

Upper Thames Moth Report 2025

Drab Looper

As it was such an early season for most species, an early survey was carried out to see if Drab Looper was on the wing on 1st May, far earlier than it would usually be seen, and three were recorded in the woods around Frilsham. On the 30th May a further search at Rushall Farm found six. Searches at Ashampstead Common once again failed to find any despite some suitable areas of wood spurge. A trip to Moor Copse on 30th May failed to find any Drab Looper and it seems to be becoming harder to find it on this once-good site, although John Lerpiniere did record two here on 26th May.

Grapholita pallifrontana

The annual survey at the Earth Trust's Bushy Bank site for this moth was carried out on 31st May. Although not ideal conditions, being rather windy, 24 individuals were recorded. The population seems to have a better spread across the site than in the past and both the moth and the wild liquorice food plant seem to be doing well.

Four-spotted

A couple of searches were made to see if any evidence of Four-spotted as a breeding species in the Upper Thames could be found. Gareth Casburn recorded this moth near Woodstock in 2024 so this area was surveyed on 30th June. The site is large and contained lots of field bindweed, but the moth was not recorded during a 2-hour search. It was a nice butterfly site but has sadly been extensively planted up with trees, largely sycamore - no doubt in the name of conservation. Given this, it is probably not a site worth returning to.

The second site, on 4th July, was the area around Culham Lab. There are old records here and Will Atkinson has also recorded the moth in his Culham garden several times in recent years. Starting at the rough grass area next to Clifton Hampden Village Hall, and following the footpath around the back of Culham Labs, there is a fair bit of field bindweed in both. Also, some grassy fields behind the labs with some bindweed present but the moth was not recorded.

Pale Shining Shining Brown (PSB)

This species is almost certainly extinct. However, as we are currently helping a conservation group with baseline surveys for a 'Moths of the Evenlode Valley' project, we thought we could kill two birds with one stone! Stonesfield, the last Upper Thames site for the moth, is in this area. As well as lending the group a moth trap for its own surveys, we arranged to do a trapping session during the flight period for PSB, just on the off chance. So, on the 21st June, I trapped in a meadow close to the village and Marc Botham ran a few traps on Stonesfield Common. Unsurprisingly, we didn't record PSB - but at least recorded plenty of species for the Evenlode project.

Striped Lychnis

A few UTB larval surveys were carried out. The National Trust had asked if we could include Green Farm, Hughenden. They have just taken back the management of the farm from a tenant farmer and were keen to know how the species was doing on the farm that was once a great site for it. The table below shows survey results. All have been iRecord-ed.

DATE	SITE	NUMBER OF DARK MULLEIN FLOWER SPIKES	NUMBER OF LARVAE
8/7/25	Culden Faw Estate	823	113
9/7/25	Watlington Hill	340	11
10/7/25	Green Farm	637	15
13/7/25	Holtspur Bottom	597	11
25/7/25	Caversham Heath G.C.	30	1

Scarce Burnished Brass (SBB)

Marc Botham and I trapped at Thatcham Reedbeds on the 12th July. Unfortunately, we did not find the target species. Always a nice place to trap, though, and always some nice moth species (which included Webb's Wainscot, Crescent, Double Lobed, Mocha and Beautiful China Mark). Peter Philp and I trapped on the 18th July, putting traps out at Parsonage and Dry Sandford. Again, sadly, we did not record SBB. Highlight of the evening for me was a Chocolate-tip, a species I rarely see these days. Sad not to record SBB, but we will continue to look for it next year.

Barberry Carpet

The annual search at the only known site for this species in the Upper Thames took place on the 24th August. 23 Barberry bushes were beaten and that produced 22 larvae. A reasonable result which indicates the population remains stable. The table shows comparison to previous years.

Year	No of larvae	No of bushes beaten
2018	35	37
2019	20	50
2020	14	42
2021	166	53
2022	42	49
2023	32	27
2024	33	29
2025	22	23

Wood Tiger

A larval search was carried out in April at the Devil's Punch Bowl near Hackpen Hill. This was not successful, but a nice consolation prize was finding three Garden Tiger larvae.

Sites on which we have been asked for help to survey moth species:

- Wild Oakingham, Oxfordshire.
Rewilding project. Five surveys carried out in 2025. 158 species recorded to date.
- Sulham Estate, Berkshire.
Rewilding project. Three surveys in 2025. 114 species recorded to date.
- Holly Copse, West Berkshire.
Rewilding project. Two surveys in 2025. 105 species recorded to date.
- Billingbear Farm, Berkshire.
Rewilding Project. One survey in 2025. 156 species recorded to date.
- Bradfield College, West Berkshire.
Two surveys in 2025. 204 species recorded to date.
- Stonesfield, Oxfordshire.
Evenlode moth project. Two surveys in 2025

Loan moth trap scheme

This continues to be a popular scheme with all available traps on loan again in 2025.

Peter Cuss