

Butterfly Conservation Upper Thames Branch

Priority Moth Species Report 2023

By Peter Cuss, Priority Moth Species Champion

The following is a brief overview of some of the work carried out by the branch in support of our priority moth species in 2023.

Drab looper. We continue to monitor the population of this scarce moth in West Berkshire. Good numbers were recorded in the woods around Frilsham (I recorded fourteen here on the 18th of May) and at Rushalls Farm. John Lerpiniere recorded it at Holly Copse (SU597702); to the best of my knowledge this is a new site for Drab Looper. Derek Brown recorded one at Greyfield Wood but also noted that there seemed to be a decline in the amount of Wood Spurge on this site. As in previous recent years, the old sites north of the M4, with the exception of Moor Copse, are doing badly. I carried out two searches on Ashampton Common and found no Drab Looper despite finding a few areas of suitable habitat. Margery Slatter also searched Ashampstead Common, Hampstead Norreys and Lay Field, but did not find the moth this year. We did make contact with the Yattendon and Eling estates following the very extensive Drab Looper survey in 2021, to make them aware of the moth and its requirements. Longer term I would like to contact with them again and see if it might be possible to work with them for the benefit of this species.



Drab Looper, Frilsham Woods



*Grapholita
pallifrontana*

Grapholita Pallifrontana. The population continues to do well at its Bushy Bank (Oxfordshire) site. Good numbers were recorded on the survey this year and it seemed to have a better distribution across the whole site.

Grid ref	Estimated number
SU5844091479	30
SU5832291595	15
SU5829891603	1
SU5822091645	8
SU5825691638	2
SU5822691645	6

Silvery Arches. A survey was undertaken at Swinley on 24th June to keep an eye on the small population at this site, last carried out in 2021. Three Silvery Arches were recorded. A larval survey had been planned for April, to see if we might get a better understanding of its requirements. Unfortunately this had to be cancelled due to heavy rain. Next year we are hoping to search other Berkshire heaths for this moth.



Silvery Arches, Swinley



Heart Moth, Windsor

Heart Moth. This year's survey, on the 1st of July, targeted an area of Windsor Great Park that had not previously been trapped. We will aim to do this in future years as well, in order to better map the population of the species across the park. Three Heart Moths were recorded despite it being a rather cold night.

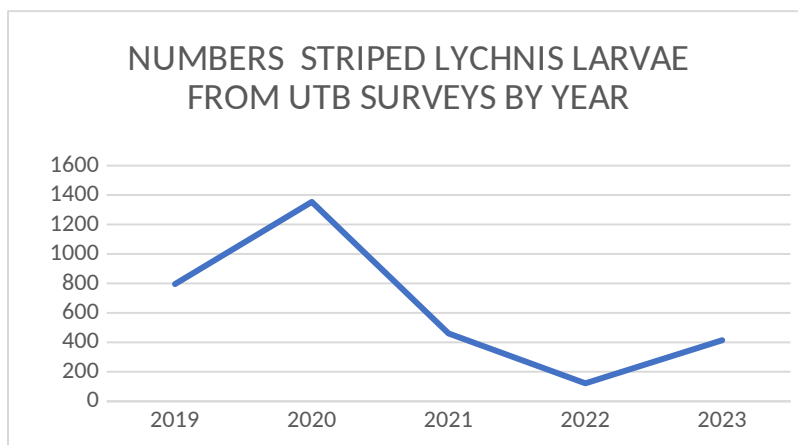
We were also pleased to record this species at Swinley during the Silvery Arches Survey. There are veteran oaks at Swinley Park and we plan to survey for Heart here next year to see if that is where this individual may have come from. Derek Barker also recorded four at Great Meadow Pond plus one was recorded in a garden at Sunninghill Park. This species appears to be doing well within its range.

Clearwings. There are three Clearwings which are priority species, Sallow, White-barred and Large Red-belted. Some effort was put into trying to record these moths in the UTB area in 2023, using pheromones, with several searches at Decoy Heath, Bucklebury Common, Padworth Common, Swinley and just over the border at Pamber Heath. None of the searches were successful but we will continue looking next year.

Agonopterix Atomella. A small UTB team continues to monitor this species at the restricted MOD site at Otmoor. Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth is also recorded here.

Goat Moth. Although we haven't done much in the way of searches for this priority moth itself, it does turn up when trapping in Windsor GP and Swinley and appears to be doing well in this corner of the UTB area.

Striped Lychnis. Very poor numbers of this species were recorded in the 2022 larval searches at all sites. The vast majority of the final instar larvae I observed in 2021 had Tachinid eggs attached and I believe this may possibly have been the cause of the population crash last year. By contrast I have noted very few larvae affected this year. 2023 has seen an increase with, 414 larvae recorded. It should be noted these figures are based on UTB larvae/flower spike surveys not on totals recorded on irecord etc.



The table below shows three sites monitored by UTB over the last five years comparing larvae and available flower spikes.

SITE	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Larvae/ F.spikes	Larvae/ F.spikes	Larvae/ F.spikes	Larvae/ F.spikes	Larvae/ F.spikes
HOMEFIELD WOOD	26 / 1233	30 / 745	75 / 900	1 / 560	15 / 900
BRADENHAM HANGINGS	311 / 1313	480 / 7205	130 / 5053	16 / 1238	91 / 5013
HOLTSPUR BOTTOM	50 / 819	71 / 375	123 / 413	16 / 226	53 / 411

Barberry Carpet. This protected species has only one know site in the UTB area. It is monitored annually by larval searches. This years search produced a reasonably good number of larvae as a ratio to barberry bushes searched. The table below shows the last six years for comparison.

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



*Barberry Carpet
larva*

Scarce Burnished Brass. One survey was carried out for this species in 2023, on the 21st of July at Thatcham Reedbeds. We did not record it on this occasion, but it was a very cool night and moth numbers were generally low.

Site surveys. This year we have been running moth surveys at three farm sites that are running re-wilding projects. It is exciting to see an increase in this type of project, and hopefully there will be more in the future. At the Sulham Estate in Berkshire we made 4 visits and recorded 139 moths of 50 species. At Billingbear Farm, Berks, we made 2 visits and recorded 112 species, including White-spotted Pinion, only the third record in the last thirty years. On the Oakingham Estate, Oxfordshire, 3 visits produced 229 moths of 62 species, including a Dotted chestnut.

Loan moth traps. These continue to be popular and all available traps went out on loan again this year.