

WILDLIFE NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2022



There has been an invasion of Jersey Tiger Moths this summer. They have been seen by several members around our area and 37 were recorded in a single moth trapping session in one member's garden.

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Wycombe Wildlife News is published 3 times a year to promote the Group and wildlife issues, and to inform members and the public of its activities.

Edited and produced by Roger Wilding.
Proof reading by Frances Wilding.

The cover photo of the Jersey Tiger-moth was provided by Graham Giles. The moth photographs on page 105 were provided by Paul Bowyer and the other photographs in this issue were taken by Roger Wilding.

Black and white copies printed by Greens, Lincoln Rd, High Wycombe.

Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Group.

For the purposes of management of the Group, membership information is held on computer.

Wycombe Wildlife Group is a registered charity No.1075175 with the following objects:

To conserve the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public.

To educate the public in the principles and practice of conservation.

Within and around Wycombe District the Group :

Surveys wildlife habitats and their associated flora and fauna, giving those taking part plenty of opportunities to increase their knowledge and identification skills.

Resources permitting, helps manage local wildlife sites by undertaking practical conservation work and provides advice to schools, other bodies and individuals on all aspects of wildlife.

Stimulates public interest in wildlife and its conservation, organising walks, talks and other activities covering a wide range of wildlife topics.

Provides advice on and encourages wildlife gardening.

Co-operates with other groups with similar aims.

Having decided that Wycombe Wildlife Group should restart its activities from May, we were faced with the problem that we have traditionally arranged outdoor activities during the period from May to August and indoor meetings from September until May when we have traditionally held our AGM. Because we were unable to arrange an AGM on a date in May 2022 when both our usual High Wycombe venue and our Treasurer were available, we decided to delay holding it until September 2022. The May booking of Trinity United Reformed Church that we had provisionally made for the AGM was used to arrange the first of our members meetings since the cancellation of all our events due to Covid. As the report of the meeting included in this newsletter shows, the talk was extremely interesting and it is a shame that only 15 members attended.

The AGM which also took place at Trinity URC was held on Tuesday 6th September and was attended by around 20 members. Although we have enjoyed meeting at Trinity URC for many years, the increased cost of holding our meetings there are unsustainable with our current attendance levels. We will continue to hold meetings at our Holtspur venue which is popular with our members and we have arranged for our November 2022 meeting to be held in the Hughenden Valley Village Hall which has a large adjoining car park and similar facilities to our Holtspur venue. The cost of hiring these halls is about the same. Because the Hughenden venue is very well used, it is likely that all our members meetings will need to be held on Fridays.

Roger

The 2022 AGM

After two years of not holding an AGM, there was a lot of business to cover at the 2022 AGM which was held on Tuesday 6th September. In the past, our AGMs were very short, leaving plenty of time for a talk by a visiting speaker after a refreshment break. On this occasion there was just enough time left after the formal business to fit in a presentation on the Round Wycombe Walk. This walk had been planned to start and end at the junction of Gomm Road and London Road as a contribution to ensuring that the inevitable development of Gomm Valley would provide some biodiversity gains. The Valley had been designated as a Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA) by a Buckinghamshire Council project team which was set up some years ago to consider suitable areas for BOA designation: Wycombe Wildlife Group had been represented on that project team. Both the current development company and its predecessor were made aware of the Round Wycombe Walk and both had confirmed that the proposed public rights of way through Gomm Valley would enable the Walk to be routed through the site. Because the development of Gomm Valley will be spread over a number of years, however, the final section of the Round Wycombe Walk currently crosses Hammersley Lane and follows public rights of way through Beacon Hill, Wycombe Heights Golf Course and Kingsmead to return to the start and end of the Walk at Gomm Road. Details of the route of the Walk, which had been agreed following a series of short walks undertaken by 5 WWG members, are available to download from the WWG website. The presentation

illustrated the remaining areas of public open spaces, woodland, and grassland that still exist around High Wycombe, as well as covering the locations of historical and scenic interest. Although the Walk is 20 miles in length, it can be broken down into short sections using buses to return to High Wycombe town centre from Flackwell Heath, Burroughs Grove, Booker, Sands, West Wycombe, Downley, Hughenden, Terriers, Totteridge, Micklefield or London Road.

