

# MOTH MUMBLINGS: APRIL 2024

## THE YEAR SO FAR

Apparently, we have just had the warmest ever March! What a pity that nobody thought to tell the moths! Things are gradually picking up (it is, after all, only April), and the reality is that we have seen most of the expected species so far this year, although just about everyone is telling me that numbers are down – even in comparison with last year! On the other hand, there have been more than the usual number of reports of both Pale Pinion (*Lithophane socia*) and Tawny Pinon (*Lithophane semibrunnea*) – both of which overwinter as adults. A single example of the Latticed Heath (*Chiasmia clathrata*) at Marshall's Heath is about two weeks earlier than the expected start of this species in our area. A few of us have also been picking up small numbers of *Caloptilia* species, including several of the recent colonist *Caloptilia honoratella*. All of our *Caloptilia* species pass the winter as adults, hidden away in the vegetation etc.

The hasty will point to climate change as the reason for the overall lower number of moth individuals, and I am sure that this is at least partially responsible, though I am very much minded to consider other possibilities. We have spent many decades trashing the environment; from the removal of hedges to make fields bigger, the wholesale spraying of agrichemicals, building of roads and railways through some of the most sensitive of areas and covering the countryside with new houses right down to smaller things like “tidying” of road verges, pruning of any tree containing dead timber on grounds of safety and many more activities. We are just now starting to regret taking the meanders out of our rivers so that they run straight to wherever they may be going and we are surprised when houses built on flood plains actually flood! All of these, and many other, environmentally damaging acts are almost certain to have a cumulative effect on the wider pool of plant and animal species associated with them. I think we have finally reached that point where we have messed things up so much that few species can continue to thrive. Climate change is probably just the last straw.

Panic talk? Maybe, but it is now well-known that in Britain, at least, populations of insects, including moths, have declined by an average of 70% since the year 1970, with some falling by as much as 90%. That means they are still here, arriving in the traps and so lulling us into a false sense of security. Back in the 1980s, my diaries record a vaguely average number of 300 Large Yellow Underwings (*Noctua pronuba*) per night in my garden light trap; in the past five years this number has been more like 30, using the same equipment. This is a 90% decline.

Numbers are dwindling so rapidly that some species are in imminent danger of extinction. In fact, we have lost no fewer than 39 moth species from the resident fauna of Hertfordshire over the years (Middlesex data not yet available).

## RED LIST OF MOTHS

The creation of our web site, and especially the inclusion therein of all sorts of statistical analyses of the moth data, has allowed me to update the Red List of Hertfordshire macro moths presented originally in our 2008 book *The moths of Hertfordshire*. I am still working on the micros; for Middlesex it may be a little more complicated.

“Red Lists” define what is rare and what is not. They are not based on results from one person's garden – nor are they based on a single year of information. The Hertfordshire Red List of moths is based on all our records (getting on for 2 million of them) of all our species from all time. A moth may be rare where you live, but the Red List provides the definitive (official) position for the wider area that it covers. Red Lists are used to support biodiversity Action Planning – a process that may frequently involve large sums of money and so it is clear that guesswork has no part on creating the lists.

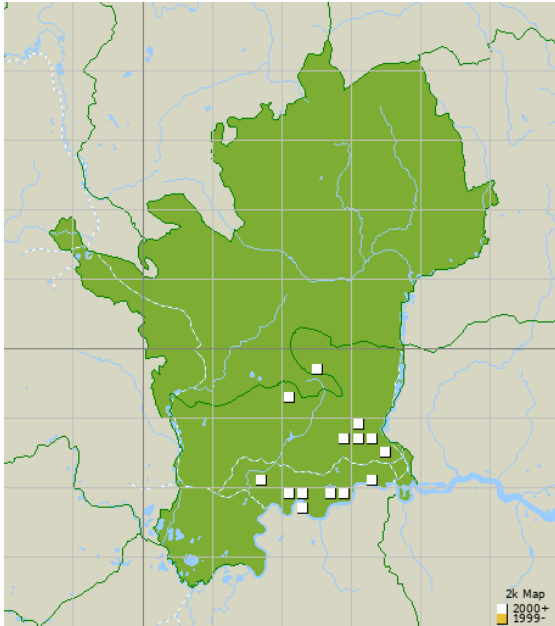
I have posted the list on our web site and can be accessed via the “Information” tab on the top banner of the home page; a copy is also appended to this newsletter.

