

Hawk-moths, Family Sphingidae

Distinctive medium to large moths. Powerful fliers, generally with rather narrow, pointed forewings. Most larvae are large, striped, and have a 'horn' at the tail end.

Convolvulus Hawk-moth

Agrius convolvuli

A strikingly large moth; wingspan up to 12cm. Forewings greyish, marbled; hindwings browner. The abdomen is striped with red, white and black. The proboscis may be up to 13cm long!

Habitat A migrant into N Europe from the Mediterranean area, which may occur wherever there are flowers, especially *Petunia* and *Nicotiana*. Breeds on *Convolvulus*, but only rarely does so in N Europe.

Status and distribution Very variable in numbers, regularly reaching S England, but not necessarily going further.

Season 6–9.

Death's Head Hawk-Moth

Acherontia atropos

An extraordinary insect, unlike anything else. Wingspan up to 13cm, and body very broad. Wings beautifully marbled brown, yellow and black when fresh; skull-like ('death's head') pattern on the thorax, and abdomen boldly striped. Proboscis relatively short, and this is one of the few hawk-moths that settles to feed. Larva large, variable in colour, green or yellow, with bold diagonal stripes.

Habitat Very mobile, occurring almost anywhere.

Status and distribution A migrant from S Europe, arriving in small, but variable, numbers.

Season 6–10.

Privet Hawk-moth

Sphinx ligustri

Resembles *Convolvulus Hawk*, but smaller, with hindwings banded pink and brown,

and forewings browner. Wings normally held roof-wise along the body when at rest. Larva green, striped with brown.

Habitat More sedentary than above species, living mainly in rough flowery places where Privet occurs.

Status and distribution Local in S Britain, widespread on the Continent.

Season 6–7.

Poplar Hawk-moth

Laotioe populi

A medium-sized hawk-moth; wingspan up to 90mm. Wings greyish to pinkish-brown, broadly banded, with a single white mark in the centre of the forewings. Hindwings orange-red at base, usually concealed, and show in front of forewings at rest. Larvae green with yellow stripes.

Habitat A variety of habitats, associated with Sallow, Poplar and Aspen.

Status and distribution Widely distributed and moderately common throughout the region.

Season 5–9.

Similar species

Pine Hawk-moth *Hyloicus pinastri* is also greyish-brown, but lacks the orange on the underwings. Occurs in association with pine, and often rests on trunks by day. Widespread but local.

Lime Hawk-moth

Mimas tiliae

Wingspan in the range 70–80mm. Forewings beautifully marbled, with a ground colour varying from pink to green or brown. Adults do not feed. Larvae green with fine yellow stripes.

Habitat In light woodland, parks and gardens, associated with limes, elms and a variety of other trees; not an especially mobile species.

Status and distribution Southern and local in the UK; more widespread on the Continent.

Season 5–7.



Convolvulus Hawk-moth



Death's Head Hawk-moth, larva



Privet Hawk-moth



Poplar Hawk-moth



Death's Head Hawk-moth



Pine Hawk-moth



Lime Hawk-moth

Eyed Hawk-moth

Smerinthus ocellata

Wingspan 80–95mm. Forewings brownish, marbled, rather like Poplar, but the hindwings are quite different – orange-red, with a large 'peacock eye' on each, which may be flashed if the insect is threatened. Larva green with yellow stripes.

Habitat Woodland, parks and gardens, associated with Apple and willows.

Status and distribution Widespread in England and Wales, rare further north. Generally distributed on the Continent.

Season 5–9.

Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth

Hemaris tityus

A bumble bee-like insect, with a wingspan of about 45mm. Wings clear, except for narrow brownish border. Flies by day, and visits flowers of Bugle, Rhododendron, and others.

Habitat Woodland clearings, damp acid pastures, where Devil's Bit Scabious grows.

Status and distribution Widespread throughout, but not common.

Season 5–6.

Similar species

Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth *H. fuciformis* is slightly larger, and has broader brown margins to the wings. Widespread but local in woodland clearings and rides; larvae feed mainly on Honeysuckle.

Hummingbird Hawk-moth

Macroglossum stellatarum

An appropriately named and unmistakable moth which darts from flower to flower, feeding as it hovers. Wingspan 50–60mm, underwings yellow. Day-flying, visiting Red Valerian, Honeysuckle, Petunia and other nectar-rich flowers.

