

Irish Moth and Butterfly Network

Newsletter no.1

November 2006

Firstly please accept our apologies for the long period of silence since the meeting. It has been a busy summer and autumn with, as many of you will have experienced, exceptional numbers of migrant moths.

This is the first of what we hope will be a regular Newsletter intended to bring you up to date with news and information on all moth related subjects in Ireland.

This first Newsletter gives details of the meeting held in July and the progress that has been made so far in setting up a recording structure.

Feedback:-

This is very important. There is now a committee of 5 as voted on at the meeting. We are representing all of you, the moth'ers of Ireland. We have our own ideas, but we would like to hear any suggestions/ideas/issues you have. Please contact any one of us at first name at mothsireland.com

Michael O'Donnell	michael@m...
Dave Allen	dave@m...
Paul Walsh	paul@m...
Angus Tyner	angus@m...
Ken Bond	

We've left Ken Bond off the list of contacts to try not to increase his already considerable workload.

Feedback is a 2 way process. So we will attempt the reverse flow via e-mail newsletters, of which this is No.1. How often it will be produced has not been decided. Perhaps 2 or 3 times a year or maybe slightly more frequently during the coming months while we get things up and running.

Our Name:-

We favour ***The Irish Moth & Butterfly Group*** as an umbrella body for moth and butterfly recording in Ireland, as was broadly agreed at the July meeting. This group would initially focus on Macro-moth recording in the Republic under the MothsIreland name, but would also be wide enough to encompass aspects of butterfly recording, currently well-coordinated in the Republic by the Dublin Naturalists Field Club and their ButterflyIreland webpage.

What do you think of this? Please let us know.

Looking Forward:-

While a funded recording scheme is on the back burner for a while, here's what we are aiming to achieve in the short term:

1. Publish annual report(s) of migrants and notable records of resident species for all Ireland

Paul in particular will focus on this. There may be a form to fill in all your migrant records. This will be compiled into a report or reports to be published in, we hope, the Irish Naturalists Journal or another appropriate journal.

2. Compiling a national database

This is a biggy! We feel this is essential, so we are going to do it! We are assessing the suitability of the biological recording software "[Mapmate](#)". A very important part of a national database is the credibility of the dataset. To achieve this we have set up a validation committee. Guidelines have been drawn up to state what details are required for what species. It is anticipated that the

dataset will end up under the care of the Biological Records Centre (BRC). To help us on our way, we have received an offer of help from the BRC.

3. Setting up website focusing on distribution maps of all Irish macro species.

Part of the assessment of Mapmate is seeing how easy the data can be manipulated for uploading to a website. There is currently a [Test page](#). This is likely to change, but these sample maps show the distribution of Heart & Dart. Ken's records are included, which explains why there is almost nationwide coverage. Please let us know which colour scheme you prefer.

Depending on how the compiling of records into a single database is progressing, we hope to have similar maps for perhaps 20-50 of the more widespread species available on a simple website during the coming winter. We would hope to update these maps every month or 2 as the records come in. We won't give a time span now, but clearly the aim is to roll out such an atlas for all species.

4. More get-togethers, in particular to focus on workshops.

We felt this was a let down at the get together in Lullymore. We would like to have more workshops/courses in the future. Would you be interested in attending these? This would be to focus on moth identification, traps, books, etc.

We have finalised a list of all the macro-moth species that have been recorded in Ireland along with validation criteria for each species. This will let recorders know what is required for a record of a species to be accepted into the database. In many cases there will be no validation required if the species is generally widespread & common. Photographs will be required for many of the scarce or difficult species and in some cases it may be necessary to retain the specimen. This list is available to view [here](#) and will also be uploaded to the Files area on the MothsIreland Yahoo group.

In relation to the Central Database we hope to be ready to start accepting data from recorders within the next few weeks. We would hope that most if not all recorders will be able to send their data to us in Excel format. This will allow us to easily import it into the database after validation. However, we will of course accept records in any format.

This is the first time that a centralised recording scheme for moths has been set up in the Republic of Ireland. We are sure to make mistakes along the way and will probably need to change things as we go along. We would greatly appreciate any feedback or suggestions as to how we might improve things.

We'll contact you all again soon to let you know how things are progressing. Newsletter No.2 will contain details of how and where to submit records for inclusion in the Central Database. This is probably the most important aspect of the whole process and we want to get it right from the beginning.

We also want articles from you for inclusion in the Newsletter. Anything moth related would be most welcome; e.g. "My Homemade Trap", "My Favourite Moth", "My Garden", "My Best (or worst) Day", etc.

