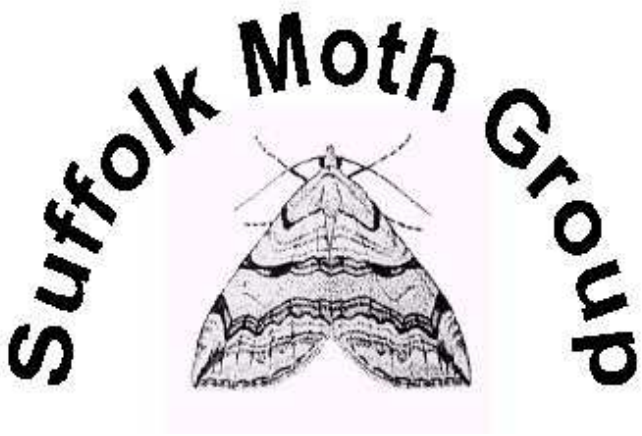


Suffolk Moth Group Newsletter

Issue 10 - March 1998

By Jon Nicholls

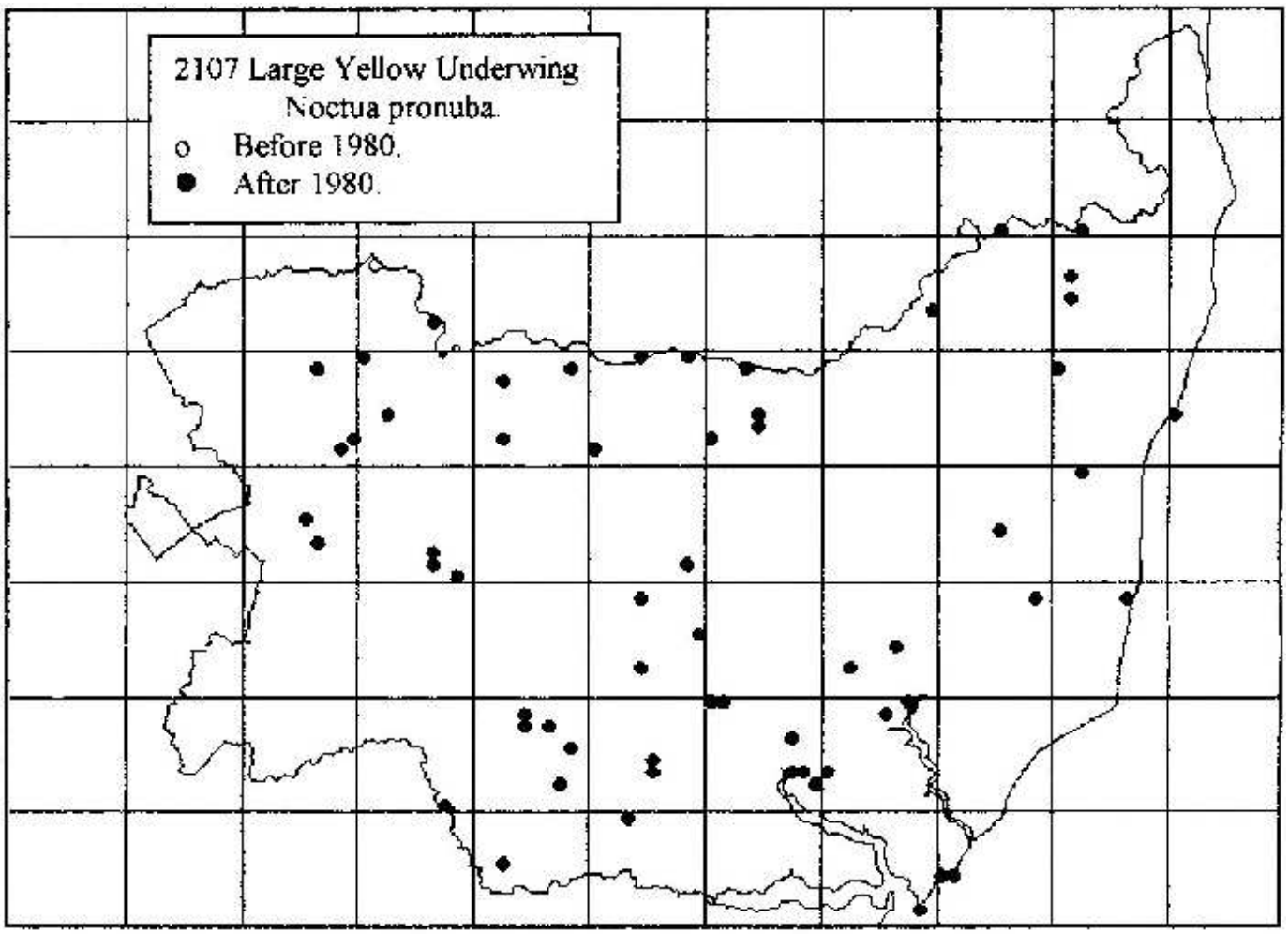
In this issue

Editorial

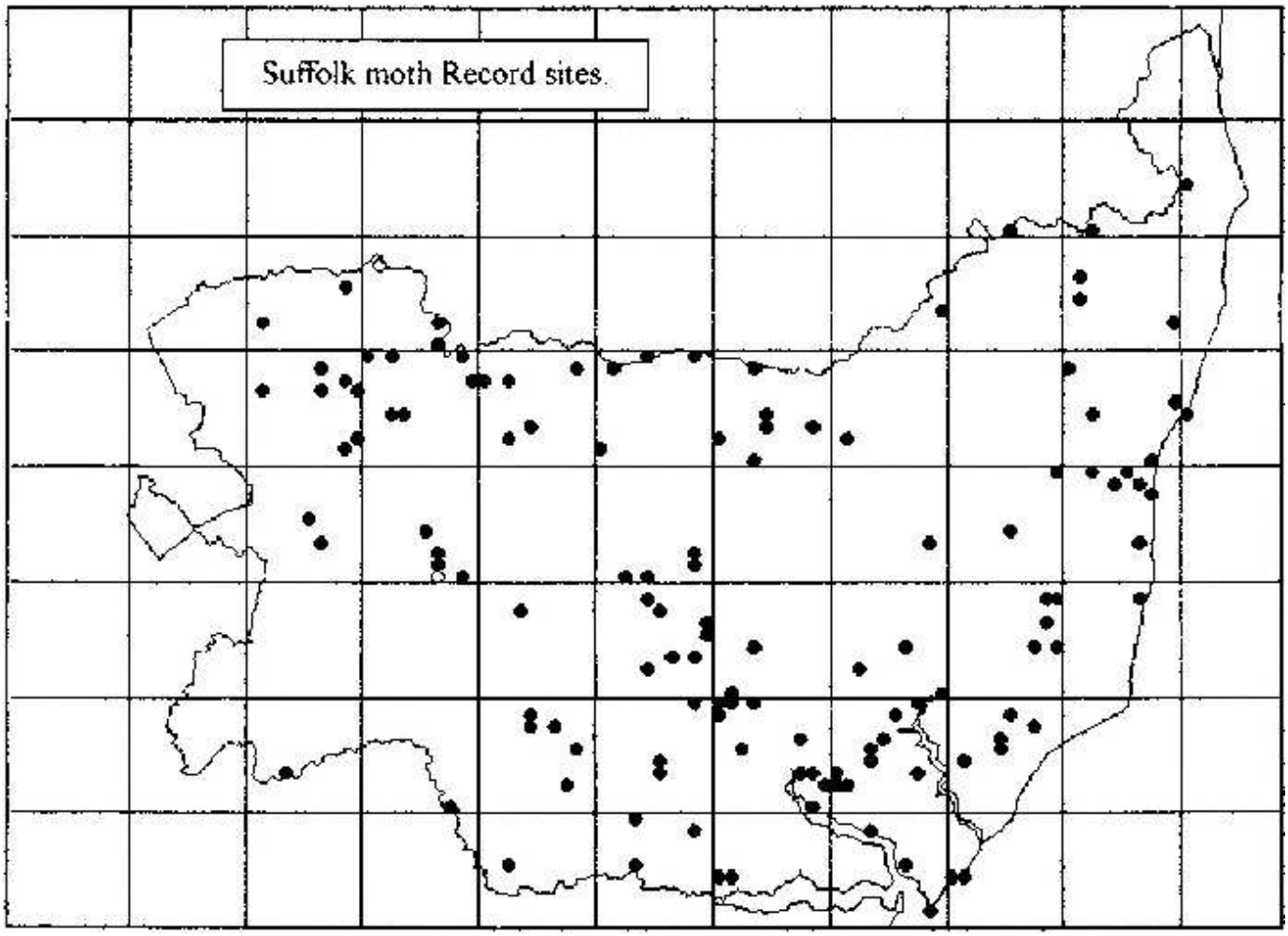
Welcome to another year of the Suffolk Moth Group Newsletters. It has been a quiet winter so far in my Felixstowe garden with only an Early Moth, on the 14 of February, to prove that the light has not completely lost its ability to attract. On the other hand it has been far from quiet for mothing in Suffolk. Several things. have changed in the administration of the Suffolk Moth Group starting with the resignation of Arthur Watchman as county recorder. Arthur has been the Suffolk Moth recorder for many years and has amassed a w~alth of Information and experience on Suffolk moths. He is a reliable authority on all aspects of mothing and will continue to be an intrinsic and essential member of the moth group. Tony Prichard and myself will now undertake the recording of Suffolk moths. We are both using the Recorder program to store the records in and at present are trying to place all the historical records. I have been able to enter all the records sent to me while I was producing the Suffolk Checklist, over 10,000!, as a start. This, however, is just a drop in the ocean compared to the records that are in the possession of Arthur and it is a daunting task to think of putting them all into recorder. However that is the plan and it should make the process of recording both more accessible and, in the long run, easier. This does not mean to say that the electronic medium has replaced the paper format though, far from it. The keeping of paper records is, in my opinion, still the preferred way to record wildlife. A field notebook with all its observation of weather, habitat and species, with the option to draw and annotate, is far superior to any computer database. It is then also possible to put yourself into the position of the original recorder and get a real feel for the time and the place, anyone who has read Gilbert White's letters will know what a vivid picture is conjured up by his descriptions and thoughts. The same can also be said for the Morley diaries with their wealth of records and comments on the flora and fauna of Suffolk. On the other hand what is difficult to do with these forms of data is very easy to do with a computer and that is, of course, to manipulate and process the information.