## TARGET MOTH FOR APRIL-MAY 2024

### The Banded Ivy Tortrix – *Clepsis dumicolana*

Adult flight records range from mid-April to the end of May. A recent addition to the British list, associated with ivy (*Hedera helix*) growing up vertical surfaces. It was discovered in West London and is clearly established at places such as the Royal Brompton Hospital, Chelsea, Acton, Buckingham Palace garden and Holloway. It has spread to affect most of eastern Middlesex but is apparently absent from the west of Middlesex and Hertfordshire, as the map shows.

This is likely to be utter nonsense, of course. I want everyone to get out there and stare at Ivy growing on walls of buildings during daylight hours – perhaps shaking it periodically and netting anything that moves.



**Distribution of the Banded Ivy Tortrix (*Clepsidum dunicolana*)** in Middlesex and Hertfordshire at December 2023.

The adult moth is unmistakable and I expect that many of you will find it easily – this is not a wild goose chase! Please, either tell me direct of any discoveries or put them on the web site for others to see.



**Banded Ivy Tortrix – *Clepsidum dunicolana***  
Image © Tim Blackburn.

## TARGET SPECIES FOR JUNE 2024: TIME TO PREPARE FOR SURVEYS

### Pale Shining Brown

There was a single report of a single example of Pale Shining Brown in Norfolk last year, 2023; this was/is generally considered to be an immigrant example. Apart from this one moth **there are, as far as I can tell from all reliable sources, no British**

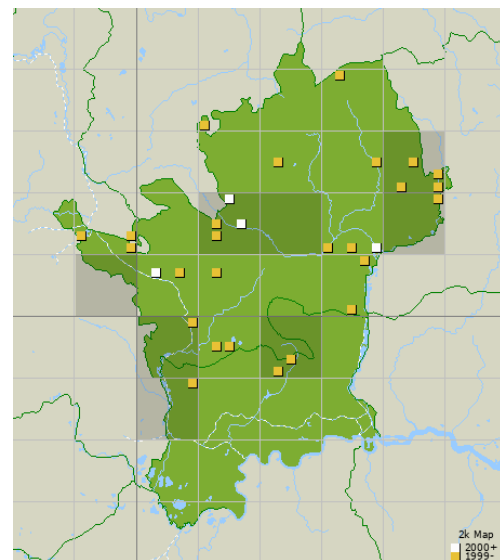
**records of Pale Shining Brown (*Polia bombycina*) since 2013.** Coincidentally, or not, the year 2013 was also the last year the species was seen in Hertfordshire (Marshall’s Heath area).

Is it extinct? Well – officially no! The rules call for it to be missing for 50 years in spite of targeted searching. However – as most people know “I don’t do official”. Tony Davis, at Butterfly Conservation, urges caution and reminds me of the rediscovery of this moth on Salisbury Plain in the early 2000s: There were no records for a number of years and many people were mumbling about extinction. When Tony tried an old site on Salisbury Plain he caught 9 on the first night and 25 a few days later. He adds that he thinks it is a “boom and bust” species that is currently at a low ebb, making detection difficult. What do YOU think?

I encourage everyone in Hertfordshire to look for Pale Shining Brown during June this year. It comes readily to small, battery-operated actinic traps and so generators and mv lamps are not essential.

I have no idea what time of night it flies, but it can surely do no harm if you are only able to run a light for a couple of hours before bed? It may well fly early on after dusk? If so, then that would be valuable information.

A favoured habitat is field margins. Yes – that’s right – arable fields! I imagine this makes them vulnerable to pesticides, but as long as there is a verge round the field it is probably worth a try; and if there is also a hedge that is likely to be a bonus!



**Distribution of the Pale Shining Brown (*Polia bombycina*)** in Middlesex and Hertfordshire at December 2023.

So – **between now and then**, please go and take some country walks, eyeball any suitable verges and

then knock on the door of the landowner and ask permission for you and/or others to run lights there during June. If the latter is too much effort, make a note of any contact details and tell me, so I can make contact instead.

Target areas are all in Hertfordshire, extending from Wheathampstead north-westwards to the Luton area.



**Pale Shining Brown (*Polia bombycina*)**, Marshalls Heath, 20213. Image © John Murray

This involves the 10Km grid squares TL11 and TL12.

