

HCCPS Hilltop News June 2022

**Moth Release:** David Dennis and Peter Bygate plan to hold another moth release on the Commons on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> June by the Full Moon starting at 9.30am. Of course, this is will be weather dependent so if the weather looks uncertain please check New Grapevine. If you haven't come to one of these events before don't miss out. They are popular with all ages and the big advantage is that, because the moths are fairly inactive during the day, you can have a good look at the wide variety that live around us but which are rarely seen.

**Litterblitz:** Our thanks to everyone who did their bit to make a special effort during Litterblitz.and, of course, all of the rest of the time too. I think the Commons were and are freer from rubbish than I have seen in a long while. I still have some free litterpicks so please get in touch if you would like one or more [lindsaygriffin@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lindsaygriffin@yahoo.co.uk). It was great to see the young Vloothuis and Hicks children making good use of theirs!







**Red Kite Incidents:** There have been a number of recent reports of Kites swooping for food when local residents have been outside picnicking. This is doubtless a pretty scary experience since they have a five-foot wingspan and can be very intimidating at close quarters. Many

years ago, soon after they had been reintroduced, we had a speaker on Red Kites at our AGM. Her advice was not to feed these birds but to leave them to forage for themselves and in that way their numbers would be controlled and they would not become reliant on humans for food. It would be a great pity if such magnificent birds came to be regarded as pests.

**Calendar Photos:** Please don't forget to take and save any good photos for next year's calendar. As usual, any subjects of local interest will be welcome. Please send to me at anytime [lindsaygriffin@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lindsaygriffin@yahoo.co.uk). Closing date will be early September. For a full main month or front cover photos need to be taken on a camera. However, images taken on mobile phones or tablets are also welcome as they are suitable for composite pages. I have a good supply of our ever-popular local cards (£1.25 each or 5 for £5) and of The Story of Dundridge Manor by Katharine Dallas and Gordon Kew (£15) which is a fascinating read.

**Isobel Clark:** We were very sorry to learn that after 22 years on our Committee, Isobel has decided to resign. She will be sorely missed as a very active member of the Committee and many of you will know of her commitment to maintaining the Commons in good order by organising the working parties on Sunday Mornings for many years. She also drove and helped maintain our little tractor and recruited and trained many other drivers over the years. She has also been very heavily involved in maintaining the ponds and in extending the heather regeneration on each side of Horseblock Lane. In more recent times she has used her acute observational skills in identifying and recording mosses and lichens found on our Commons and her photographs of these minute species are a joy to look at. Check out our website [hawridgeandcholesburycommons.org](http://hawridgeandcholesburycommons.org). On a recent visit from the Moss and Bryophytes Recorder for Bucks, Sean O'Leary found 78 species which is a good number for a site such as ours and Isobel has recently found a lichen, *Trapella coarctata*, which has only ever been recorded in Bucks a total of 19 times. It is located on the bottom Boundary Stone and Isobel's photo (much enlarged) shows its fruiting bodies which look like Jelly Tots. As mosses and lichens are often indicators of a healthy environment or otherwise, Isobel's observations are of considerable importance and I am delighted that she has shown us some of these species that would also often go unobserved. Thank you very much, Isobel for all of your hard work and your outstanding commitment over all these years.





**Reptiles and Amphibians:** When you have been out on the Commons you may have seen several pieces of matting with numbers on. These are part of a National Reptile Study which is being conducted here by Dr Claudia Bernardini, Environmental Project Officer, Bucks Council. The mats should be left in situ and they are being checked regularly about every two weeks. So far two common lizards have been recorded in different areas.

Claudia and two colleagues, Charley Scales, Newt Officer, Buckinghamshire Council and NatureSpace Partnership, and Emma Foster also visited in late April to survey amphibians in Pallett's Pond, my little garden pond and the Dew Pond. Happily, there were numerous toad tadpoles and a number of smooth newts in the first two. Because there had been so little rain the Dew Pond had practically dried up so we will have to wait to see whether any survive there. What is very encouraging is that, despite all the problems with NZ Pygmy Weed, Pallett's Pond remains a breeding pond. Claudia hopes to be back to carry out further surveys especially when the weather is warmer which is better for newts.



**Claudia, Charley and Emma at Pallett's Pond**



### **Smooth Newts**

**Invertebrates:** An invertebrate survey will be conducted on September 3<sup>rd</sup> by Neil Fletcher and Martin Harvey. Obviously, David Dennis and Peter Bygate have recorded the butterflies and many moths on the Commons. However, we look forward to learning more about other invertebrates here. David and Peter's moth records now stand at 346 in total which includes 34 micro moths which they have only recently started to tackle. These are a real challenge since some are minute being only a few mms in size.

One of the most recent Macro Moths to be trapped was a female Emperor Moth. David writes 'The male has a 6cms wingspan, the female, up to 8cms. They fly only in late April and May, the males flying by day, finding the females by scent from great distances. The females fly at night, as did the one we found in the trap at Isobel's. The caterpillar is bright green and eats a variety of plants including heather and bramble. It then overwinters as a chrysalis, enclosed in a hard silken cocoon, attached to the base of a plant. The cocoon's opening is protected by a closed circle of upward pointing spines to deter predators. It is more frequently found in the north, particularly on the Yorkshire moors, and this is the first known sighting on the Commons.'