There will also be further information on the first of the Annual Reports which will cover migrants and reports of rare/scarce species during 2006.

In the meantime keep those moth traps going. There are still moths flying at this time of year and migrants continue to turn up. We still have a lot to learn about the moths of Ireland, particularly in relation to distribution and abundance and there is huge potential for adding new species to the Irish list.

Good hunting!

**Details of a meeting held at the Irish Peatland Conservation Council centre, Lullymore,
Co. Kildare on 8th July 2006.**

A meeting for all those with an interest in moths was held at the IPCC centre on 8th July 2006. This meeting was unique in being focussed on a group of animals that have hitherto been studied by individuals acting alone in different areas of the country with limited contact with each other. The meeting was attended by people from many counties and included a wide range of people from those with little or no knowledge of moths to those who have spent a lifetime studying them.

The list of those who attended the meeting is as follows:

Organisers

Angus Tyner	Co. Wicklow
Michael O'Donnell	Co. Wexford
Paul Walsh	Co. Waterford
Ralph Sheppard	Co. Donegal
Ken Bond	Co. Cork

Chairperson

Dr. Don Cotton	Co. Sligo
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The following attendees, including speakers, signed the register:

Damian McFerran	Ulster Museum, Belfast
Dara Fitzpatrick	Co. Cork
Eamonn O'Donnell	Co. Meath
David Dillon	Co. Dublin
Kevin Hannon	Co. Limerick
Derek Traynor	Co. Laois
Jean Dunleavy	Co. Sligo
Brian Nelson	Co. Armagh
Shirley Nelson	Co. Armagh
Maurice Hughes	Butterfly Conservation, Northern Ireland
David Nash	Co. Dublin
Richard Fox	Butterfly Conservation, Dorset, UK
Veronica Santorum	Munster Moth project, Co. Limerick
Christian Osthoff	Co. Wicklow
Philip Strickland	Co. Kildare
George McDermott	Co. Donegal
Faith Wilson	Co. Wicklow
Dermot O' Mahony	Co. Dublin
Liam Lysaght	Heritage Council
Joe Adamson	Co. Wexford
Alex Copland	Co. Offaly

Apologies to anyone who may have been left off the list. For those who arrived early, a start was made emptying the moth traps which had been run overnight in the grounds of the Centre and at nearby Lullymore West. [A full list of species is available to view here](#)

The meeting was opened at 09.30 by the Chairperson, Dr. Don Cotton, who began by welcoming everyone. He went on to say that while we live in a world of instant communication, it is also a time of climate change and continuing habitat destruction. He continued by stating that it was also a period of increased interest and awareness in environmental issues and the exciting development of the Irish Biological Records Centre was testament to this. He thanked Ken Bond, Paul Walsh, Michael O'Donnell, Angus Tyner and Ralph Sheppard for organising this meeting.

He then introduced the first of seven speakers who gave excellent presentations on a range of moth related topics.

Ralph Sheppard followed with a general introduction to moths and a slide show. He presented a key to identifying moths, outlining the two main groups, the Geometers and Noctuids plus 50 or so other species.

He explained how colour and pattern forms camouflage, highlighting Peppered Moth, Swallow-tailed Moth, Red Sword-grass, Buff-tip, Scalloped Hook-tip, Lunar Thorn and August Thorn. He also mentioned how some day-flying moths use the opposite to camouflage such as the brightly coloured Cinnabar Moth to let birds, etc, know that they are not pleasant to eat.

He touched on attraction, mentioning antennae to detect pheromones emitted by female moths. He highlighted the dancing Gold Swift and Ghost Moth. Also mentioned were Hawkmoths and Pugs.

Finally he went through the Moths of Donegal website which has an Introduction, background and Statistics. It has maps of all the macro-species with photographs of most.

Veronica Santorum talked about the [Munster Moths Project](#) which is based in Co. Limerick. Through a desire to be in contact with other beginners in moth trapping, she set up a recording scheme project, aided by funding from the Heritage Council.

She set out the aims of the project and talked about recruitment of recorders, introduction training and an advanced training session with Paul Waring of which some photos were shown. She talked about how she organised the whole scheme and the advanced training session.

Maurice Hughes (regional officer of Butterfly Conservation of Northern Ireland) explained the previous attempts to set up an Irish Macromoth Recording Scheme. He briefly explained how the UK scheme will be funded by their National Lottery and that it would be ideal to try to get an all Ireland scheme set up. CEDaR (Centre for Environmental Data and Recording) considered running a scheme as a follow up to DragonflyIreland. In Sept 2003 a discussion document was sent to key recorders, NPWS, Heritage Council, etc. This outlined the scope of the project. Everyone expressed wholehearted support except NPWS who, unfortunately, decided they didn't wish to participate. As the NPWS would have provided a high proportion of fieldworkers this meant that the project could not proceed.