If you draw an imaginary line from Wheathampstead in the south, northwards via Kimpton, Whitwell and Preston to Hitchin, then ALL of Hertfordshire left of here as far as the M1 motorway is the target area, including south-east of Luton (Luton to Harpenden is mostly in Bedfordshire – stay alert Bedfordshire people!).

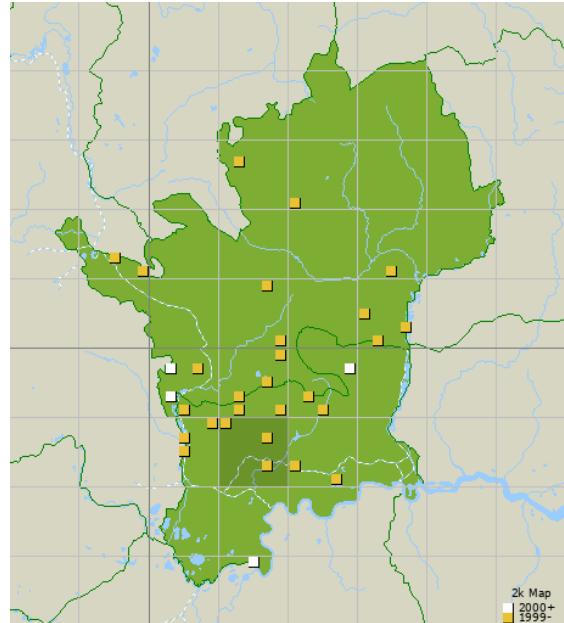
Suggested Hertfordshire search areas include Mackeyre End, Blackmore End, Bowers Heath, Peters Green, Diamond End, Bendish, Breachwood Green, Cockernhoe, Mangrove Green, Lilley Bottom, and Great Offley – amongst others.

I am keen to know of negative results please – where you tried and failed to find the moth. This is almost as important as re-finding the beast itself.

## AND ONE FOR MIDDLESEX

### *Forester Adscita statices*

I'm sorry, but I can't help it if the main target moth is in Hertfordshire, though I would really hate for all you Middlesex people to get bored! So here is another target species – and like the tortrix mentioned above, one that is likely to be found if you are in the right place at the right time! The up-to-date distribution is:



**Distribution of the Forester (*Adscita statices*)** in Middlesex and Hertfordshire at December 2023.

All recorded adults in our area were reported in the months of June and July.

The area between Mill Hill School and Harrow provides an historic record at a period, a century ago, when suitable habitat undoubtedly persisted there. This species was also recorded at Horsenden Hill in June 1948, prior to the construction of the two reservoirs in 1951/2 which destroyed much of the suitable habitat crowning the hill. It is just possible that the general area of Horsenden Hill might be amongst the first to be recolonised should such an event occur?

A record from Bushey Park in the south of Middlesex on 20th June 2020 was the first county record for 72 years and was followed by one a year later in the north-east, at New Fields in Trent Park on 16 July 2021. Both these sites potentially already support a breeding population and should be searched on multiple occasions during the daytime when the moths are likely to be spotted if present.

At around the same time, examples were also recorded in the River Colne Valley in the region of Harefield, but on the Hertfordshire side of the border.

The sudden reappearance of this moth is a mystery. It could perhaps have been a breeding resident at all four modern sites, yet it has not been seen at any of them since then. Could it be a resident in extremely low density and just really hard to find? Or could it have wandered from elsewhere (and if so, where?).

The moth is unmistakable (two look-alike species in Britain are quite absent from our area). Pictures are available in many ID guides, but **no photograph of this species taken specifically in either Hertfordshire or Middlesex is available**. If you have one, please upload it to our web site so others can benefit as well.



**Forester (*Adscita statices*)** photographed in Wales. Nicked by me from the Bedfordshire Moth Group's web site. Photograph © Melissa Banthorpe. See <https://bedfordshiremoths.co.uk/index.php?bf=1630>.

The Forester has declined nationally; if breeding is indeed confirmed for either of our two counties, habitat-based conservation measures will need to be put into place [this may, of course, mean doing nothing if it is felt that the moth has selected a particular site because it is already ideal!]. It is important, therefore, that you let me have all available information so I can inform the relevant "powers that be" at the earliest possible opportunity.