The existing trustees were all re-elected, together with Wendy Thomas and Peter Bailey. The latter had been co-opted as a trustee following his agreement to take over the role of Treasurer, a post which James Donald had announced at the last AGM he would be giving up.

Paul Thomas and Trevor Mansfield of the Lane End Conservation Group (which is a member of WWG) attended our AGM and, as agreed in advance, brought along some display boards and were given a slot on the agenda to give a talk about a unique opportunity that has arisen to purchase some or all of Finings Wood, an ancient woodland close to the centre of Lane End, for amenity use. It is hoped that with support from the Forestry Commission, The Woodland Trust, The Chilterns Conservation Board, BBOWT and the Friends of Finings Wood, that at least some of this wood can be preserved. We hope that all those involved in this worthwhile project are successful in their aim of purchasing as much of Finings Wood as possible for the benefit of Lane End residents and the surrounding local natural environment.

A number of important issues were raised at the AGM which will require detailed discussion and decisions by the Executive Committee. The most important of these and, probably the most difficult to resolve, is how our group can continue to meet its charitable objectives, particularly the one relating to conserving the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public. Whilst many of our activities contribute to the charitable objective of educating the public in the principles and practice of conservation, the increasing age of most of our members makes undertaking a programme of practical conservation tasks very difficult.

The outcome of the Executive Committee's discussions will be reported in the next newsletter. If any members have any thoughts on the above issues or indeed any issues relating to the future of our Group and its activities, please contact us.

Holtspur Bank Spring and Summer walks

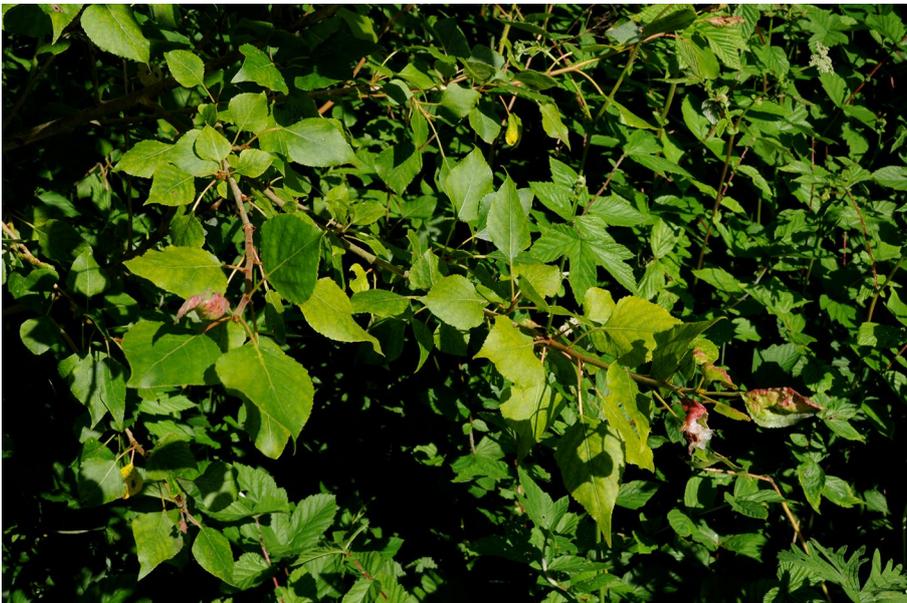
As usual this year's walks organised by the Friends of Holtspur Bank were included in the WWG events programme and several of our members supported them. The Friends Group now asks attendees who are not members of the Friends Group to make a voluntary donation of £1 or you can become a member of the Friends Group for £5 a year.

As usual there was a good show of flowers and butterflies to be seen on this year's Spring and Summer walks. Although the species seen on these walks does not vary much from year to year, it is a nice area for a walk and it is good to see that several WWG members support these events. The walk on 26th June also covered the adjoining Butterfly Conservation's Holtspur Bottom Reserve which added a great deal of interest to the walk.

