



Moths and the gentle art of Moth Trapping cording Wildlife

The word 'trap' might sound bad, but moth trapping isn't deadly or cruel. It simply involves attracting moths to a light source or food source so you can take a closer look at them, or if you're a serious "mother", record the species.

Setting the trap just before it gets dark and going, the next morning, to see what has been caught overnight, feels like opening the Christmas stocking – you never know what you are going to find. It's a great activity for the whole family – I guarantee any young nature-lovers will be fascinated by the beautiful moths living right outside their house.

Until I was introduced to the hobby, I had no idea there was so much activity out there at night – but a word of warning - it can be addictive, VERY! Some are spotty, others stripy or speckly; some shimmering copper and others bright canary-yellow. And they come in all sorts of sizes – from the huge 'Poplar Hawkmoth' to the 'Buff-tip' which disguises itself like a piece of silver birch bark.



Whilst there are around 2,500 species in the UK, most people tend to concentrate on the 800 or so of the larger macro-moths. I was then reminded by last month's article by Nick Ostler, that these numbers are in fact changing all the time, as moths, like all other wildlife, are having to adapt rapidly to climate change. We are finding that some new specimens are being recorded here in the south-east, as moths are migrating from Europe – the Jersey Tiger Moth being a classic example. Until recently, it was only found in the Channel Islands – it is now commonly seen in the southern counties. Moths are useful indicators of the health of our environment.

One moth that tells the tale of air pollution in the UK is the Peppered Moth. During the Industrial Revolution, it was found that as soot settled on the surface of bark, peppered moths changed their colouration to blend in better with their environment. Nowadays, these moths have reverted to a lighter colouration as air quality in many areas is much less polluted with black particulates.



Black Peppered Moth



Peppered Moth

All is not well though – the charity Butterfly Conservation reports that in the last 100 years, 65 species of moths have become extinct. Recording programmes show that around two-thirds of species are declining and over 170 species are threatened and listed as Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. So now is the time to see what is out there at night; you might find a newcomer.