### CAN ANYONE BAG A BAGWORM?

Two species of Bagworm (Psychidae) are currently prevalent – and probably much under-recorded. The larvae of these weird moths feed from inside a silk case that is adorned with frass, soil, algae or whatever and they look to all intent and purpose like terrestrial versions of caddis flies. They insects are parthenogenetic – males are usually absent and the females never leave the cases.

*Taleporia tubulosa* makes an elongate case that is triangular in cross-section and the tip has a triple-valved terminus! It feeds on the algae growing on tree trunks, and its size (around 2 cms when grown) immediately separates it from all of the Coleophora species (which are never triangular and never more than 5 or 6 mm long).

There are look-alikes – so be careful. If in doubt collect (along with some substrate for them to continue feeding) and let me have a look.



**Case of *Taleporia tubulosa***, Bramfield Park Wood. Image © Trevor Brownsell.

Far more frequent, but often very hard to spot is *Luffia lapidella* (= *ferchaultella*). It makes a shorter, more squat "bag" – never long and tapering – and is almost always covered in the green lichens upon which it is feeding. It is also found on tree trunks, but is also frequent on old, dilapidated fence panels, gateposts and the like. It is very hard to separate from other species and live beasts should be collected (along with some substrate) to allow laboratory examination. It is no good looking on clean surfaces – if there is no covering of lichens/algae then there will be nothing for it to feed on.



**Case of unknown bagworm (?*Luffia* or *Proutia* sp.)**. Bramfield Park Wood. Image © Trevor Brownsell.

That's all folks – keep me posted of any discoveries.

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## REVISED RED LIST OF MACRO MOTHS IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Plant (2008. *The Moths of Hertfordshire*), created a list of candidate species recommended for inclusion in a categorised “Red List” of species of conservation concern that could be input by the appropriate local government departments and associated professional bodies to a county “Biodiversity Action Plan”. Species data analysed for the production of that list was accumulated up to the end of year 2006. In the 17 years since then, to

the end of 2023, significant new data have been gleaned and these have rendered changes to both the species included in the Red List and their categorisations therein. This current document updates and replaces that published in the 2008 book. **All species allocated to a Threat Category qualify for automatic inclusion in the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan**

### HELP WITH RARE MOTHS

For the most up to date information on any listed species, please visit <https://hertsmidxmths.uk/index.php>. Planning officers, ecological consultants, wildlife consultants and landowners may e-mail the Hertfordshire County Moth Recorder at [colinwlant@gmail.co](mailto:colinwlant@gmail.co) for information. County Moth Recorder is a volunteer post and so may not get an immediate reply. My initial response will be free of charge, so please carefully consider the specific questions that you wish to be answered and don't forget to include a telephone number in case the response needs to be lengthy!

### STATUS CATEGORIES AND THREAT CATEGORIES.

All species have a status category. However, not all species are under any sort of threat to their population strength, distributional range or any other aspect of their ecology. Consequently, not all species are allocated to a **Threat Category**. Hertfordshire **Status Categories** are defined as follows:

#### STATUS CATEGORIES

The legally applicable date for the initial application of these categories is 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024.

Category	Code	Attributes
Herts Extinct	<b>X</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species that were resident breeding species in Hertfordshire in the past but which have not been found in the area for fifty years (1974 or earlier) in spite of specialist searching;</li> <li>Species that were resident breeding species in Hertfordshire in the past but which have not been found in the area for fifty years (1974 or earlier) where specialist searching for them has not been undertaken to an adequate measure;</li> <li>species that were resident breeding species in Hertfordshire in the past but which have not been reported in the area for a period of less than 50 years but for which the evidence from survey suggests they are absent.</li> </ol>
Herts Rare	<b>R</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species known or predicted to be breeding in five or less localities within the county regardless of the number of map squares affected regardless of whether threatened or not.</li> </ol>
Herts Scarce	<b>S</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species known or predicted to be breeding in 6 to 30 localities within the county regardless of the number of map squares affected regardless of whether threatened or not.</li> </ol>
Non-resident	<b>N</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Immigrants</li> <li>Vagrants</li> <li>Adventives</li> <li>Other non-resident categories</li> </ol>

#### THREAT CATEGORY DEFINITIONS

A “threat”, in any category, applies to the selected moth species as a resident. Some moths that are resident in the county may occasionally also appear as primary immigrants from overseas; these and all others from non-resident populations are to be ignored in threat analysis.

