Dark Crimson Underwing

Catocala sponsa

Conservation status
Priority Species in UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

The English name of this large attractive moth describes the deep red patterning on the hindwings, which are largely hidden beneath the forewings when the moth is at rest. ‘Catocala’ means ‘beautiful below’, in reference to the brightly coloured hindwings of many members of the genus. The species name ‘sponsa’ derives from the Latin for fiancée or bride. Linnaeus started a convention of naming moth species with brightly coloured hindwings in a matrimonial context. It is thought this refers to the brightly coloured undergarments worn by Scandinavian brides! In Britain, the species is now restricted to the New Forest in Hampshire. It was formerly recorded in other southern counties, such as Kent, Sussex and Wiltshire, and in London. Recent records away from the New Forest are likely to refer to primary immigrants.

Foodplants
The larvae feed on oak Quercus spp., initially on the buds and catkins and then on the expanding foliage. Large and mature trees are preferred.

Habitat
The species is associated with large tracts of mature oaks, generally in open woodland situations.

Life cycle
The species is single-brooded. The eggs are laid on oak in August and overwinter, before hatching in April. The larvae develop from April to June, feeding by night and hiding in bark crevices by day. The moth pupates in June and July, in a cocoon either among the foliage or in bark crevices. The adults generally fly from late July to early September. Adults fly late in the afternoon, usually high in the canopy, and at night.

![Graph showing the life cycle of Catocala sponsa](image)

**Egg**
- June, July, August

**Larva**
- April, May, June

**Pupa**
- June, July

**Adult**
- Late July to early September
Habitat management for the Dark Crimson Underwing

The overall aim is to retain large tracts of mature and veteran oaks in open woodland situations.

- Mature oak stands should be retained wherever possible as this habitat is of high conservation value and home to many important species.
- Aim to provide a continuity of supply of mature oak trees, including mature oak in open conditions.
- The adult moth is readily recorded at artificial bait and at sap runs, suggesting that sap runs may be important for this species in its natural habitat.

How to survey/monitor

The adults are particularly attracted to artificial bait, such as sugar and wine ropes, and will also come to sap runs and light-traps.

above Dark Crimson Underwing larva
below Ideal woodland with large oak trees