

The Country Diary of an Edwardian Garden



MOUNT EPHRAIM NEWSLETTER
Late Summer 2010

It is a regrettable fact that nationally speaking, some of our invertebrate species are in shocking decline. Insects that were once commonplace have disappeared in my lifetime, or have become so few and far between that to see one, is a notable occasion.

However, that aside, Mount Ephraim still has a good number of species, which would keep the most budding entomologist happy for a lifetime. At this time of year, the gardens are literally, buzzing with life! Obviously, a complete list would take more space than I have here, but one or two species in particular have caught my attention lately.

Without doubt, Hornets cause a stir! Whether you find them hugely intimidating or awe inspiring, it is very difficult not to react to their sudden appearance, as you stroll around the gardens. The Hornet (*Vespa crabro*) is our largest species of wasp, and at 30mm they certainly demand attention. Much maligned and credited with exaggerated aggressiveness, the Hornet is surprisingly non-aggressive for its size and unless unduly provoked, will not normally sting. They do a great deal of good in the garden as do all wasps, for unlike bees, they feed their grubs on insects and caterpillars and so go a long way to controlling pest species.

Hornets have a much heavier, slower flight than wasps and their colouring is more of a golden-brown and black, rather than the usual yellow and black. The majority of

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

SUN 29 & MON 30 AUGUST 2010.
THE PANTALOONS –
OPEN-AIR SHAKESPEARE
WITH A DIFFERENCE

SUNDAY 5 SEPTEMBER
'COUNTERFEIT BEATLES'
FUND-RAISING EVENT IN AID
OF 'CHILDREN WITH CANCER'
CHARITY.

SUN 12 SEPTEMBER
'APPLE SUNDAY' AT MOUNT
EPHRAIM GARDENS

(See inside for more information)



MOTTO OF THE MONTH

*St. Swithin's Day, if it do rain,
For forty days it will remain
St. Swithin's Day an it be fair
For forty days t'will rain nae mair.*

MOUNT EPHRAIM GARDENS
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Issue ➔ 1.1

Hornet sightings are more likely to be queen wasps which can be intimidating enough in their own right, especially if you suffer from spheksophobia (fear of wasps), but once you have seen the real thing, the difference is obvious.

And then, just when you were thinking it couldn't get any worse, a Horntail crash lands in your lap! Perhaps even more intimidating than the hornet because of its deep resonous and droning buzz, a tendency towards lumbering, erratic flight and a large, prominent sting, the Horntail or Giant Wood Wasp (*Urocerus gigas*), isn't actually a wasp at all, and unlike J.K.Rowling's Horntail, this one is completely harmless.

The Horntail is a species of Sawfly, other species of which are more commonly known for their caterpillar-like larvae, which decimate the foliage of their favoured food plants. The Solomon's Seal Sawfly, for example. The sting is actually the female's ovipositor, with which she drills into timber, most especially pine trees, to lay her eggs. I have only ever seen this amazing insect twice, in all the years that I have worked here, presumably due to relative lack of pine trees, and only on one occasion elsewhere. I stress again, that these wonderful insects are completely harmless, so if you are lucky enough to see one, please don't swat it!

The Miz-Maze is an excellent place for insect watching, especially at this time of year. Bees and Beetles abound on the flowers and grasses, and butterflies, sadly all too few and far between these days, can generally be seen, with around 14 species noted. The dry crackle of the wings of Dragonflies hawking for their insect prey overhead, can be heard against the constant whir of Grasshopper song and the repetitive chirrupping of Crickets. If you are lucky, you may see a Hummingbird Hawkmoth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*) as it flits from bloom to bloom, they particularly favour the flowers of *Verbena bonariensis*. Perhaps closer examination of flowers, especially the daisy types, will reveal a Crab Spider, white or yellow according to the colour of the bloom (some species have the ability to change colour accordingly), patiently waiting for the next unwary insect visitor to the flower.

Contrary to popular belief, not all moths are nocturnal and as well as the Hummingbird Hawkmoth, you may see the brightly coloured Six-spot Burnet Moth (*Zygaena filipendulae*) or the Cinnabar (*Tyria jacobaeae*). Both are

“The Miz-Maze is an excellent place for insect watching, especially at this time of year”

IMAGES:

Right: Horntail

Bottom: Small tortoiseshell butterfly

Back page: Cinnabar caterpillar



ALSO OF NOTE:

Toadlets are leaving the water in the Water Garden (where the adults spawn) and can be seen hopping about on the lawns.

Grass snakes and Common Lizards may be glimpsed around the gardens.

Young Tawny Owls are now fully fledged, and active in the Little Wood.



