

Les Hill, Zoë Randle, Richard Fox & Mark Parsons 2010. Provisional Atlas of the UK's Larger Moths. – Butterfly Conservation, Wareham, Dorset, U.K., 454 pp. ISBN 978-0-9562216-4-3. Paperback, format 210 × 295 mm, Price: £ 20.

There has been a funded project entitled "Moths Count" in the U.K. since 2006, and this book presents the outcomes of this project in the form of mapped records for each of the species of larger Lepidoptera known to occur in the United Kingdom.

The book contains just four pages of introductory text and one of acknowledgements, then there are 869 maps showing the distribution of species in the UK, two to each A4 page. Records are divided into pre-2000 shown as open circles and 2000 onwards as solid circles, each covering a 1-km square of the British national grid. The coverage of the maps is impressive and represents 11.3 million records, mostly supplied by amateur recorders.

Traditionally biological recording has covered the whole of the British Isles, including the Republic of Ireland, but in this atlas only Northern Ireland features. The Channel Islands are included although some would regard them as biogeographically more akin to France.

At first glance the maps appear to provide an accurate current range for each species, and comparison with pre-2000 records shows clearly which species are in sharp decline.

Thirty-three of the maps show no record since 2000 and a further 11 show recent records only from the Channel Islands. A number of maps are supplied for species which have only appeared very rarely in the UK, mostly scarce migrant species. Two former resident taxa are not mapped together with three scarce migrant species, but this appears to be a random selection. To give so much space to non-resident species seems a little strange since it is largely a matter of chance where they are recorded.

When one looks more carefully at the maps it is necessary to understand the caveats and constraints which are described in the introductory pages. It is tempting to compare the maps with those published volumes of *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* but then the historic records are not the same. Not all early records are included, but some others are. The reason for this is that the data incorporated are just those submitted by the County Recorder for each county in the United Kingdom. Such people are amateur volunteers often with other demands upon their time. The result, as stated, is that the coverage is patchy. What we have here are raw data, but it is expressly stated that analysis of trends for species should not be calculated from these maps.

Examples of a few species may illustrate the situation. *Zygaena viciae* has a map showing the historic locality in the south of England, although it is well known that this species is now resident only in Scotland, but this does not appear on its map. Similarly *Pyropteron chrysidiformis* has pre-2000 records, but none more recent, although I believe it is still resident in Kent.

Taxonomic debate is not entered into, and in cases of uncertainty this is stated; where species pairs are hard to separate a map is given for the complex of species as well as of records of the individual species, e.g. for *Mesapamea secalis/secalella* and *Amphipyra pyramideale/berbera*. A map is supplied with records of *Schrankia intermedialis* even though this has been shown to be a hybrid taxon.

Scientific names (without author) are used without synonyms, and English names are given and synonyms where they have been in recent use.

The choice of solid circles for records from 2000 onwards means that it is not evident from these maps alone which species are spreading, which is a pity.

When a project attracts funding from public sources there is often felt to be a need to show the outcome in a way such as this book. It does demonstrate the vast amount of recording effort that has gone into it, but it would be more useful if time were taken to ensure that all past and present records were included. This is recognised by the authors and the stated purpose is to encourage further recording. There must be some doubt as to whether similar funding would be available to publish comprehensive maps at some date in the future, or to manage the research which would enable such a project.

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