

Upper Thames Moths 2024 report

A brief summary of some of the work carried out this year on our moth species.

Drab Looper.

This species still seems to be doing well in its known sites south of the M4. A survey on the 10th of May in the woods around Frilsham produced 19 individuals. A search at Fence Wood on the 11th of May found 9 moths. I am not aware of any records in its old haunts north of the M4. Two searches at Moor Copse NR, usually now the only reliable site that side of the motorway, failed to find the moth which is a concern. A search at Frilsham woods on 12th of August for second generation DL produced two adults. Going forward I am hoping we can establish some good contacts from the estates that hold these colonies.

Forester Moth

As this was my last year at work I am hoping to (with a little extra spare time!) get a project started next year to look at sites where this moth is found, comparing management of the sites to population size. This year I did manage to find three Foresters at Bernwood Meadow on 27th May. I have struggled to find it here in past years and the meadow is cut fairly early in the summer. By contrast, at the Millenium Field, Sonning Common, the population did well again. At this site little management takes place and the grass cutting seems to be done by rabbits!

Agonopterix atomella.

UTB ran a “learning the field signs of micro moths” day on 29th of May. I believe 17 *A.atomella* larvae were recorded during this session. Going forward it would be great to search other sites that have Dyer’s Greenweed as, to the best of my knowledge, this moth is only found on one site in the UT area presently.

Grapholita pallifrontana.

When I tried to get permission to survey at Bushy Bank in early June I found my contact at the Earth Trust had left. It took a while to establish a new contact, but the new land manager was very helpful. It did mean I was late getting in to survey and probably missed the main flight period. A survey on the 29th of June produced only two moths. The site has become very scrub covered now, to the point it isn’t easy to walk across. There is still a good amount of wild liquorice. The Earth Trust is intending to change the site management to favour the chalk flora and have asked for advice on how to preserve the moth while achieving this. I have passed on advice given by George Tordoff and I will continue to monitor the site. Going forward I would like to also survey other UTB sites that have this moth.

Oxyptilus pilosellae.

UTB continues to monitor sites for this species. It has now been confirmed as being present on at least eight sites in our area.

Striped Lychnis.

A number of larval surveys took place and this species seems to be holding its own in its Chilterns stronghold. I received several reports of sightings slightly beyond its typical range, around Westridge Green, Berks and Beale Park. It is planned to do some more dark mullein planting projects, this year at Peppard Common and new sites in the coming years

Scarce Burnished Brass

A search was made at Cothill Fen for this species on 28th July. It was not recorded. The last successful survey for this moth was 2019.

Barberry Carpet

Larval searches, at its only known Upper Thames site in Oxfordshire, produced reasonable numbers and the population seems to be stable. The table is shown below with previous years for comparison. A search for larvae in other UTB areas with Barberry also took place. These were at Beale Park, Dry Sandford Pit, Blewburton Hill and Aston Upthorpe Down. No larvae were recorded at any of these sites.

Year	Number of larvae	No of bushes beaten
2018	35	37
2019	20	50
2020	14	42
2021	166	53
2022	44	49
2023	32	27
2024	33	29

Moth surveys at farms doing some rewilding/conservation projects.

We have been asked to survey at four sites. It is great to see an increase in these types of projects and to be involved in surveying new sites, although we may struggle if we get too many more!

Currently the sites are, Billingbear Farm, Berks. Pear Tree Farm, Berks. Oakingham Estate, Oxon. Sulham Estate, Berks.

Peter Cuss. Sept 2024.