The forgotten river - a talk by John Tyler

Our first members' meeting since March 2020 was held at Trinity URC on Tuesday 19 May 2022. We have always enjoyed John Tyler's talks and our Programme Planning Group decided that we should invite him to give us another talk and agreed that his talk about the River Thames, entitled "The Forgotten River" sounded interesting. We were not disappointed, as this talk covered the Thames from its source near Cheddington, a few miles north of Tring, where it rises from a spring, to where it joins the Thames south of Dorchester in Oxfordshire. John made the point that much of the river's course is on private land but that the parts of the river that can be accessed are well worth visiting. He added that where there are no footpaths, he had used a coracle to navigate the river: a coracle can easily be lifted and carried around obstacles blocking the channel. We were told that the River Thames flows for around 26 miles from its source to where it joins the Thames as the crow flies, but that the river's winding course results it being over twice as long. The Thistle Brook joins the River Thames NE of Aylesbury and numerous other mostly-unnamed streams add to its flow along its course.

Most of the first half of the talk covered the natural history interest of the river starting with the trees mainly found along its banks. These included Black Poplar, a rare species in much of Britain (mainly because only a small number of the trees are female),



Black Poplar (*Populus nigra*) - a rare native species which can be found along the River Thames

Alder and three species of Willow. Crack Willow twigs snap off easily and will root in moist soil. Osiers are used to make baskets and are often cultivated in fields for this purpose. White Willow is the species used to make cricket bats. Willow is also used to make coracles. We were shown photographs of Great Horsetails, which thrive in wet locations around Aylesbury. Although these plants produce thousands of spores, they will only germinate in wet ground. Other illustrations included a bracket fungus on a mature tree, a Yellow Water Lily with a Banded Demoiselle perching on it, the red whip-like defensive structure of a Puss Moth larva, Whirligig Beetles whizzing around at great speed, and a Backswimmer which, unlike Water Boatmen, swim on their backs whilst using their legs as oars. The large leaves of the Butterbur, which grows in wet ground and along riversides, was once used to wrap around butter to keep it cool in hot weather and were even used as sun hats.

We saw pictures of portable cases made by caddis flies to protect them from predators, ranging from ones made with dead leaves and other plant debris, twigs, gravel and even small stones or pebbles, and a Water Scorpion which uses its powerful front legs to catch its prey.

As we got towards the end of his talk, John showed us some photographs of an annual event, which takes place each August along the RiverThame between Tiddington in Oxfordshire and Ickford in Buckinghamshire where the river forms the border between the two villages. The event is a tug o'war across the river between a team from each village. The losers are the team that lose control of the rope or get pulled into the river, but the winners then jump into the water to join them. It all sounds rather daft but good fun, and we were told that the number of spectators turning up to see the event increases each year.

The talk ended with a mention of Dorchester where the River Thames flows into the Thames. Dorchester has been a human settlement from Neolithic times. It had an Iron Age hill fort, the Celtic people built defensive walls there and it became a Romano British settlement. Later, when it was a Saxon settlement, the King of the West Saxons was baptised in the River Thames by St Birinus in 635 AD.

The Forgotten River talk finished with a photograph of the footbridge which takes the Thames Path across the mouth of the River Thames. Our thanks go to John for such an interesting and informative talk. Although the talk was entitled "The Forgotten River" I think this talk will remain in our memories for a long time.