As a comparative newcomer to Suffolk and entomology I can remember how confusing it became to find moths that were deemed to be 'rare' turning up in my trap with regularity and yet some of the so called common species failing to materialise. Who decided these moths were rare or common? How did people know that a species had not been seen in Suffolk before or had hardly ever been seen before? Was the distribution of moths a true reflection of their ecology or an artefact of the recording process? In an attempt to answer some of these questions I suggested producing the Suffolk Checklist so that this rather amorphous concept of status could be formalised (but not finalised). Collecting together some of the records that were accessible within the county has gone some way towards answering these questions but it has also highlighted the deficiencies in the process as well. Moths are motile and complex organisms that do not always show themselves even when they are present in numbers. Finding them by using the standard 'bright light' technique is only going to produce limited success. I am reminded of a visit that I made to the house of one of Suffolk's most respected mothers, Rafe Eley, when he talked about the various ways he had obtained this or that moth for breeding. He said it was not sufficient to simply place a light in the moth's habitat, as many a species simply did not respond to light. With some species their food plant had to be searched for the larvae, but not just any food plant, it had to be one growing under an oak tree, and then only on the underside of the leaves. This would reveal the larvae, and then only if you had looked on the leaves near the base of the plant. All this information was needed to procure the particular species we were looking at, so was it rare then? I asked. Oh no! You just had to know where to look. So where does that leave us? Well one thing we can do is look at the evidence, all of it, and analyse it to find out what the patterns are and then any pronouncements about a species abundance, or lack of it, is at least based on the facts - and this is where computers come into their own. They have no opinions, no vested interests or axes to grind or action plans. If we are ever to get a complete picture of the flora and fauna of Suffolk then one of the tools that we will need is the computer. Whether you want to know which is the most common moth or when this moth was last seen in Suffolk or where can you find this moth or how many species are recorded in Suffolk then the ease with which this can be done makes the computer essential. However they will never be the final word, the experience and local knowledge by expert entomologists is always going to be a part of the picture that will not be so easy to put in Recorder.

It is interesting to look at some of the maps that can be easily produced using Recorder. The first one below shows the distribution of the Large Yellow Underwing, Noctua pronuba, regarded as a widely distributed moth. The impression it gives is that this moth is widely distributed throughout Suffolk with the exception of the south-west and a central area to the east.



This however is misleading, as you can see from looking at the second map below, which shows the distribution of recorders within the county. Now the lack of records for the Large Yellow Underwing can be seen to be due, not to the lack of moths, but to the lack of recorders!



