

'Lepidoptery of a Huntingdonshire Garden' – Nick Greateorex-Davies
(Thursday 20th February 2014)

The talk was about butterflies and moths that have occurred in a Huntingdonshire garden over the past 17 years, focusing particularly on those species that have been found breeding in the garden and the plants that attract them.

Nick lives in Hemingford Grey and moved into his house in 1996. Since then he has managed his 600m² garden for lepidoptery by planting and managing the lawns, house roof, hedges and trees in such a way as to encourage visiting butterflies and moths and to encourage breeding. The talk was a fascinating photographic diary of his recordings through the years through using light boxes and “beating” at dusk with butterfly nets and simply observing. So far he has recorded an incredible ~540 species of moths and butterflies – 203 micro moths, 306 macro moths and 17 butterflies.

Common butterfly species in the garden are Common Blue, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood and Small White. The species that have been found breeding in the garden are Brimstone (on buckthorn), Orange Tip, Large White and Green Veined White. Brown Argus, Comma, Red Admiral and Holly Blue could also be breeding based on their numbers and the plant food sources available for their respective caterpillars. Some of the moths present are Merveille du Jour, Pink-barred Sallow, Oak Beauty and Peach Blossom and seven species of hawk moth have been recorded – including Large Elephant, Small Elephant, Lime, Pine and Privet Hawk moth.

Nick took us through each part of the garden and plant species explaining what species he had observed – the caterpillars as well as the moths. He also touched on the other wildlife in the garden and their impact. One noteworthy story was of the blackbirds which completely stripped a bush of emperor moth caterpillars in a few hours. The only evidence left was the purple streaks on the patio which the birds had used.

Nick's garden is a great example of how a garden can be managed with wildlife in mind to have great impact on the local lepidoptery.