Mark James started working at Mount Ephraim in 1996, after leaving Art College, where he studied wildlife illustration. Whilst he does not have any horticultural qualifications, Mark has always had a life-long passion for natural history, as reflected by his hobbies and interests. Mark keeps and breeds exotic insects, is a collector of insects preserved in amber, and has a large collection of cacti. A regular attendee at the regional meetings of the British Cactus and Succulent Society of which he is a member, Mark is also Vice Chairman of the Hernhill Horticultural Society.

distasteful to birds, which is the reason for their bright warning colours, in this case, black and red. The Cinnabar in particular, is very poisonous. It's caterpillars feed on Ragwort and store the plants' alkaloid poisons within their bodies, which are carried on through the pupal stage and into the moth. The caterpillars too, are brightly coloured, this time in the universal warning colours of black and yellow stripes.

So before you next visit the gardens at Mount Ephraim, why not invest in a hand lens, and perhaps a good field guide to insects, and allow yourselves or your children to spend some time in marveling at our wildlife in miniature. It is a fascinating world to study and you never know, you may just catch the bug (pun intended) and spark off a life-long interest!



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EVENTS DIARY

AT MOUNT EPHRAIM

SUN 29 & MON 30 AUGUST 2010.

THE PANTALOONS – OPEN-AIR SHAKESPEARE WITH A DIFFERENCE. TICKETS ON SALE TODAY

The Pantaloons are a young, vibrant theatre company who will return to Mount Ephraim to perform *Much Ado About Nothing* in their unique and hilarious style - fun for the whole family. Bring a picnic and something to sit on! Tickets can be purchased online from www.thepantaloons.co.uk or direct from Mount Ephraim Gardens (cash on collection only please) – call 01227 751 496. Tickets are £9 adults and £5 child.

Performances: Sunday 29 Aug - 7pm / Bank holiday Monday - 2.30pm.

“Part alternative-rock band, part thespian, part performance art, the result is wholly charming.” Ken Russell, THE TIMES

SUNDAY 5 SEPTEMBER (GATES OPEN AT 5.30PM)

WOODROSE AT MOUNT EPHRAIM PRESENTS: ‘COUNTERFEIT BEATLES’ FUND-RAISING EVENT IN AID OF ‘CHILDREN WITH CANCER’ CHARITY.

Tickets £10 each available from Woodrose or online at www.woodroserestaurant.co.uk. For more information contact Dianne on 01227 731168 or 07779634848 / email : info@woodroserestaurant.co.uk

SUN 12 SEPTEMBER –

‘APPLE SUNDAY’ AT MOUNT EPHRAIM GARDENS

Join in the apple harvest celebrations on the family farm including apple pressing demonstrations, fun farm tours and a chance to sample and buy some of the best fruit grown in Kent. Children: apple bobbing, an Apple Trail and tasting quiz. Guest appearance by Hawklands from Farming World at 1pm with a display of various stunning birds of prey. Also, sale of second hand books and other interesting bric a brac.

*Lunches etc can be pre-booked via Woodrose Tearoom call Dianne: 01227 751168.. Gardens open 11am and 5pm last entry.
Tel: 01227 751496*

SUN 19 SEPTEMBER 2010

PLANT FAIR

Plant Heritage - National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens (NCCPG) bring you conservation through cultivation with a range of specialist local nurseries on the grounds of the beautiful Mount Ephraim Gardens.

*Normal garden admission applies: Adults £5, Children (3-16) £2.50, Children under 3 go free, Plant Heritage Members £4.50 upon presentation of membership cards. Gardens open 11am and 5pm last entry.
Tel: 01227 751 496*

SAT. 25 & SUN 26 SEPTEMBER 2010

AUTUMN AT MOUNT EPHRAIM

Visit Mount Ephraim and Woodrose Tea rooms before the gardens officially close for the year. Out of season visitors are welcome to enjoy the gardens in the autumn/winter. Reduced rate garden entrance payable via the Main House.

SAT. 06 NOVEMBER 2010

FIREWORKS NIGHT

The family fireworks event of the season takes place at Mount Ephraim on Saturday 6th November at 7:30 pm - organised by the Dawes Community Association. This excellent display will be complete with a Bar, Food and Music to make your night go with a bang.

For more information on any of the events listed above, please visit our website or call Mount Ephraim Gardens: 01227 751 496 / Email: info@mountephraingardens.co.uk

APPLE SUNDAY – 12 SEPTEMBER

A scrumptious Sunday in the gardens.



APPLE BOBBING • GARDEN QUIZ

FRUIT TASTINGS AND SALES – APPLES, PEARS, PLUMS, COBNUTS, JUICE

ORCHARDS FARM TOURS • BIRD OF PREY DISPLAY AT 1PM

LONGEST PEEL COMPETITION

BOOKS, BRIC-A-BRAC AND FURNITURE FOR SALE

LUNCHES, CREAM TEAS AND APPLE BAKED TREATS

11am - 5pm (last entry)

Normal admission charges apply

£5 Adult / £2.50 child (4-16years)



**MOUNT
EPHRAIM
GARDENS**

01227 751 496

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