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The six-spot burnet (*Zygaena filipendulae*) is the commonest of the day flying moths. It has a bias towards coastal grassland where it visits a wide variety of wild flowers. During mid-summer it can often be found in large numbers.



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The distinctive caterpillars feed mainly on bird's-foot trefoil. The red spots on the wings of the adults, the yellow and black colours of the caterpillars and the bright yellow cocoons warn predators that they are distasteful.



© Robin D Sutton

The rarely seen but stunning elephant hawk-moth (*Deilephila elpenor*). The common name is derived from the caterpillar's fanciful resemblance to an elephant's trunk.

Moths can sometimes get a bad press. Some caterpillars eat our plants and clothes, and the adults are perhaps scary because of their often fast and erratic flight in the evening. However, the vast majority of moths cause us little or no problems and are important pollinators.

You can discover more about the moths found in the Outer Hebrides by visiting our website:

www.outerhebrideslepidoptera.co.uk

We would be interested in receiving information about the moths and caterpillars you see, even the common species. For more information please visit the Outer Hebrides Biological Recording website:

www.ohbr.org.uk



Outer Hebrides Biological Recording

Common Moths of the Outer Hebrides

When you start to look carefully at moths you slowly become aware of the amazing number of varieties that exist. This guide will only cover a few of the most distinctive and common adults and some of the more frequently seen and easily recognised caterpillars.



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Above is the unmistakable garden tiger (*Arctia caja*), seen on the wing in July and August. Below is its caterpillar, well-known as the 'woolly bear'. Still common in the Outer Hebrides but declining in other parts of Britain.



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The oddly shaped drinker (*Euthrix potatoria*), unknown in the Outer Hebrides until recently, has spread rapidly northwards. The caterpillars feed on a range of grasses and sedges.



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The antler moth (*Cerapteryx gramis*) is often seen in numbers during the day feeding on the nectar of flowers. It is still common in the Hebrides but on the mainland, especially further south, it is declining.



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The fast flying males of the fox moth (*Macrothylacia rubi*) are often glimpsed on moorland walks as they seek newly emerged females. The female only fly at night.

The caterpillars are often found in very large numbers feeding on heather, creeping willow and bilberry. During its early development stages it is dark brown with distinctive orange/yellow bands. The fully grown caterpillar is up to 70mm long and very hairy.



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Epirrhoe alternata obscurata, the subspecies of the common carpet, is only found in the Outer Hebrides. Although there are many types of carpet moth, none of their caterpillars feeds on carpets but on cleavers and bedstraws.



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Above is the amazing caterpillar of the emperor moth (*Saturnia pavonia*). The adults are large and have distracting 'eyes' on their wings. The males can grow to 40mm in length.



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