

# all about

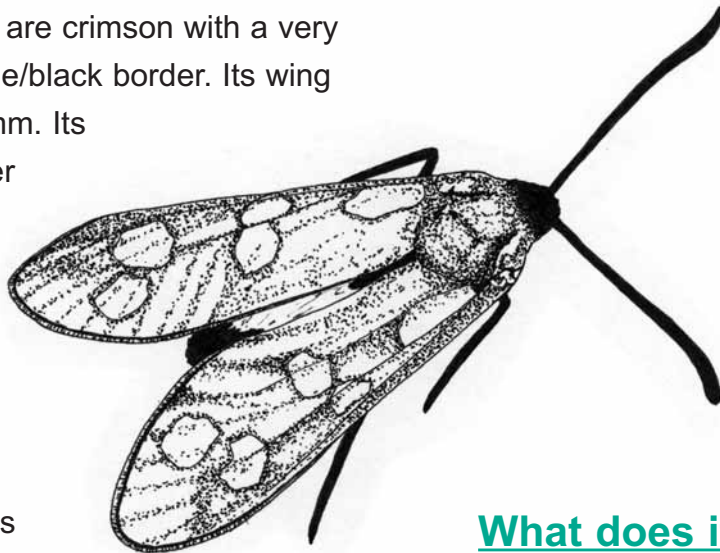
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## SIX-SPOT BURNET MOTH

*Zygaena Filipendulae*

The six-spot burnet moth is brightly coloured and is active by day. As a result it is often mistaken for a butterfly. People generally think that moths only fly at night but in fact a number, including the six-spot burnet moth, fly by day. It has blackish blue front wings which have a metallic shine and are patterned with the six red round spots that give it its name. The hind wings are crimson with a very narrow dark blue/black border. Its wing span is 30–38mm. Its antennae, rather unusually for a moth, are club shaped. They are used for feeling and smelling.

The caterpillar is short and plump measuring about 22mm. It has a greenish yellow body with two rows of black blotches along its back and smaller spots along its sides. It has large jaws for chewing the plants on which it feeds.



The bright colours of the moth and its caterpillar make them very conspicuous. All stages in the life cycle of the six-spot burnet moth contain cyanide in their bodies and their bright colours protect them by warning birds and other predators that they are poisonous.

### Where does it live?

The six-spot burnet moth is found in grassy areas where it can find the wild flowers that the caterpillar feeds on. In Scotland it is mainly found near the coast.

### What does it eat?

The adults drink nectar from the plants using their proboscis. This is a hollow feeding tube, rather like a drinking straw, which can be coiled up when the moth is not eating.

The caterpillar feeds on the bird's foot trefoil, clover and kidney vetch.

## Life cycle

The six-spot burnet moth, like other moths, has four different stages in its life cycle.

The moth lays its eggs on its food plant in July or August, and the young caterpillars hatch within a few days.

The caterpillars start feeding in the autumn and then hibernate through the winter on the plants. They start feeding again in the spring and are usually fully grown by the end of May. While they are growing the caterpillars moult several times. Feeding is almost a non stop activity apart from a day or two to rest at each moult and they grow quickly.

Sometimes they remain as caterpillars over a second winter.

The fully grown caterpillars spin cocoons with silk from their spinnaret, a special gland near their mouth. The tough straw coloured cocoons are attached high up grass stems. They then change into a pupa inside the cocoon. Inside the pupa the body of the caterpillar breaks down and reforms into the body of an adult moth.

The adult moths emerge in June or July, flying on warm sunny days. They only live for a short time. Once they have mated and the female has laid eggs, the adults die.

## Human impact

Although the six-spot burnet moth is not under great threat of extinction at the

moment, destruction of grassland habitats is a cause for concern. If its food plants are not available the moth cannot survive. Demands for land, housing and roads, for example, result in grassland being dug up and destroyed.

Fertiliser and herbicides are used by farmers to help the growth of grasses suitable for grazing animals but their careless use can prevent the wild flowers, which are the food plants of butterflies and moths, from growing.

## Finding out more

Useful guides which include information about moths, and many photographs, include:

### **Butterfly and Moth**

Eyewitness Guide (Dorling Kindersley)

### **Butterflies and Moths**

David Carter (Pan)

## How you can help

Grow plants that attract butterflies and moths with their nectar e.g. buddleia and scabious.

You could also become involved with groups concerned with the future of Scotland's wildlife. Check your local newspaper or library for information about groups in your area.

Scottish Wildlife WATCH, which is part of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), produces a magazine and Scottish newsletter which include information about environmental issues and give you the chance to help wildlife by taking part in projects and surveys, Contact: Scottish Wildlife WATCH, Cramond

House, Cramond Glebe Road,  
Edinburgh EH4 6NS

You could also contact your local  
museum.

A poster of a six-spot burnet moth is  
available free of charge from Scottish  
Natural Heritage, Publications Section,  
Battleby, Redgorton, Perth PH1 3EW

## **Glossary**

### **Cocoon**

A protecting case made out of silk.

### **Habitat**

The place in which an animal or plant  
lives.

### **Predator**

An animal that kills and eats other  
animals.

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**Forestry Commission**  
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