



## GROUPS

Examples from left to right: Privet hawk-moth (*Sphinx ligustri*) Phil Godbold, Beautiful golden y (*Autographa pulchrina*) Norman Crowson, Lime hawk-moth (*Mimas tiliae*) Norman Crowson, Six-spot burnet moth (*Zygaena filipendulae*) Norman Crowson

# Macro moths

Information: Bertie Stirling

### All about macro moths

- Moths (*Lepidoptera*) are divided for convenience into two types: macro moths (larger) and micro moths (smaller). There are over 900 species of larger (macro) moths in the UK and 3000 species of micro moths).
- They have a range of colours from bright crimson to bright yellow to various blues, greens and browns, with amazing patterns.
- Macro moths have a typical insect life cycle of egg -> larva -> pupa -> adult.
- Their habitats vary greatly; some larvae live on or in leaves and grasses, some in wood and bark, others may live in seeds or even ant colonies. In addition, a number of species are attracted to light, especially the ultraviolet lights.
- Macro moths are also important in the pollination process. When the bees and flies retire for the evening, moths take over for the night shift. They carry pollen from our fruit trees and legume plants, and a single moth species tends to cover a wider variety of flowers than any bee species.
- Moths vary greatly in size, from the size of a single grain of rice, to filling the palm of your hand.

### Why do macro moths need our help?

Over the last 20–30 years numbers of moths appear to have declined rapidly. Unlike butterflies, which have been studied and watched every year since the second world war, research into moths is a lot further behind. Undoubtedly some of the changes in moth populations have been caused by a lack of food and destruction of habitat. In the past 10 years it is thought that the numbers of moths have also been affected by climate change, especially wetter winters and extended hot periods in summer months.

**DID YOU KNOW?** In the UK, there are several hundred macro moths and there are several thousand micro moths. In contrast, there are only a couple of dozen or so butterflies. Moths outnumber butterflies greatly in the British Isles.

### How can we help?

To attract moths into your garden you could plant some flowers which they like. Evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*), madonna lily (*Lilium candidum*), night-blooming jasmine (*Cestrum nocturnum*), and some yucca species draw these pollinators to them. Usually, they have white or pale coloured flowers that reflect moonlight making it easy for moths to find their flowers from a distance. Species such as saxifrages (*Saxifraga*), dead-nettles (*Lamium*), yarrows (*Achillea*), knapweeds (*Centaurea*) and willow (*Salix*) provide food for the larvae.

### Learn more

- [wildlifeinsight.com/guide-to-british-moths/](https://wildlifeinsight.com/guide-to-british-moths/)
- [extreme-macro.co.uk/extreme-macro-moth/](https://extreme-macro.co.uk/extreme-macro-moth/)

Two sources for identifying macro-moths are:

- Book: Field Guide to Moths of Great Britain and Ireland, Paul Waring and Martin Townsend, British Wildlife Publishing Ltd, 2003.
- [ukmoths.org.uk](https://ukmoths.org.uk)
- Contact an A Rocha UK naturalist at [naturalist@arocha.org](mailto:naturalist@arocha.org)