Roger

Wildlife sightings May to Sep 2022

Great Tits have young in a Deeds Grove garden	4 May 2022
Jay and Bullfinch in a Deeds Grove garden	11 May 2022
Painted Lady in a Tylers Green garden	18 May 2022
Small Copper in a Deeds Grove garden	19 May 2022
Baby Bluetits, Starlings and Goldfinches in a Deeds Grove garden	25 May 2022
Peach Blossom and <i>Udea olivaris</i> moths seen in a Tylers Green garden	14 June 2022
Hummingbird Hawkmoth and <i>Strangalia maculata</i> long-horn beetle in a Tylers Green garden	17 June 2022
7 Scarlet Tiger-moths in a Downley garden	20 June 2022
Ringlet butterfly in a Deeds Grove garden	24 June 2022
Silver-washed Fritillary, Pyramidal Orchid and Hummingbird Hawkmoth seen in a garden east of Amersham Hill	Late June 2022
Baby gulls having noisy night-flying lessons over a Deeds Grove garden	1 July 2022
Jersey Tiger moth seen on Holywell Mead	5 July 2022
Silver-washed Fritillary seen in Penn Street churchyard	18 July 2022
Jersey Tiger-moth seen in a Tylers Green garden	25 July 2022
Jersey Tiger Moth seen in garden E of Amersham Hill	13 August 2022
Privet Hawkmoth seen in a Deeds Grove garden	5 August 2022
Chiffchaff in a Deeds Grove garden	3 and 5 August 2022
Stock Dove in a Deeds Grove garden	4 August 2022
37 Jersey Tiger-moths recorded during a moth trapping session in a Bassetsbury Lane garden	9 August 2022
Small Blue in a Deeds Grove garden	20 August 2022
Jersey Tiger-moth seen in a Deeds Grove garden	22 August 2022
2 Swifts over a Tylers Green garden	5 September 2022

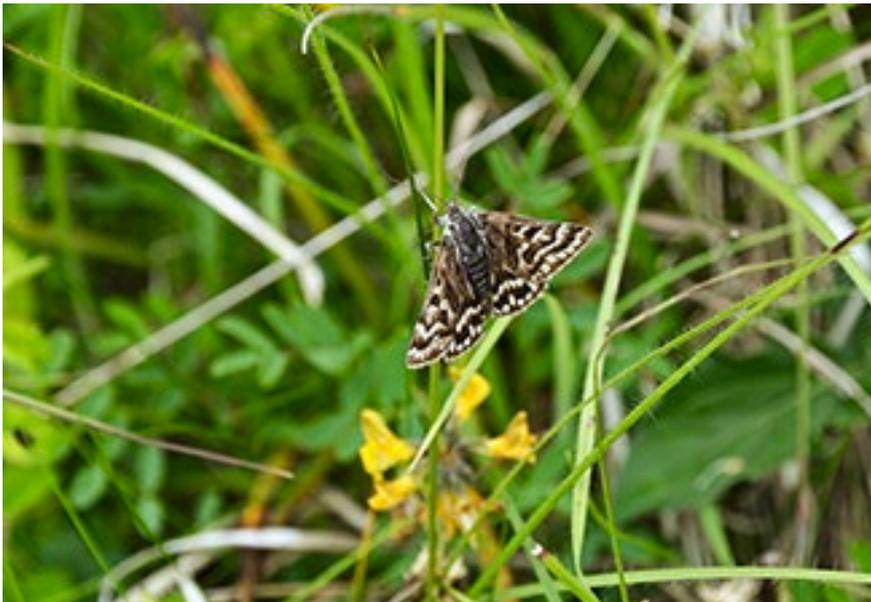
West Wycombe Hill walk

The first WWG walk in our new programme took place on Thursday 9th June meeting in the car park at the top of West Wycombe Hill. It was a perfect day for a walk but there only three of us to enjoy what turned out to be a really interesting and enjoyable walk.

We started with a brief look at the north east side of the hill to admire the huge numbers of orchids growing there, mainly Common spotted Orchids with a few Pyramidal Orchids.

We then followed the fairly level public footpath through the wood on the east side of Hearnton Wood admiring the views across the valley towards the Downley woods from the area of open grassland which looks down on the railway line where it crosses the A4040. Entering the wood again we walked past the location where the rare Green Hellebore provides a wonderful show in early March. Even at the time of the walk there was a good range of other flowering plants to see and try to remember their names, a problem which increases with age, especially at the start of the wildflower walk season.

We then made our way to an area of open access land and SSSI which is owned by and managed by the West Wycombe Estate. In the early days of Wycombe Wildlife Group this area of land was managed by BBOWT and known as Buttler's Hangings Nature Reserve. Although there is more scrub cover than there used to be, there are still numerous orchids and other chalk grassland plants throughout most of the site. We were pleased to see an Adonis Blue butterfly and a Mother Shipton moth on the hillside.