Habitat Entirely migrant in this area, and may occur wherever there are suitable flowers. Often seen near the top of sunny old walls.

Status and distribution Widespread, occurring virtually throughout, but highly variable in numbers.

Season 6–10 (though odd individuals may occur at almost any time).

Large Elephant Hawk-moth

Deilephila elpenor

An attractive and distinctive species, with a wingspan of 60–70mm. Forewings striped brown and pink, hindwings half pink, half brown. Larvae are impressive, large, greyish, with a snout like an elephant's trunk, and large 'eye-spots'.

Habitat Rough grassland, waste ground and gardens. Larvae feed on willowherbs, bedstraws, and sometimes *Clarkia* or *Fuchsia*.

Status and distribution Widespread and moderately common.

Season 5–7.

Similar species

Small Elephant Hawk-moth *D. porcellus* has a wingspan of 45–55mm, and is generally yellower in appearance; hindwing yellow edged with pink. Larva smaller, browner, lacking horn at tail end; feeds mainly on bedstraws. Widespread but local.

Spurge Hawk-moth

Hyles euphorbiae

Similar in size and shape to Large Elephant, but with brown and pink forewings, and pink hindwings.

Habitat Larvae feed on spurge; adults are highly mobile and may turn up anywhere.

Status and distribution A S European species which moves northwards irregularly. Rare vagrant to UK.

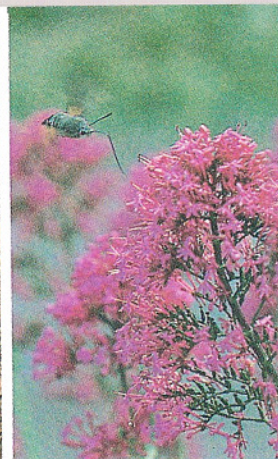
Season 5–9.

Similar species

Bedstraw Hawk-moth *H. gallii* looks very similar, but has bolder brown front margin to the wings, and less pink on the hindwings. A mobile species, moving northwards in some years. Very rare UK visitor.



Eyed Hawk-moth



Hummingbird Hawk-moth



Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth
Large Elephant Hawk-moth, larva



Large Elephant Hawk-moth
Small Elephant Hawk-moth



**Prominents, Family
Notodontidae**

So called because of a tuft of hairs on the hindwing which projects when the moth is at rest.

Buff-tip

Phalera bucephala

A remarkable moth, with a well-developed and unusual camouflage pattern (see p.27). Wingspan 55–65mm. Wings greyish, like Birch bark, tipped with yellow hairs, and with a yellow thorax – the overall effect can be very like a broken Birch twig. Larvae distinctive, with longitudinal yellow, black and white stripes.

Habitat Woods, heaths and lightly treed sites, where Sallow, Poplar and Birch occur.

Status and distribution Widespread and common throughout.

Season 6–8.

Similar species

Nothing looks quite similar.

Chocolate-tip *Clostera curtula* has a similar colouring pattern, with dark brown wing-tips and a brown head. Wooded areas, widespread but mainly southern in UK.

Puss Moth

Cerura vinula

A very attractive moth; wingspan 65–80mm. The overall impression is of a white 'fluffy' moth; the abdomen is white, with about 10 black dots, and the wings are pale greyish-white with darker lines; male antennae feathered. The larvae are extraordinary, as shown in the photograph opposite.

Habitat A variety of habitats, where willows occur – woods, fens, dunes and other sites.

Status and distribution Widespread and quite common.

Season 4–7.

Similar species

Leopard Moth *Zeuzera pyrina* (see p.152) is rather similar, but wings are more dotted, and there are 6 large dark dots on the thorax.

Iron Prominent

Notodonta dromedarius

A greyish-brown moth, with a wingspan of 45–50mm. There are rust-coloured patches on the forewings. As in other prominents, there is a tuft of scales on the back. The larva is more exceptional: green, with several narrow humps on its back.

Habitat Lightly wooded areas, where Birches and alders occur.

Status and distribution Widespread and reasonably common throughout.

Season 5–9.

Swallow Prominent

Pheosia tremula

An attractive moth, with a wingspan of 50–60mm. Wings longitudinally striped; dark brown towards the body, paler in the centre, and darker along the margins.

Habitat Various habitats; larvae feed on Aspen, poplars and willows.