Maurice then outlined what were thought to be problem areas in any potential survey:

- Small number of recorders.
- Huge number of species.
- Commitment of equipment and time.
- Lack of expertise.
- Validation problems.

He then outlined a three year survey to help identify species of conservation concern. This would start with desk research and would target moths that haven't been recorded for decades, assigning recorders to target specific sites at specific times.

He finished off by giving details of some important publications including the "The State of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland" and "The State of Britain's Larger Moths" and the forthcoming book "The Butterflies and Moths of Northern Ireland",

Richard Fox outlined his role in Butterfly Conservation. He then ran through the forthcoming national moth recording scheme which will cover the UK including Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands and will have a project team of 5.

He explained how it will only cover the larger moths, i.e. Macros. There are already recording schemes for some of the other groups, e.g. Pyralids. He mentioned how it is not just a recording scheme but also has outreach activities planned to bring in new people which is a condition of receiving lottery money and how it is not even solely a Butterfly Conservation project but they will run the scheme in partnership with moth recorders, etc.

Beforehand, a two year consultation and planning exercise was done also funded by the National Lottery. 1000 completed questionnaires were received and 200 people came to discussion meetings. It was estimated that there was a minimum of 2000 moth recorders but there could be as many as 10,000 active recorders in Britain with an estimated 18 million moth records. It took another year to compile the application to UK Lottery which was followed by fund-raising to make up the shortfall.

He outlined the aims of the scheme:

To stimulate and encourage recording and to set up a recording scheme.

Aiming the project at the wider public.

Getting more recorders.

Using the current network of county recorders.

At the end of a four year project to produce a provisional atlas and eventually a proper atlas of macro moths of Britain and, hopefully, Ireland.

The ultimate aim would be to use the data for the conservation of moths.

He finished by saying that the biggest project that Butterfly Conservation will ever run is about moths!

Damian McFerran talked about CEDaR which is the Centre for Environmental Data and Recording. The aim of CEDaR is to collect, store and disseminate information on the distribution of flora and fauna in Ireland. It has a staff of 5:

Record Centre Manager:	Damian McFerran
Environmental Recorder:	Julia Nunn
Vertebrates Officer:	Lynne Rendle
CEDaR Web Site Officer:	Fiona Maitland
CEDaR Database/GIS Officer:	Catherine Porter

He mentioned the DragonflyIreland project but explained that this was a bad example in relation to moth recording. A much better example is [LichenIreland](#) which is a four year project that commenced in 2005. It would be more relevant to moths with 1300 species and very few recorders. It has a relatively big budget of £29,000 which can fund plenty of training courses and field work.

Damian mentioned that although projects usually have a specific term, they in fact continued on afterwards. An effort was made to continue the momentum created by the dragonfly project.

Finally Damian offered help, advice, guidance and encouragement to a moth recording project if approached.

Liam Lysaght gave a rundown of the Irish Biological Records Centre

The Heritage Council, whose primary function is to propose policies on natural heritage, was established in 1996. Information was needed to propose these policies and the need for a Biological Records Centre (BRC) was identified. A policy paper was put to the then Minister in 2003/04 setting out the need for BRC. Approval from the Minister was granted with some trade-offs/strings attached.

The centre was to be located in Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) and a budget of €2.5m was granted, but most of this was needed for setting up the centre, rather than at grass roots level. The management board is chaired by Liam Downey with members from Heritage Council, NPWS, Natural History Museum, WIT, etc. No staff would be allocated by Dept, but funding was available for contracts so the running of the BRC is tendered out with a contract of Service to complete a 5year work program.

There are a number of primary objectives.

- To promote biological recording
- Build a foundation over next 3-4years for data management
- Tie in institutional support such as EPA, National History Museum, Central Fisheries Board, National Botanic Gardens, etc.

A 5 year work program is being put together to include at least 3 schemes. There is a possibility of a Ladybird recording scheme, but it will probably be Bees instead. There is a near completed database of the Snails of

Ireland which six months support would complete and there was a possibility of working with other agencies such as the Central Fisheries Board to do a freshwater fish database.

Liam stressed that a big challenge is to have biological data in a format so as to feed into forming public policies.

Liam finished off by offering whatever help he can towards a central moth database.

