

Garden Tiger (*Arctia caja*) survey 2011.

The Butterfly Conservation and Rothamsted Research report 'The State of Britain's Larger Moths' in 2006 highlighted the plight of many species regarded as common and widespread in the past that had suffered huge declines in abundance over the period 1968-2002, based on figures from the Rothamsted Insect Survey light-trap network. The recently-published follow-up report 'The State of Britain's Larger Moths 2013' included data from a further 5 years of recording, and found that two-thirds of the 337 species investigated declined in abundance over the 40-year period, with greater losses in the southern half of Britain. In 2006, the Garden Tiger was reported as showing a population decrease of almost 90% (increasing to 92% between 1968 and 2007 according to the more recent publication), and a decrease of 30% in the proportion of monitored sites occupied during the late 1980s, prompting a more detailed investigation. This suggested a correlation between population levels and Atlantic climatic patterns thought to influence winter weather in Britain, the moth seeming to prefer cold, dry conditions followed by a rapidly warming spring. If that is indeed the case, 2011 could well have been a good year for the Garden Tiger, following two very cold winters and a warm, dry early spring.

The Garden Tiger spends the winter as a small caterpillar, with the large, brightly-coloured adults on the wing in July and August. Larval food plants include nettles, docks and many herbaceous garden plants, and the 'woolly bear' caterpillars are often seen crossing paths and roads in the summer as they disperse to pupate.



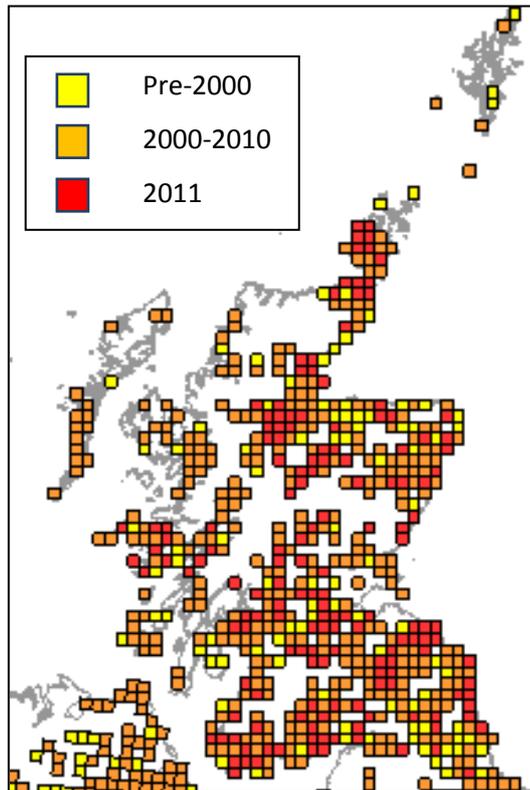
Garden Tiger moth: Ramsay Young



Garden Tiger caterpillar: Roy Leverton

Following the success of the postcard and online surveys for several species of butterfly, it was decided to launch a special appeal for members of the public to report sightings of the Garden Tiger moth during 2011 to add to records collected for the National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS) and assess its current situation in Scotland.

There were 77 online responses to the survey, and these confirmed a continued presence in the Aberdeen area, as well as Skye and Argyll, and the Ayrshire coast. Particularly pleasing was a record of 2 individuals spotted near Arbroath in an area with no post-2000 records in the database. The map below (from the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway, based only on NMRS data entered to October 2012) suggests that the Garden Tiger is still widely distributed in Scotland, with strongholds in certain areas, and has not suffered the dramatic declines in Scotland that have been reported from the south of the United Kingdom.



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2011 Ordnance Survey [100017955]

Key References:

Fox, R., Conrad, K.F., Parsons, M.S., Warren, M.S. & Woiwod, I.P. (2006). *The State of Britain's Larger Moths*. Butterfly Conservation and Rothamsted Research, Wareham, Dorset, UK.

Fox, R., Parsons, M.S., Chapman, J.W., Woiwod, I.P., Warren, M.S. & Brooks, D.R. (2013). *The State of Britain's Larger Moths 2013*. Butterfly Conservation and Rothamsted Research, Wareham, Dorset, UK.