Status and distribution Widespread and common throughout.

Season 5–8.

Similar species

Lesser Swallow Prominent *P. gnoma* is similar in pattern, but smaller, with more white on the wing, and a white triangle near the hind margin of the forewing. Similar habitats and distribution. Feeds on Birch.

Coxcomb Prominent

Ptilodon capucina

Wingspan 40–50mm. A marbled brownish moth, made distinctive by the especially prominent 'hump', the scalloped margins to the forewings, and the hairy crest.

Habitat Woodland, hedges and scrub. Larvae feed on various broadleaved trees.

Status and distribution Widespread throughout, generally the commonest Prominent.

Season 5–9.

Similar species

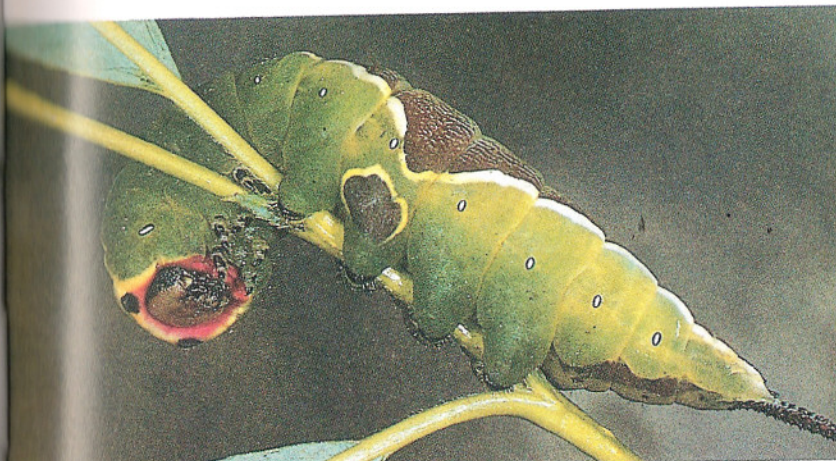
Maple Prominent *Ptilodontella cucullina* is very similar in shape, but this species has large pale patches on the wing-tips. Similar habitats, but more local.



Buff-tip



Puss Moths, mating



Puss Moth, larva

Iron Prominent, larva

Coxcomb Prominent



Pale Prominent

Pterostoma palpina

A curious-looking moth, with long projections in front of the head. Wingspan 45–60mm, with a long body; wings greyish, marbled with brown and white – well camouflaged when at rest.

Habitat Open woods and scrub.

Status and distribution Widespread throughout, and generally common.

Season 5–8.

Great Prominent

Peridea anceps

Rather similar to Pale Prominent, though larger (up to 65mm wingspan), generally darker in colour, and lacking the prominent duckbill-like snout. The hindwings (usually hidden at rest) are very pale greyish. The larvae are bright green, with reddish diagonal stripes.

Habitat Scrub and woodland; the larvae feed on oaks.

Status and distribution Widespread and moderately common throughout.

Season 5–7.

* Pine Processionary Moth

Thaumetopoea pityocampa

Adults are undistinguished, pale grey-brown moths with a wingspan of 30–35mm. Larvae, however, are very conspicuous, living communally in web 'tents' on pine branches; the tents remain visible after the larvae have left. They travel in a procession when seeking a pupation site in spring.

Habitat Wherever pine trees, of various species, occur.

Status and distribution Very common in S Europe, just reaching into central Europe.

Season Adults 5–7; larval nests visible much of the year.

Similar species

* **Oak Processionary Moth** *T. processionea* is very similar, but occurs on oaks.

Vapourer Moth

Orgyia antiqua

A fascinating moth, of which all stages may be noticed. Males are orangey-brown, with a white spot on each forewing; wingspan 35–40mm. Females are wingless and dark. She remains on her empty cocoon, where a male will find her, and she lays a batch of large conspicuous eggs all over it (see photo). The larvae are very distinctive, with colourful tufts of hairs.

Habitat All kinds of habitats, wherever there are trees and shrubs.

Status and distribution Widespread and common throughout.

Season 6–10.

Similar species

Scarce Vapourer *O. recens* is very similar, but males have white marks at the tips of the forewings. Very local, in SE Britain only; widespread but local on the Continent.

Pale Tussock

Callitaera pudibunda

Wingspan 50–70mm, males smaller. The wings are greyish-white, with a broad darker band; the furry front legs are held forwards at rest. The adults do not feed. The larvae are attractive and distinctive, yellow and very hairy.