The Chairperson, Don Cotton, summarised by saying that any group or survey should start small and let it grow slowly, organically and naturally.

History of moth recording in Ireland **Ken Bond**

The earliest collections of Irish Lepidoptera date back to the early 19th Century, and come mainly from various non-resident collectors who visited localities such as Howth, Co. Dublin and Killarney. Their main aim was to build up their collections. Particular interest was placed on "Irish forms" of species, and several Irish forms, varieties or aberrations were described. Barrett discovered Barrett's Marbled Coronet at Howth at this time, and Howth Head became a minor focus of attention (it's still worth visiting the cliffs). There was great interest in sea-cliff species in general, for which Ireland was considered particularly good (from the British aspect).

Large collections were built up, particularly of the variable species. Many of these collections are in museums such as the Natural History Museums in Dublin and London. The usefulness of many collections is very limited, because the specimens were often unlabelled, or simply labelled "Ireland".

The early collectors showed little interest in why species were distributed as they were. The ideas of habitat and conservation were little understood or considered. It was not until well into the 20th Century that some people began to notice that some species were declining, some at an alarming rate, and that the explanation was largely the loss of habitat.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, Kane produced his catalogue of the Irish Lepidoptera. This was the first attempt to give a comprehensive account of the presence, abundance and distribution of both Macro- and Microlepidoptera, although very little was known about the latter in Ireland at that stage.

During the 20th century more systematic collecting and recording was carried out by people such as Graves and Donovan, who at least labelled their specimens with locality, and the idea of including a full set of information (locality, date and capturer) was gradually established. In 1936 Charles Donovan brought out a revised catalogue of the Macrolepidoptera only, including many new localities for the species, and a general discussion of some of the more interesting species (e.g. spp. with peculiar Irish forms, etc.).

During the late 1930's Bryan Beirne became a lecturer in the Zoology Department of Trinity College Dublin, and at the same time embarked on an active recording and collecting campaign, which also covered many areas outside Dublin, and concentrated on the very neglected Micros. He soon added a large numbers of Micros to the Irish list and in 1941 published the first really comprehensive list of the Microlepidoptera of Ireland, listing the occurrence of each species by vice-county. Beirne continued to record Microlepidoptera actively up to the time of his emigration to Canada in the early 1950's where he later achieved international recognition in the field of entomology, being one of the pioneers of biological control. About the time of his departure from Ireland he produced his "British Pyralids and Plume Moths", which for many years was a basic reference work for both British and Irish Lepidopterists, and it remains the only readily available work covering both groups.

Following Beirne's departure, the study of Microlepidoptera largely ceased for some years, but Edward Baynes, who settled in Ireland about the same time began to systematically collect and record Macrolepidoptera around his residence at Glenageary, Co Dublin, as well as further afield, particularly in the Burren.

There were also some other resident and visiting entomologists who added to our knowledge of the Irish Lepidoptera. One in particular deserves mention: Henry Huggins visited Ireland for collecting almost annually for about 50 years, and the Bibliography of Irish Entomology lists no fewer than 90 publications, dating from 1928 to 1976, consisting mainly of notes and short papers on the moths of West Cork and the Dingle Peninsula.

From the 1950's onwards Raymond Haynes lived in Killarney, and built up an impressive collection of the Lepidoptera of the area and also of the Burren.

A very important contribution to our knowledge of the Irish Lepidoptera was made in the 1960's by Bradley, Mere & Pelham-Clinton, who spent several weeks of several summers intensively studying the Micros in particular. They were experts in the identification of the Micros and their immature stages; they also identified many species by breeding, a technique that has been sadly lacking in Ireland up to now.

During the 1960's the moth recording scheme operated by Monk's Wood in Britain was extended to Ireland, being coordinated here by An Foras Forbatha. This scheme was highly successful in Britain, producing detailed distribution information based on the 10km squares of the national Grid. The situation in Ireland was less satisfactory, and when the British mapping scheme was wound up in 1983, the defects soon became apparent. Maps resulting from the Monk's Wood scheme were reproduced in the various volumes of MBGBI, showing an excellent coverage in England, although less complete in Scotland. The Irish distributions of even the commonest species showed enormous gaps, with little or nothing being recorded from vast areas of the midlands in particular. It was simply impossible to give adequate coverage to Ireland in the few years available. This situation was compounded by many of the records submitted to AFF not finding their way to Monks Wood, for reasons that remain obscure. It was always going to be difficult to find enough lepidopterists in Ireland who were competent to identify many of the lesser known species. Even the efforts of visiting entomologists made little difference. In addition, the Irish Grid, which was introduced as recently as 1965 was poorly understood and little used by the general public, and the difficulty was made greater by the 6-inch maps which showed grid lines at only 10km intervals. Estimating a six-fig. reference became a tedious 2-dimensional task of rulers and scales.