Mother Shipton moth

The whole site is on a steep slope and in locations where the scrub has become dense it is almost impossible to avoid a steep uphill climb to get back to the point where the footpath enters the site. The consolation is that there is a bench near the entrance from the wood which is dedicated to the memory of a BBOWT member who helped to manage the site when it was a BBOWT reserve. We were pleased to make use of the bench, but we did move to make room for some other visitors who had climbed the steep steps from the road at the bottom of the hill and were obviously disappointed finding the only bench on the site occupied when they reached the top.

The highlight of the visit was seeing a Fallow Deer doe and fawn looking up the slope at us looking down at them. Unfortunately they ran off before I managed to get my camera out of my rucksack but at least we all saw them and it was the highlight of what was a very enjoyable walk.

Visit to the Chilterns Open Air Museum

When this visit was planned for the 11th July, we could not have predicted the hot spell of weather when people were being warned of potentially very hot temperatures. Although our published programme said it would be helpful if members planning to attend could contact me to let me know they were coming, this was not a requirement. As we had arranged for those attending to meet inside the grounds at a specific time and place, I had thought it would be helpful to know who was planning to attend so that we could delay the start a short while if those expected had not turned up at the arranged time. Caroline Kay, Frances and I decided we would go but make it a short visit to avoid the very hot weather expected in the afternoon. We arrived at the entrance to the Museum quite early as I had picked up a few 2 for 1 entry forms from the High Wycombe bus station. Having waited for a reasonable time after the published meeting time we paid our entrance fees and slowly made our way towards the agreed meeting point confident that none of our members could have gone in without us seeing them. Much to our surprise when we reached the meeting place, we saw John Hoar sitting there patiently waiting for someone else to turn up. What we didn't know was that John is a volunteer at the Museum and he had been able to enter the grounds without going through the visitors' entrance.

John had brought along some sweep nets which we able to use to catch and examine some of the many invertebrates enjoying the hot weather.

We spent some time wandering around the Hidden Meadow which certainly supported plenty of invertebrates and the wildflowers were doing their best to put on a show taking into account the hot and dry conditions. After enjoying an early lunch in one of the on-site cafes we decided to go home before it became too hot.

Butterfly walks

Three butterfly walks had been included in the events programme. The first was the annual butterfly walk at Stoke Poges Memorial Gardens, but Paul was unlucky enough to test positive for Covid and we decided that the event would have to be cancelled. Paul had recovered in time for the butterfly walk at Homefield Wood to take place but only Paul and I attended. This was a pity as it was a very successful walk, particularly along the woodland ride where the following species were recorded:-

Butterflies

Green-veined White (8)
Silver-washed Fritillary (18)
Red Admiral (1)
Ringlet (17)
Gatekeeper (26)
Meadow Brown (8)
Dark-green Fritillary (2)
Large Skipper (5)
Comma (7)
Common Blue (3)
Small White (2)
Large White (3)
Small Skipper (2)
Marbled White (3)
Peacock (3)

Moths

Hummingbird Hawkmoth
Shaded Broad-bar

We were very disappointed that there were very few butterfly species in the open grassland areas of the reserve, but this was probably due to cloudy conditions.

Wildlife gardens update

The regular visits to our garden by a very tame fox still take place but, instead of being daily, they now tend to be every few days. There have also been some new developments.

We have some fairly large compost heaps and there are now several large holes along the bottom of the heaps with piles of excellent mature compost in front of the heaps which a fox has dug out and which we have bagged up and used.

When we see a fox in our garden it is not always easy to tell whether it is "our fox" or whether it is what we think is her sister. So far only "our fox" comes down to the house when we call her. The other fox is still getting used to us and prefers to keep her distance.

We regularly use the circular path around our garden for exercise, and during the recent hot weather it has been quite usual to keep passing by a fox resting in the tall vegetation in the areas we manage as a wildlife garden. She sometimes raises her head as we walk past her but more often than not, she just ignores our presence.

Occasionally the two foxes play games in the garden, chasing each other, jumping on each other and wrestling. On one occasion they were joined by a cat which remained a spectator.