If you now take into account the number of moths that do not come to light and those that are only found at certain times of year or the effect of recent weather conditions then any conclusions, using these maps, about distribution becomes even more difficult to make. I hope this is food for thought… …

Sending in Records

As far as records are concerned I will continue to gratefully receive records on a monthly basis, for inclusion in the newsletter, to give other recorders a reflection of what is happening in your part of the county. I would also like recorders to send in their final year records to be processed as well. I enclose a new version of the record card to trial this year. It consists of the complete macro Suffolk list (although there may be some omissions in it somewhere!) which can be ticked to give a quick way of recording. Any moth that is not on the list is a 'new' one - this means one that has not been recorded since 1990 - and can be treated accordingly e.g. photograph or voucher specimen. The micros can be added to the sheet by using the box on the back. Please let me know if this sheet is useful and if not why not and how I can improve it. It will certainly make my job easier as I can enter records very quickly using this it.

New moths to the Suffolk Checklist

The following moths have been recorded in Suffolk in the past few years and could be added to the Suffolk Checklist. However several of these moths have only been seen once and therefore their true status is not confirmed. If you find any of these moths then please let me know, and if possible keep a voucher specimen or take a photograph, so that we can confidently add them to the Suffolk Checklist.

B+F	Latin Name	English Name	National Status
321	*Phyllonorycter messaniella*		Common
427	*Yponomeuta cagnagella*		Unknown
459	*Ypsolopha sylvella*		Unknown
665	*Dasytoma salicella*		Unknown
971	*Pandemis cinnamomeana*		Common
979	*Archips crataegana*		Unknown
1139	*Epinotia tenerana*		Unknown
1156	*Epinotia solendriana*		Unknown
1329	*Donacaula forficella*		Local
1791	*Philereme vetulata*	Brown Scallop	Local
2373	*Archenara sparganii*	Webb's Wainscot	Notable

Suffolk Moth Survey

Ipswich Golf Club. Friday 7 March

After several days of good weather it was decided to visit the Ipswich Golf Club to see what moths were about. The centre of the club contains an area of Alder Carr and Oak Woodland. We set up three traps just before the skies opened and were forced to retreat to a nearby shed. When we returned to the traps it was good to see a number of insects had been knocked out of the trees and onto the sheet. All in all we found fifteen different moths and several of these came in good numbers.

The moths were; Chestnut, Clouded Drab, Common Quaker, Dotted Border, Engrailed, Grey Shoulder-knot, Hebrew Character, March Moth, Oak Beauty, Pale Brindled Beauty, Small Brindled Beauty, Small Quaker, Spring Usher, Yellow Horned and the micro *Tortricodes alternella*.

Records from recorders around the county

Location : Wolves Wood. Recorder: Tony Prichard. 24 September 1997

Using two traps on a warm night in September ten species were found in this RSPB reserve. They included; *Acentria ephemerella*, Common Marbled Carpet, Spruce Carpet, Large Yellow Underwing, Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing, Chestnut, Brick, Sallow, Copper Underwing and Snout.

Location : Wolves Wood. Recorder: Tony Prichard. 4 November 1997

With temperatures still in double figures six species were found. Including; December Moth, Feathered Thorn, Green-brindled Crescent, Satellite, Chestnut and Sallow.

Location : Wolves Wood. Recorder: Tony Prichard. 27 November 1997

Another warm night brought in eleven species. Including; *Acleris notana*, *Acleris hastiana*, *Emmelina monodactyla*, December Moth, Winter Moth, Feathered Thorn, Scarce Umber, Mottled Umber, Satellite, Chestnut and Yellow-line Quaker.

Location : Wolves Wood. Recorder: Tony Prichard. 10 January 1998

Only one species came along on this rather cold night in January. It was a Mottled Umber.

Location : Wolves Wood. Recorder: Tony Prichard. 10 February 1998

A warm night with very little cloud cover soon got a lot cooler but not before nine species. Including; *Tortricodes alternella*, March Moth, Small Brindled Beauty, Pale Brindled Beauty, Spring Usher, Dotted Border, Early Moth, Satellite and Chestnut

Location: Bromeswell Green. Recorder: Tony Prichard. 25 February 1998

Another warm start and cold finish brought out seven species. Including; *Tortricodes alternella*, Yellow Horned, Pale Brindled Beauty, Spring Usher, Early Grey, Satellite and Chestnut.