

# Moths

## = the canaries of our countryside

Moths have always suffered from bad PR and mis-information.

They are blamed for making holes in our clothes but in reality of Britain's 2,500 species only about half a dozen eat clothes and then they prefer dirty clothes, that are hidden away in the dark where they are not disturbed.

They are also only thought of as being nocturnal when in reality many species, such as the Speckled Yellow, fly by day.

But above all they are thought of as being dull and drab when compared to butterflies.

Again this is a myth as many species like the Garden Tiger and Burnet

Moths are very colourful, and on close inspection most have intriguing, intricate and cryptic patterns which have evolved to aid camouflage.

Moths are an integral part of the food chain.

For instance, our four most common garden birds all feed on moths or their caterpillars. In many

cases they are eaten by nestlings as well as by adult birds.

All 16 British species of bat feed on moths to some extent.

However, the moth population of Britain is in serious decline, causing concern for the future of many species of birds, bats and invertebrates that feed on them.

This is the findings of a recent report, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, compiled by Butterfly Conservation and based on data collected by the Rothamsted Research, the largest agricultural research institute in the country.

Information was gathered from a nationwide network of moth light-traps run by volunteers, and located from the coast to upland moor, from woodland to private garden that were first established in 1968.

The report makes grim reading.

Its key conclusions are:

- \* The number of larger moths in Britain has decreased by 32% since 1968

- \* Sixty-two moth species are believed to have become extinct in Britain during the twentieth century