Threats to individual species may change over time. The effective date for the application of these categories is 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024. All species allocated to a Threat Category qualify for automatic inclusion in the Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

Category	Code	Attributes
Herts Endangered (Highest threat category)	E	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species that may be extinct in the county, but for which exists the possibility that they are overlooked rather than absent;</li> <li>Herts Rare species that demonstrate a decline in the county since year 2000 and where none of the known sites for them has a long-term management plan that includes specifically identified proposals for this moth species;</li> <li>Species that would otherwise be categorised as Vulnerable or Threatened, but which have declined rapidly in either population strength or distribution in recent years and are continuing to so decline in spite of conservation efforts;</li> <li>Species that are known with reasonable certainty to be restricted to a single site in Hertfordshire even if that site is not currently threatened.</li> </ol>
Herts Vulnerable (Middle threat category)	V	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species categorised as 'Herts Rare' and believed to be declining in Hertfordshire but present on sites that either have a long-term management plan that includes specifically identified proposals for this moth species or which are not under any specific threat;</li> <li>Species categorised as 'Herts Scarce' and believed to be declining in Hertfordshire and where none of these sites has a long-term management plan that includes specifically identified proposals for this moth species;</li> <li>'Herts Rare' species associated with a rare and threatened habitat, microhabitat or foodplant even if the moth itself does not appear to be declining;</li> </ol>
Herts Threatened (Lowest threat category)	T	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species categorised as 'Herts Rare' and believed to be declining in Hertfordshire but present on sites that either have a long term management plan that includes specifically identified proposals for this moth species or which are not under any specific threat for the present;</li> <li>Species categorised as 'Herts Scarce' and believed to be declining in Hertfordshire and where none of these sites has a long term management plan that includes specifically identified proposals for this moth species;</li> <li>'Herts Rare' species associated with a rare and threatened habitat, microhabitat or foodplant even if the moth itself does not appear to be declining;</li> </ol>
Herts Stable		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species whose range and population strength in Hertfordshire has remained constant over the period 2000 to 2024 (including species that may rise and fall between years, provided that the trend line on the graphs for number of records received, population strength and number of occupied sites) has remained constant;</li> <li>Species that are expected to continue to thrive without intervention in spite of existing or reasonably predictable human activities.</li> </ol>
Increasing		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species whose range and/ or population strength has increased in Hertfordshire over the period 2000 to 2024. Most of these will be immediately discernible from the three graph lines (number of records received; population strength, number of occupied sites) on the main page for each species at <a href="https://hertsmid dxmoths.uk/index.php">https://hertsmid dxmoths.uk/index.php</a></li> </ol>
Insufficiently known (Data deficient species)		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Species for which there is inadequate data for us to allocate a threat category with any reasonable degree of certainty, but which we do not consider likely to be declining;</li> <li>Species for which there is inadequate data for us to pass any opinion at all.</li> </ol>

## ANNOTATED SPECIES LISTS

### FORMER RESIDENT SPECIES CURRENTLY CONSIDERED TO BE EXTINCT IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Taxon	English name	Year of last record
<i>Synanthedon culiciformis</i>	Large Red-belted Clearwing	1947
<i>Adscita geryon</i>	Cistus Forester	1940
<i>Eriogaster lanestris</i>	Small Eggar	1971
<i>Gastropacha quercifolia</i>	Lappet	2012
<i>Macrothylacia rubi</i>	Fox Moth	1961
<i>Hemaris tityus</i>	Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth	1948
<i>Hemaris fuciformis</i>	Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth	1977
<i>Scopula ornata</i>	Lace Border	1969
<i>Scopula emutaria</i>	Rosy Wave	1961
<i>Cyclophora porata</i>	False Mocha	1937
<i>Phibalapteryx virgata</i>	Oblique Striped	1970

