DyFRA

Dymock Forest Rural Action

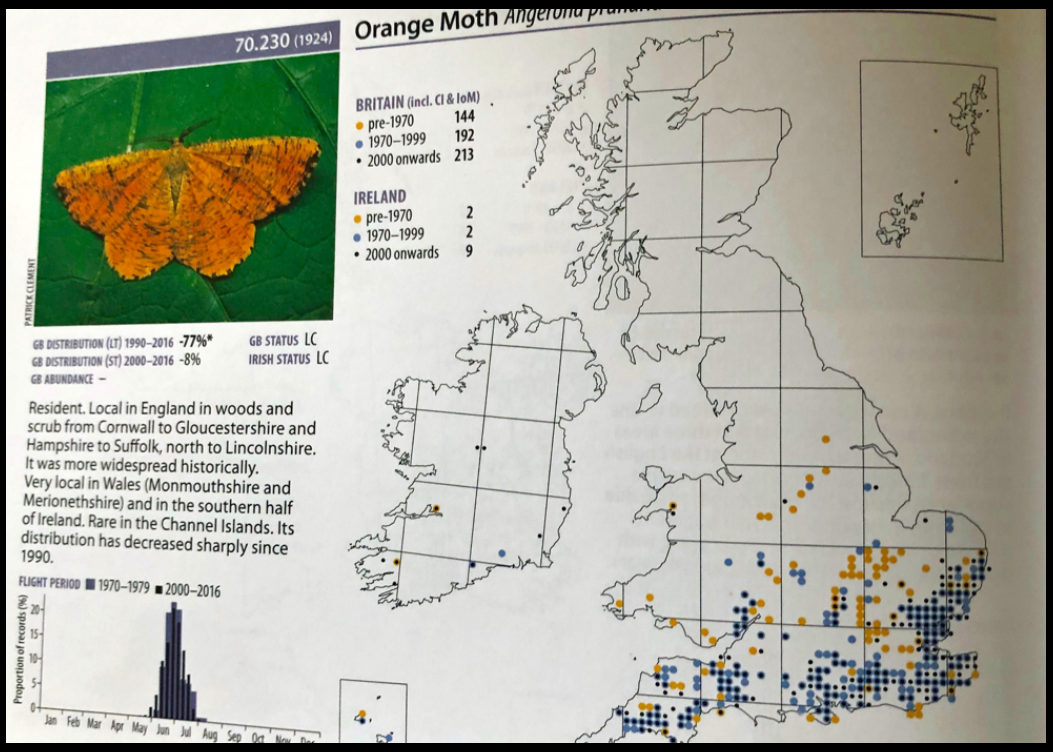
A Midsummer Night's Moth Survey

Expanding, restoring, connecting and creating habitats is the key

It is Midsummer's Night and our Moth Squad are in Queens Wood, Kempley with two local expert and enthusiast recorders and their light traps. You never expect to target a species and then discover three specimens of it in the first hour! The Orange Moth is alive and flying in The Centenary Glade, a welcome sight after the intense renovation work DyFRA has overseen at this former Christmas tree plantation with its pitch dark floor once apparently devoid of life.

Peter Hall the Herefordshire County Moth Recorder said on receiving the Orange Moth records 'We're at the extreme western European range for this species out here in the Marches, and the Orange Moth is not found in many of our woods. It's been recorded at Haugh Woods - Mordiford Bridge on the Wye, but I spent 5 years moth trapping all over those woods recently and did not record it at all, so I think it might be gone from there. It comes readily to the trap light. It's been some years since it was recorded at Dymock Forest, but that's because there's been a bit of a pause in recording there. I suspect it is doing very well in the managed Reserves of these woods.'

The National Moth Atlas gives a wealth of population and historical distribution detail. It registers a 77% decline of Orange Moths since 1990 so we are pleased to report that Dymock Forest's ancient woodland is bucking the national trend



Recorded here in 1908 the first modern record was made by Michael Harper. His work's legacy, the Michael Harper Reserves, remains under volunteer management today (see Windcross Paths map Centenary Walks in Dymock Woods.)

http://www.windcrosspaths.org.uk/?page_id=11

The monitoring and recording of fauna and flora are the traditional activity of walkers and naturalists, going back to the 18th century and the famous diaries of Rev. Gilbert White of Selborne in Hampshire. In this tradition our project leader Rick Benson-Bunch says ‘There are around 2600 moth species in the UK and they have many different life-cycles, food plants and indeed are found in different environments in different parts of the country. Because of this moths are a superb environmental indicator as many parameters can be explored. In addition to that we have over 30 million moth records. I believe that this is the biggest dataset that there is of this kind.’

On the night we recorded 30 different varieties of moth, down from 39 in June 2020, but no significance can be extrapolated from this finding. However, the national NGO Butterfly Conservation 'State of Moths in the UK 2021' report clearly states in its final key finding ‘The decline of moths and other insects, both in Britain and elsewhere, is clear and demands an urgent response. We do not need to wait for robust global trends or scientific proof of causes of change. The existing evidence is compelling and clear policy pathways have already been identified; we can and should act now. In Britain, expanding, restoring, connecting and creating habitats that support rich arrays of moths and other wildlife, that improve human wellbeing and that deliver ecosystem services such as carbon storage, flood prevention and cleaner air, is the key to reversing moth declines and confronting the biodiversity and climate crises.’

This is where our volunteers and supporters are so important. DyFRA continues to monitor our environment and contribute to the flow of information helping to guide our local response to the critical decline in biodiversity. What we need is enlightened commitment of our councils at parish, district and county level to make it happen. And we also need our volunteers, for whose support we are so grateful.