

Two immaculate Sand Dart *Agrotis ripae* (Hb.) at the inland site of Calceby Beck Marsh SSSI, Lincolnshire

On 13 and 27 June 2000, I ran two Robinson pattern m.v. light traps at Calceby Beck Marsh SSSI, by the villages of Calceby and South Thoresby, near Louth, Lincolnshire, in search of the Marsh moth, *Athetis pallustris* which was reported from the site by Pilcher (1973. *Ent. Rec.* **85**: 230-233). I did not see anything of the Marsh Moth, but I recorded two immaculate Sand Dart *Agrotis ripae* on the second night. This is of interest because most lepidopterists regard the species as resident only on the coast of the British Isles. The national distribution map in Heath & Emmet (1983. *The moths and butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* **9**: 146) shows no inland records, suggesting that the species seldom wanders inland.

Figure 1 is the distribution map which I prepared in 1996 for a review of the Nationally Scarce macro-moths with the Calceby record added. The marsh is 14 kilometres from the coast. This record raises two questions. First, is the Sand Dart resident at Calceby or is this a rare example of the species flying inland? Second, since the Sand Dart occurs at both the currently known sites for Marsh Moth on the Lincolnshire coast, one wonders whether, if the Sand Dart can wander this far, how about the Marsh moth? It is not unusual for a couple of searches for a rare moth such as the Marsh moth to draw a blank even when the moth is present, but what is the evidence for a colony at Calceby?

Phil Porter, Assistant County Moth Recorder for Lincolnshire, informs me that the late Rick Pilcher's unpublished records indicate that he had the Marsh moth at these inland sites on the following dates:

South Thoresby - apparently single males on 13 & 20 June 1970 and 6 June 1971;

Swaby Valley - apparently single males on 24 & 25 June 1971;

Calceby Beck Marsh - no numbers given, date altered, either 15 or 17 June 1973.

During the 1970s, he lived in a house (which he referred to as South Thoresby), with a garden backing on to Calceby Beck Marsh and he operated a light trap in the garden there on a fairly intensive basis. It would therefore seem that the Marsh Moth only visited the garden occasionally, and not in most years. Swaby Beck Marsh is not a site that he trapped frequently, and it is a fairly difficult site to reach with light-trapping gear. Duddington & Johnson and Johnson and Johnson give no other records from Calceby Beck Marsh and it appears that no one has operated light-traps there since – certainly the owners of the Marsh cannot recall anyone doing so. The same is probably true for Swaby Beck Marsh. There appears to be no record of Marsh moth larvae from either site, nor of any searches having taken place. If any readers know differently, I would be grateful for the information.