Other members' wildlife gardens

Elisabeth Porter who lives in Totteridge sent me a note about her garden which, although small has much to delight, costs no money, and soaks up stress, promoting much needed well being and relaxation. She has placed some old iron chairs under trees and shrubs which just require cushions when used.

The garden is visited by badgers, a fox, dragonflies and birds and contains compost bins and a log pile, bird feeders and various items to hold water of different depths for birds of various sizes to drink and bathe.

Eliza Wheeler, one of our members who lives in Bourne End has also reported the enjoyment she and her family get from their wildlife garden.



Moth trapping with a difference

Karen and I tried something different for the moth trapping event held on Friday 24th June. Instead of attending the moth trapping, an opportunity was provided to view the moths trapped through the night from 9am the following morning and help identify them before they were released.

We identified 61 moth species. Amongst these were many large colourful moths including Scarlet Tiger, Elephant Hawkmoth, Small Elephant Hawkmoth, Swallow-tailed, Large Yellow Underwing, Peppered Moth, White Ermine and Light Emerald. The most numerous species were Heart and Dart with nine, Elephant Hawkmoth with seven and Heart and Club with six. Other smaller moth species included the Bird's Wing, Beautiful Hook-tip, Clouded Silver, Phoenix, Poplar Grey, Foxglove Pug, Brimstone, Garden Carpet, Common Marbled Carpet, and the Coronet.

We have started to recognize some of the more common micro moths, amongst these were *Anania coronata*, *Endotricha flammealis*, *Crambus pascuella*, *Chrysoteuchia culmella*, *Clepsia consimilana* and *Pyrausta aurata*.

There were 2 moth species which we had not identified in the garden before. The first was Blackneck which is a medium sized member of the Noctuidae family whose distribution is described as "local". Unfortunately, we did not get a photograph of this distinctively marked moth. The second was the Dingy Shell a member of the Geometridae family. It is quite small and rests with its wings closed. The distribution of this moth is also described as "local". Its larval food plant is Alder.

The new format for moth trapping was very successful. We had 7 visitors who enjoyed viewing the moths and talking about them while taking refreshments in our garden. One person was new to moth trapping and, having enjoyed the experience, promised to attend our next session.

Paul Bowyer



Moths in keep net for viewing prior to release



Dingy Shell moth

How Local Light Pollution Affects the Abundance and Species Diversity of Moths in an Urban Setting

by Laura Dodd BSc (Hons)

Abstract

Several factors are contributing to the decline of European moth populations, including light pollution. Light pollution refers to excessive and pronounced amounts of artificial light, often associated with urban areas. Moths are naturally attracted to light through positive phototaxis; so artificial light sources can cause changes to their behaviour. Moth species diversity may be affected as moth species are influenced differently depending on their light sensitivity. In the scientific literature there are conflicting views on how higher light levels affect the abundance and species diversity of moths in urban areas. The first round of data collection showed that moth abundance and species diversity was noticeably higher in areas of low light levels compared to areas of medium and high light levels. The second round of data collection showed no significant difference between local light levels and moth abundance and species diversity. The differences between the two collections were likely due to colder and wetter weather seen going into September, when the second data collection was done. Overall, this study provides evidence that artificial light in urban areas can cause disturbances to the distribution and behaviour of moths.

Impacts of light pollution on moths

Light pollution alongside other factors including climate change, non-native species, chemical pollution, urbanisation, agricultural intensification, habitat fragmentation and habitat destruction, especially in Great Britain where two-thirds of macro moth species have declined for over 40 years.

Light pollution can affect moths in several ways, both directly and indirectly. One of the most commonly studied impacts of artificial light sources is changes to adult moth behaviours. There is a lot of clear evidence that shows that even under low light levels adult behaviour can be suppressed, preventing certain behaviours. Light levels above 1 lux cause moths to become inactive. This can cause moths flying from areas with low light levels to areas with high light levels to become inactive for long periods of time. Other changes to behaviour are linked to positive phototaxis, which can cause consequences for highly light sensitive species. This can cause either a brief disruption of low fitness behaviours such as foraging, or bigger disruptions such as higher predation and less reproduction leading to high fitness costs.