Habitat In woods and areas with trees and shrubs. Food-plants include various trees and shrubs.

Status and distribution Widespread and generally common throughout, though absent from Scotland.

Season 4–7.

Similar species

Dark Tussock *Dicallomera fascelina* is slightly darker, with more brown on the wings. Widespread, but commoner in the north.

* **Reed Tussock** *Laelia coenosa* has a beautiful caterpillar (see photo); now extinct in UK, but locally common in N Europe.



Pale Prominent



Pine Processionary Moth, 'tent'



Vapourer Moth, female egg laying



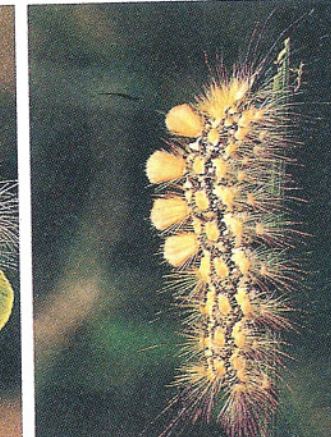
Pine Processionary Moth, larvae in procession



Vapourer Moth, larva



Pale Tussock, larva



Reed Tussock, larva

Gold-tail or Yellow-tail

Euproctis similis

A small to medium moth; wingspan 35–45mm. Generally white in appearance, but the abdomen is tipped with a brush of yellow hairs in both sexes. The larvae are distinctive, red and black with tufts of hairs.

Habitat Woods and hedges, occasionally gardens. The larval food-plants are mainly Hawthorn and Blackthorn.

Status and distribution Common in England and Wales, rare in Scotland; widespread on the Continent.

Season 6–8.

Similar species

Brown-tail *E. chrysothoe* is very similar, but slightly smaller, and with a brown tip to the abdomen. The larvae are similar, but duller, and live gregariously in webs on Hawthorn and other shrubs. Generally less common, but may become abundant at times.

Black Arches

Lymantria monacha

An attractive and distinctive moth; wingspan 45–55mm. Wings white, heavily dotted, striped and suffused with black; males have feathery antennae.

Habitat Wooded habitats. Larvae feed mainly on oak, but also on other trees including pines.

Status and distribution In S Britain only; more widespread on the Continent.

Season 7–9.

Similar species

* **Gypsy Moth** *L. dispar* is similar in form, but lacks most of the black markings; males have a brown ground colour. Extinct in UK as resident, but occasional as immigrant. Widespread on the Continent.

Rosy Footman

Mitochrista miniata

A pretty little moth, with a wingspan of about 30mm. Forewings pinkish-yellow finely marked with black; hindwings almost white. Larvae grey and furry, feeding on lichens such as Dog Lichen on trunks.

Habitat

Woodland.
Status and distribution A southern species in Britain, more widespread on the Continent.

Season 6–8.

Dotted Footman

Pelosia muscerda

Wingspan 30–35mm. Dull yellowish-brown, with 5 dark dots on the forewings.

Habitat Woods and scrub; the larvae feed on algae, and possibly lichens.

Status and distribution Now very rare in UK, local on the Continent.

Similar species

Small Dotted Footman *P. obtusa* is smaller, browner, with more rounded wings. Rare, in E Anglia only in UK, local on the Continent.

Common Footman

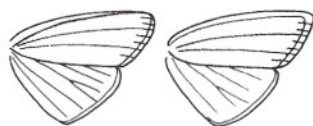
Eilema lurideola

Representative of a small group of distinctive moths. Wingspan 32–38mm. Forewings grey, edged yellow; hindwings creamy-yellow. The wings are folded back along the body when at rest.

Habitat Woods, hedgerows and gardens; the larvae feed on lichens on trunks.

Status and distribution Widespread and generally common, rarer in N Britain.

Season 6–8.



Common Footman Scarce Footman

Similar species

Scarce Footman *E. complana* is almost identical but the yellow stripe at the front of the forewing does not taper (see illustration). Local, mainly southern.

Dingy Footman *E. griseola* is duller and browner in colour, and has curved front edges to the forewings. Widespread, but rare in the north.



Gold-tail, larva



Gold-tail



Black Arches, male



Rosy Footman
Dotted Footman

Common Footman