After 1983, there was no general moth recording scheme covering Ireland, and there was also no network of recorders, except in the North. A few limited schemes, such as the Pyralid Recording Scheme have been operating in recent years, but with very few Irish contributors.

We are left with uncatalogued museum collections, uncompleted recording schemes, and miscellaneous published and unpublished notes, all of which need to be considered if we are to have a comprehensive recording scheme. The National Collection in the National Museum is an invaluable source of information (at least part of it is catalogued), and the Bibliography of Irish Entomology (2nd part recently published) is a very useful starting point. In addition to recording in the present and future, we need to be aware of these resources. Only when we understand the present and past conditions can we confirm the suspected changes in distribution and abundance in the Irish fauna and in many cases the losses suffered by it. This is the most important function of an ongoing recording scheme.

The afternoon was given over to an open discussion on the future of moth recording in Ireland.

The main focus, initially, was on whether a formal society should be set up. A number of comments from the floor suggested that setting up a society, possibly as a Limited Company with charitable status, would mean the need for a constitution and would have tax and public liability insurance implications if members were asked to pay an annual fee and would mean having to prepare annual financial statements.

It was felt that, at this point in time, it was better to form a steering committee which would initially concentrate on setting up a standardised recording structure with a central database for records. There was also some consideration given on whether to include records of micro-moths.

At this point Angus Tyner presented the results of the questionnaire which had been circulated prior to the meeting. [Results of the questionnaire](#) (note 3 sheets). Respondents to one of the questions concerning what type of recording people did indicate that, while the majority recorded only macro-moths, they felt that all available records of micro-moths should also be collated. Following further discussion, the general consensus was that whatever group was set up should have as its scope all moths and butterflies, and collate records of all moths, but should concentrate its efforts on macro-moths in the initial stages.

Talk then turned to the question of standardised recording with a centralised database/recorder where people could send their records. This was considered to be a very important issue with several people stressing the need for a network of recorders with somewhere for them to send their records. However, it was pointed out that validation of both current and historical records was most important when it came to adding records to a central database.

The production of county lists was requested by several people due to the lack of information on the status of moths in most counties. An annual report, concentrating on migrants and rare/scarce species, was mentioned by a number of people and was considered to be an important part of the process of feedback to recorders. It was suggested that an annual report could be published in *The Irish Naturalists Journal*.

The questionnaire had also shown that six people had indicated that they would be willing to serve on a committee if one was set up. One subsequently withdrew their name (at least for the moment). It was then proposed and seconded that a committee be set up comprising these five people to be provisionally called the Irish Moth & Butterfly Network. A vote was taken and all agreed with one abstention.

The Chairperson then closed the meeting and thanked all the speakers, the organisers and the IPCC for an enjoyable and worthwhile meeting. A collection was taken to offset some of the costs of the hire of the room and other expenses and a total of €226.50 was gathered.

To summarise:

A committee, made up of the five people who had put their names forward and accepted at the meeting, is to establish an organisation provisionally known as the Irish Moth & Butterfly Network.

Its aims are:

- To compile a list of all known active recorders.
- To establish a central database for records of, initially, all moths on the island of Ireland.
- To collect, collate and vet records of, initially, all moths with the emphasis on macro-moths.
- To publish an annual report.
- To enable contact between recorders.
- To encourage others to take up an interest in moths.

The organising committee would like to sincerely thank the speakers, Ralph Sheppard, Veronica Santorum, Maurice Hughes, Richard Fox, Damian McFerran, Liam Lysaght and Ken Bond and all the attendees who travelled from all over the country. We would also like to thank Brian and Shirley Nelson for bringing back-issues of the *Irish Naturalists Journal* and a selection of nets from [B & S Entomological Services](#) for sale. We are also grateful to Paul Talbot of [Pennine Books](#) and Mark Tunmore of [Atropos](#) for donating prizes. We are especially grateful to The Irish Peatland Conservation Council for the use of the centre and allowing us to operate moths traps, particularly Caroline Hurley and Nuala Madigan who gave up her birthday to look after us on the day and last but by no means least to the Chairperson Don Cotton who kept everything running very smoothly and on time.

We look forward to the new committee organising more meetings and workshops in the future and hope to see you all there.