<i>Scotopteryx mucronata</i>	July Belle	1947
<i>Chloroclysta miata</i>	Autumn Green Carpet	1967
<i>Minoa murinata</i>	Drab Looper	1899
<i>Rheumaptera hastata</i>	Argent& Sable	1972
<i>Trichopteryx polycommata</i>	Barred Tooth-striped	1940
<i>Macaria wauaria</i>	V-moth	2009
<i>Selenia lunularia</i>	Lunar Thorn	2009
<i>Dyscia fagaria</i>	Grey Scalloped Bar	1914
<i>Perconia strigillaria</i>	Grass Wave	1937
<i>Clostera pigra</i>	Small Chocolate-tip	1948
<i>Orgyia recens</i>	Scarce Vapourer	1887
<i>Spilosoma urticae</i>	Water Ermine	1940
<i>Parasemia plantaginis</i>	Wood Tiger	1979
<i>Nudaria mundana</i>	Muslin Footman	1971
<i>Pechipogo strigilata</i>	Common Fan-foot	1961
<i>Anchoscelis helvola</i>	Flounced Chestnut	2011
<i>Jodia croceago</i>	Orange Upperwing	1834
<i>Xylena exsoleta</i>	Sword-grass	1946
<i>Dicycla oo</i>	Heart Moth	1971
<i>Orthosia miniosa</i>	Blossom Underwing	1980
<i>Anarta myrtilli</i>	Beautiful Yellow Underwing	1995
<i>Polia hepatica</i>	Silvery Arches	1970
<i>Sideridis reticulata</i>	Bordered Gothic	1972
<i>Mythimna turca</i>	Double Line	1937
<i>Mythimna pudorina</i>	Striped Wainscot	1937
<i>Spaelotis ravidia</i>	Stout Dart	2001
<i>Meganola strigula</i>	Small Black Arches	1941
<i>Xanthorhoe ferrugata</i>	Dark-barred Twin-spot Carpet	2007

## RESIDENT MOTH SPECIES REGARDED AS ENDANGERED IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Taxon	English name	Category
<i>Polia bombycina</i>	Pale Shining Brown	E1
<i>Mniotype adusta</i>	Dark Brocade	E1
<i>Scotopteryx bipunctaria</i>	Chalk Carpet	E2
<i>Scopula immutata</i>	Lesser Cream Wave	E2
<i>Euphyia biangulata</i>	Cloaked Carpet	E2
<i>Trichiura crataegi</i>	Pale Eggar	E2
<i>Eupithecia plumbeolata</i>	Lead-coloured Pug	E2
<i>Angerona prunaria</i>	Orange Moth	E3
<i>Xestia baja</i>	Dotted Clay	E3
<i>Adscita statices</i>	Forester	E4
<i>Cosmia diffinis</i>	White-spotted Pinion	E4
<i>Hydraecia petasitis</i>	Butterbur	E4



## RESIDENT MOTH SPECIES VULNERABLE IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Taxon	English name	Category
<i>Eulithis testata</i>	Chevron	V1
<i>Eupithecia trisignaria</i>	Triple-spotted Pug	V1
<i>Rheumaptera undulata</i>	Scallop Shell	V1
<i>Ematurga atomaria</i>	Common Heath	V1
<i>Charissa obscurata</i>	Annulet	V1
<i>Cucullia lychnitis</i>	Striped Lychnis	V1
<i>Cirrhia ocellaris</i>	Pale-lemon Sallow	V1
<i>Triphosa dubitata</i>	Tissue	V2
<i>Pelurga comitata</i>	Dark Spinach	V2
<i>Eulithis mellinata</i>	Spinach	V2
<i>Abraxas sylvata</i>	Clouded Magpie	V2
<i>Cucullia chamomillae</i>	Chamomile Shark	V2
<i>Eulithis testata</i>	Chevron	V2
<i>Hydriomena impluviata</i>	May Highflier	V2
<i>Melanthia procellata</i>	Pretty Chalk Carpet	V2
<i>Chesias legatella</i>	Streak	V2
<i>Colostygia multistrigaria</i>	Mottled Grey	V3

## RESIDENT MOTH SPECIES REGARDED AS "THREATENED" IN HERTFORDSHIRE

Taxon	English name	Category
<i>Diloba caeruleocephala</i>	Figure of Eight	T3
<i>Jodis lactearia</i>	Little Emerald	T2
<i>Chesias legatella</i>	Streak	T3
<i>Eupithecia pygmaeata</i>	Marsh Pug	T2
<i>Autographa jota</i>	Plain Golden Y	T2
<i>Cirrhia gilvago</i>	Dusky-lemon Sallow	T3
<i>Naenia typica</i>	Gothic	T3
<i>Ceramica pisi</i>	Broom Moth	T2
<i>Anchoscelis litura</i>	Brown-spot Pinion	T2
<i>Graphiphora augur</i>	Double Dart	T2

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