 | 819 | 50 | Marion & Tony Gillie, Brenda Mobbs |
| YOESDEN | 13/7/2019 | 49 | 29 | Sue Taylor |
| WATLINGTON HILL | 23/7/2019 | 324 | 155 | Sue Taylor |
| BRADENHAM | 16/7/2019 & 19/7/2019 | 1313 | 311 | Sue Taylor, J.Allen K.Davies, M.Hall |
| TURVILLE SU76829126 | 25/7/2019 | 50 | 11 | Peter Cuss |
| ROADSIDE SU77618946 Skirmett to Hambleden | 25/7/2019 | 40 | 14 | Peter Cuss |
| ROADSIDE SU78208676 Hambleden | 25/7/2019 | 50 | 4 | Peter Cuss |
| DAIRY LANE SU77478610 | 29/7/2019 | 1000+ | 74 | Peter Cuss |
| GREEN FARM, HUGHENDEN SU86759517 | 18/7/2019 | 318 | 55 | Peter Cuss |
| WEST WYCOMBE HILL SU82879487 | 1/8/2019 | 45 | 7 | Peter Cuss |
| WORMSLEY ESTATE SU73669577 | 2/8/2019 | 200 | 9 | Peter Cuss |
| PRESTWOOD NEAR Gt MISSENDEN SP8774700600 | 05/8/2019 | | 10 | Colin Tyler. On allotment feeding on White Mullein |

Forester moth.

I was unable to find the time this summer to do much work on this species. I did look for it at the Millennium Field, Sonning Common, where I remembered seeing it some years back and I was pleased to find it was still present.

2020 target. The hope this year would be to visit more sites and try and increase the recording effort for this moth.



Foresters at Sonning Common

Other notable species

Scarce Burnished Brass

Dr Marc Botham and I trapped at Cothill Fen on July 12th. We had one SBB to light which at least shows the species is still present here. I hope in the future to search other known sites as well as potential new ones.



Scarce Burnished Brass

Clearwings .

Pheromone lures were used to try and increase the recording effort for this group of moths, all of which are classed as nationally scarce. I managed to record Red belted from three sites, Six-belted from one, Yellow-legged from one, Current from one.



Six-belted Clearwing

Moth trapping at 'new' sites.

As well as a focus on the priority moth species I am hoping, with the help of Berks Moth Group, to run lights at some locations each year which are not usually trapped, to help the recording effort. You never know what might turn up! Paul Black and I ran traps at Bradfield Water Meadows. There are very old records of Scarce Burnished Brass in this area. We were not successful in recording it here but we did get the nice consolation prize of several Dotted Fan-foot, only the ninth Berkshire record I'm told. Mirams Copse, near Rushells farm, Produced two nationally scarce species, The Festoon and Small black Arches.

We were also able to help National Trust Ranger, Matt Bond, carry out a moth survey for Watlington Hill with one trapping session in May and one in July. Matt has asked if we could do some more next year and possibly look at other NT sites.