



Common Quaker adult; Least Black Arches adult; Light Brown Apple Moth adult; Lunar Marbled Brown adult; Sulphur Bark Moth adult (Photos: Mark Parsons)

## Big Wood Friends hosts its first 'Moth Breakfast'

MELANIE EDDIS

An 8.30am start on Sunday 30 April didn't deter around 80 enthusiastic visitors from gathering at the Oakwood Road gate to find out more about Big Wood's nocturnal lepidoptera and enjoy some refreshments.

We were privileged to host Dr Phil Sterling, a leading authority with a lifetime of study of moths. Phil explained that there are more than 2,500 different species of moth in Britain compared with only about 60 species of butterfly, yet we are much more familiar with the butterflies in our gardens. It takes patience and ingenuity to

explore the diversity of moths that come out at night.

The night before we met, Phil set two moth traps in a garden adjacent to Big Wood. The traps shine a bright light to attract the moths, which fly down a funnel, settle on layers of egg boxes and rest safely until the trap is opened the next morning. Sometimes more than 60 species gather in the trap, but the unusually cold temperatures this year have delayed the emergence of the adult moths and, as Phil carefully lifted the layers, he entertained us with a colourful explanation of the life history of the nine species and 21 individual moths we saw. These

were Double-striped Pug, Oak-tree Pug (which doesn't live on Oak trees) and Brindled Pug (which does live on Oak trees), Lunar Marbled Brown, Common Quaker, Least Black Arches, and Oak Spring Jewel. We also saw two species originally introduced to Britain from Australia, probably on imported plants and fruits: Australian Orange-tip and Light Brown Apple Moth.

Phil also explained that the larvae of many tiny moths (known as micro-moths) live within a small part of a single leaf, creating a meandering track known as a leaf-mine as they munch their way along. The shape and size of the

leaf-mine, the time of year, and plant it is eating can give a good indication of the moth species. Lots of slightly bigger micro-moths play an important part in the ecology of a woodland like Big Wood and help to digest dead and decaying leaves, sticks and wood. Phil brought along a dead hazel stick encrusted with small black warts of the fungus Beech Barkspot. Some of the black bumps were linked with black and white grains, the 'frass' (faeces) of the caterpillars of Black-barred Fungus Moth which feed on the decaying wood (white) and fungus (black). He also showed us a log with what looked like grainy dust

caught up in silk, which was the frass adhering to silk left by the caterpillar of Sulphur Bark Moth which eat fungus and dead wood.

After the main event, the Forest School children enjoyed a chasing game of bats and moths and some moth craft and also welcomed some new enthusiasts to the group.

Dr. Phil Sterling is Programme Manager of Butterfly Conservation, the charity working to conserve butterflies and moths. We look forward to welcoming him back next year, and to exploring moths that emerge later in the season.

For more information, contact [friendsofbigwood1@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofbigwood1@gmail.com).

## Central Square Update Spring 2023



This year there will be a refreshment of the planting on the Square that has been such a success over the years.



We plan on improving accessibility to the Square by replacing the two steps at the path by the Free Church with a ramp.



As you might already have seen, we have planted a new Yew hedge by the Free Church steps to replace the unattractive and time-expired railings.



We will continue to replace memorial benches on the Square over the course of this year so that people can enjoy the Square more readily – please get in contact to learn the process of securing a bench on the Square.



We've been able to grant licences for local groups and organisations to use the Square for public events. Please get in contact if you would be interested in obtaining a licence or if you want to know more about this.

Trust Members – keep an eye out for the latest issue of Trust Times which will be arriving in your email inbox shortly.

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