In general, there are still plenty of gaps in our knowledge of the impacts of light pollution on moths. One which is currently attracting interest is the abundance and diversity of moths in relation to light pollution and how this may be connected to observed population declines.

Hypotheses

Areas with high light levels will have lower abundance and species diversity of moths compared to areas with low light levels.

Areas with medium light levels will have lower abundance and species diversity of moths compared to areas with low light levels.

Areas with medium light levels will have higher and species diversity of moths compared to areas with high light levels.

Methodology

This study took place on the University of Reading Whiteknights campus at fifteen sites established prior to the study. All fifteen sites were around the Foxhill side of campus near Whiteknights Road. Sites 1 to 6 were located near Wessex halls, sites 7 to 10 were near Stenton and Childs' halls and sites 12 to 15 were around the centre of campus (Figure 1). These sites were intentionally selected as they were close in proximity; making it likely that land use and local moth populations were either the same or very similar. These sites were also selected due to their differences in local light levels measured in lux. The sites were split into three different categories based on their light levels: Low (0 lux), Medium (0.2-1.6 lux) and high (2.2 lux and above) (Table 1).

Summary of the results

The results of this study provide some evidence that the abundance and species diversity of moths are affected by local light levels within urban areas. Data from the first round of data collection showed that both species diversity and abundance was higher in areas of low light levels compared to high and medium light levels. Therefore, the hypotheses stating that areas with high and medium light levels will have lower abundance and species diversity compared to low light level areas can be accepted for the first collection. The results from the second round of data collection, however, showed no significant difference between local light levels and moth abundance and species diversity. This data means we cannot accept or reject any of the hypotheses for this collection. These results provide some evidence to suggest that artificial light in urban areas does affect the distribution and behaviour of moths, but the results of the two collections conflict. The differences between the two collections are likely due to colder and wetter weather seen going into September, when the second data collection was done. Less moths were caught in September meaning any pressures caused by light pollution were less prevalent in the data. Figures 2 and 3 show that the second collection data did have a similar pattern to the first collection, however it was not significant.

Implications

The observations noted in Wilson et al (2018) and Boyes et al (2021) show moth abundance being influenced by night-time lighting. In these two studies it was suggested that this influence may be connected to the decline of moth populations in the UK and Europe. This study can neither prove nor disprove this connection, due to the conflicting results noted here. However, changes to moth abundance were observed at local levels due to artificial light in the data collections, although these were not significant for the second collection. These changes at local levels may be part of the larger scale issues contributing to the changes seen in moth abundance nationally and internationally.

Conclusion

Overall, this study provides further knowledge on how artificial light is affecting the abundance and species diversity of moth populations in urban areas. This study also provides novel data on moth populations in Reading which have not been previously observed. The distribution of abundance and species diversity seems to be affected by both high and medium light levels. The observed decreased abundance and species diversity in areas with artificial light levels may be linked to the observed decline in moth populations in Europe. Further study into this area is desperately needed to further the understanding of the extent of the influence of light pollution on moths.

Editorial note

The Dodd Family have been members of Wycombe Wildlife Group for many years and Laura shared her parents' interest in fauna, flora and fungi, attending moth trapping events organised by our Group. We were delighted to hear that Laura had received her BSc Hons degree in Ecology and Wildlife Conservation and wish her all the best in her ongoing studies to gain her Masters degree.

We were also delighted to be offered the opportunity to publish this dissertation by Laura related to moths.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR FUTURE NEWSLETTERS

The next WWG newsletter is due to be issued in January 2023. Now that we have recommenced our programme of talks and other activities, finding enough material for inclusion in our newsletter should cease to be a problem, but to help make the content interesting, we still need an input from members. The number of wildlife sightings reported does seem to be increasing but most are submitted by a small number of people. I am always grateful to those who provide me with interesting items for inclusion in our newsletters, and hope that more members will be able to contribute to the contents of future newsletters.

Roger

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To join our Group, please complete a copy of the form on the right and send to

The Membership Secretary,
15 Cherrywood Gardens,
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Account name

Beneficiary bank and payee details

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