

ENCOURAGING MOTHS AND BUTTERFLIES



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Moths and butterflies

WHY?

Insects (including moths and butterflies) are the most numerous creatures on the planet, but habitat loss and climate change are driving numbers down in many areas of the world, with significant losses in the UK. This has the potential to affect all species directly or indirectly along the food chain – not least as the impact of insect depletion on agriculture could be catastrophic because many insects pollinate our crops. Moths and butterflies are also amongst our most attractive insects: their appearance and intriguing lifecycles point to the extraordinary creativity of our God, and that alone is a good enough reason to encourage them! <https://butterfly-conservation.org/>

HOW?

Any patch of ground has the potential to provide habitat and food for moths and butterflies. The adults are often attracted to a particular family of plants and favour specific plants for egg-laying. These plants become the food plant for the caterpillars (the larval stage). This larva turns into a pupa and then an adult butterfly or moth. Consider doing a wildlife survey (see our paper on how to do this) to make the link between your plant species and which moths and butterflies they are likely to attract.

Butterflies tend to favour warm areas for egg-laying and congregate along woodland edges. Those 'edge-habitats' are where a lot of activity happens such as feeding, mating and egg-laying. Aiming for a graduation from woodland/tree edge to bramble/scrub, to long/medium grass is perfect, and many species will thrive here. In these areas, ivy, old shrubs, or a shed/outbuilding may provide a dry hibernation site for the winter. It's worth looking up the church tower too, you may find hibernating butterflies or the spectacular herald moth: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/moths/the-herald>

The largest area of suitable habitat in your churchyard is likely to be grassland. Remember grass will contain a mixture of several species of grass and many wildflowers, many of which are attractive to butterflies and moths. Nettles in particular host some of our most spectacular butterflies.



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Many micro-moth species and several day-flying moths are associated with grasses. Whether you have a spring meadow, a summer meadow or a combination of the two, to make the most of them, identify which plants you already have established. In a churchyard with frequently cut grass, the best way is to stop mowing for a few weeks so you can recognise and identify your plants more easily. Leaving patches uncut in the spring will enable many early-flowering plants to flower and set seed. The same can be done over the summer months, doing a September grass cut.

Ideally you could even create a combination of both spring and summer meadows. This would provide lots of warm, egg-laying sites and nectar-rich wildflowers for insects. Your grass cuttings must be removed to prevent the soil from becoming nutrient-rich, which would encourage grasses at the expense of wildflowers. (See our resource on grassland management).

Finally, consider the ants. Yellow meadow ant hills are an important feature of uncultivated grassland so are common in churchyards. Ants carry seeds into the nest, where they germinate and widen the range of plant species present. Ant hills are also good basking sites for butterflies, and a favoured food of green woodpeckers.

Here are some recommendations about suitable planting:

<https://www.lancswt.org.uk/blog/charlotte-varela/gardening-butterflies-moths>

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/gardening/gardening-for-moths>

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/get-involved/gardening/gardening-for-butterflies>



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LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

UK Moths have some pictures to help you identify and learn about our moths:

<https://ukmoths.org.uk/>

You can submit your moth sightings here:

<https://www.mothrecording.org/>

And butterfly sightings here:

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/fund-our-work/other-ways-to-help/send-us-your-butterfly-sightings>

Consider joining in with the annual Garden Butterfly Survey usually held in August:

<https://www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org/>