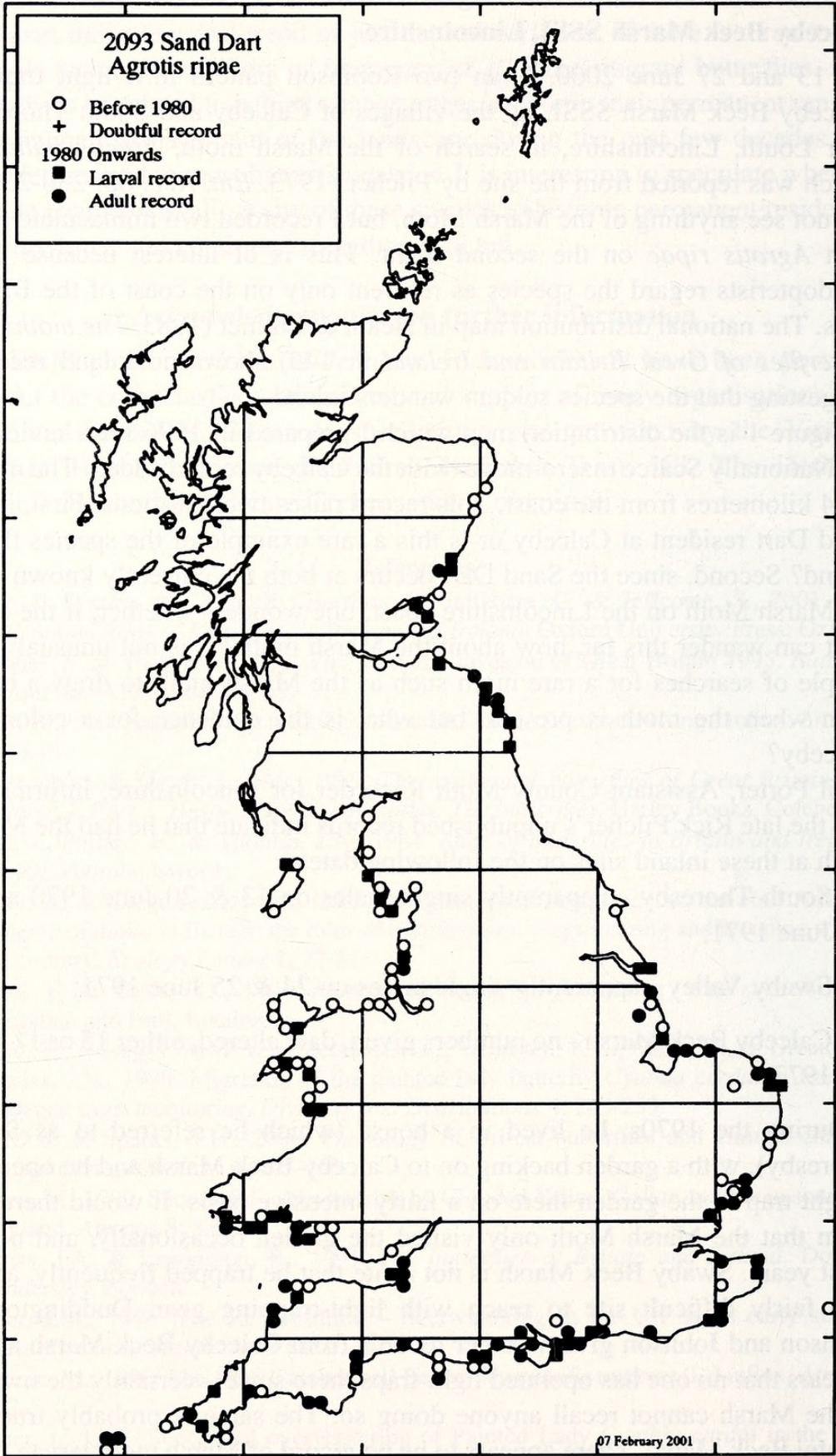


Figure 1: Distribution at ten-kilometre squares of the Sand Dart *Agrotis ripae* in Great Britain.

Concerning my own searches, on the windy cool night of 12 June 2000 at 23.15 hours, a fresh male Marsh Moth had come to one of four Robinson traps I operated at its main breeding site on the Lincolnshire coast so I knew the species was on the wing, probably near the start of its flight period for that year. The next night at Calceby was a cool, but calmer, clear dry night with a dew, 12°C at dusk falling to 6°C. I ran one trap in the marshland on each side of the Beck until 02.05 hours and searched for moths by torchlight, but saw no Marsh moths and only ten species of macro-moths, mostly as singletons. The same night I had two Robinson traps and an actinic trap out in Swaby Beck Marsh until 01.30 hours. Here I only had 15 moths of ten species also. None were of special note. When I returned to Calceby Beck Marsh on 27 June 2000 for the second attempt, the weather was much more favourable for moth-trapping, cloudy, calm, dry and mild, remaining 13°C all night, and I stayed all night, operating the two Robinson traps in the same positions as before and an actinic trap also on the far side of the beck. In the morning, I found a Sand Dart in both the traps on the far side of the beck, both moths in immaculate condition. There were 101 individuals of 38 species of macro-moths in the near Robinson trap and 134 of 31 species in the far one and 21 moths of 12 species in the actinic trap. Other noteworthy species included singletons of the Cream-bordered Green Pea *Earias clorana* and the May Highflyer *Hydriomena impluviata* the larval foodplants of both of which occur along the beck. The visit was also enlivened by the sight of a pair of Kingfishers *Alcedo atthis* piping at dawn and perching on the becksides Alders, followed by a Barn Owl *Tyto alba* quartering the marsh just above the heads of the cattle at 07.30 hours.

Later in the year I made an arrangement for two local conservationists to place a few small piles of cut grass out on the site for me to inspect after a couple of weeks for Marsh moth larvae, a technique which has been used annually with success at the main coastal site, including in 2000. Despite badgering from me, the litter piles never materialised, by which time it was too late for me to set them up, but they have been promised for 2001 when I hope to try again for this moth. I shall also be looking for more Sand Darts and will be delighted if I can report that a colony is present. Around the edge of the marsh there are several banks where the soil is quite sandy and exposed, so perhaps it is suitable for breeding.

I would be interested to hear of any other inland records of the Sand Dart. The survey was conducted as part of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan project on the Marsh moth, administered by Butterfly Conservation and funded by English Nature. The national distribution map for the Sand Dart was compiled from information collected by the National Recording Network for the Scarce and Threatened Macro-moths and plotted using the DMAP programme. I would like to thank Claire Weaver of the English Nature Local Team based at Grantham, Barrie Wilkinson of the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, and the

private owners of both inland sites for help with my visits and for providing background information and Phil Porter, Assistant Lincolnshire Moth Recorder, for investigating and supplying Rick Pilcher's records.— PAUL WARING, 1366 Lincoln Road, Werrington, Peterborough, PE4 6LS (E-mail: paul_waring@btinternet.com).

Moth trapping at Kingsham, West Sussex, 2000

I live on an arable farm surrounded with mature hedges at Kingsham, near Chichester, in West Sussex. Although adjacent to the A27 trunk road, there is no street lighting and no other light sources for some way to the south. For the two years we have lived here, I have trapped most nights from spring through to late autumn and have made some interesting observations.

For the first time last year, I looked at plume moths (Pterophoridae). Guided by an old borrowed copy of Beirne (1952. *British pyralid and plume moths*), but relying on confirmation by the county recorder, I actually ended up with some good records. *Agdistis bennetii* is an extremely local species confined to the south-west corner of the county. There have only been four recent sightings in Sussex, between 1990 and 1996, but I recorded three singles on 5, 7 and 20 August.

Amblyptilia acanthadactyla is another very local species with only a dozen records since the 1930s, all during a '90s "revival". Three singles found their way into my trap, on 13 and 26 August and 1 September. *Stenoptilia bipunctidactyla* has been presumed extinct in West Sussex since 1955; I caught one on 4 October. *Merrifieldia tridactyla* is a Vulnerable, very local species entirely restricted to chalk in Sussex. There have been six modern records in the county, the last in 1991. Unfortunately my specimen got separated from its slip of paper and I cannot be certain of the date.

Euzophera cinerosella is a fairly distinctive pyralid. The larvae feed in rootstocks of Wormwood *Artemisia absinthium* and pupate in a burrow in the pith of an old stem. One moth in my trap on 8 August turned out to be the first county record of this species. Co-incidentally, or not, I also trapped two Wormwood Sharks *Cucullia absinthii*, on 15 and 19 July, the first West Sussex records since 1980.

One last micro of interest: There have only been about a dozen records of *Nephoterix angustella* in Sussex. I recorded one in my parents' garden near Worthing, West Sussex on 19 September 1998 and I was lucky enough to record another here at Kingsham last year, on 24 July.



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