Very conveniently this female laid 40 or more eggs in the trap and Peter, for whom the Emperor Moth embodies his deep love of the Yorkshire Moors where he grew up, is carefully nurturing the eggs 'with a view to producing a species monograph, capturing every stage of



its life-cycle developments.’ Three weeks afterwards all of the caterpillars hatched within the space of 30 minutes.



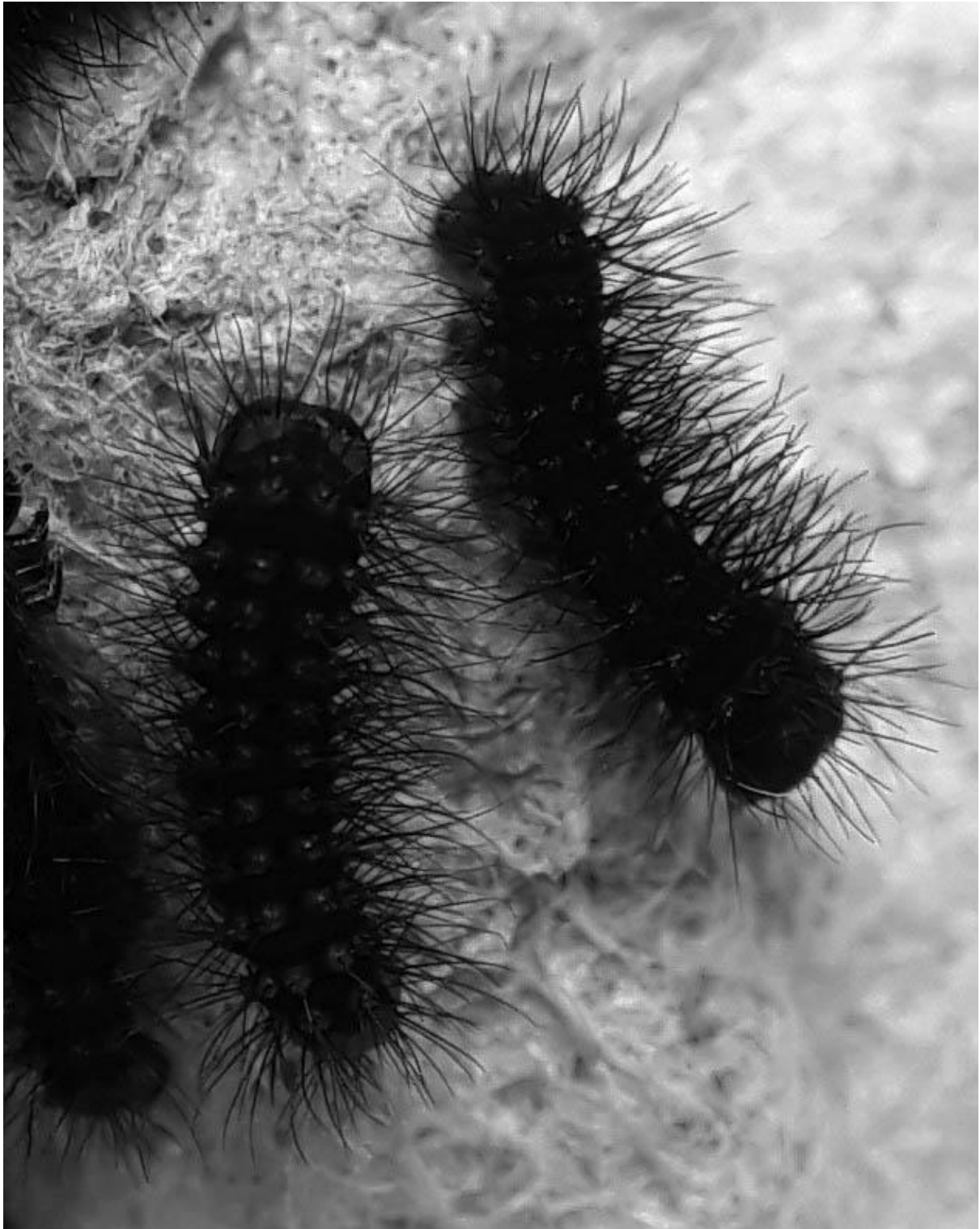
Female Emperor Moth



Emperor Moth eggs and hatching caterpillars











**Ash Dieback:** John Morris, formerly of Chiltern Woodlands, will advise Christine again in August on any work which needs to be done and in particular he will be looking at our veteran trees, which will also be checked for bats. Tree work is due to restart in October, and climbers will be needed for the roadside section between Pallet's Pond and Shire Lane.

We are very fortunate to have experts who share their expertise and their findings to show the diversity of life on our Commons. We are also fortunate in having the Commons where we try to use no chemicals and minimal intervention in which this diversity can flourish.

Lindsay Griffin

