

### **Cinnabar *Tyria jacobaeae* (Linnaeus)**

The Cinnabar is a brightly coloured, medium sized (35-45mm wingspan) moth that can be found during the day, and as a result is frequently mistaken to be a butterfly. This moth typically has black forewings with red or pinkish red markings. Very rarely the red is replaced by yellow or the wings are entirely black. Burnet moths are day-flying moths that are superficially similar to the Cinnabar but on closer inspection their forewings are narrower and they lack the red line on the wing belonging to the Cinnabar. The antennae of the burnet moths are also long and thickened.



*Photograph Alan Barnes/Butterfly Conservation*

The Cinnabar moth is most active late at night from May to early July, and rests in low grass and herbs by day, when it will fly if disturbed. The eggs are laid on common ragwort and to a lesser extent on groundsel and other ragworts. The striking yellow and

black striped caterpillars are seen in July and August and are a familiar sight in many parts of the country - a single plant can often be covered with many caterpillars and they have been known to reduce the plants to bare stems. The conspicuous colours of both the adult and the caterpillars are believed to act as a warning to potential predators ('aposematic colouration') that the moth is distasteful, possibly as a result of toxins in the ragwort eaten as larvae.



*Photograph Butterfly Conservation*

The Cinnabar moth is common and well distributed throughout England and Wales, although numbers of this moth have fallen. According to the Rothamsted trap survey, numbers of the Cinnabar moth have declined by 83% in the last 35 years. The Cinnabar is most numerous in well-drained and grazed grassland but also occurs on heathland, sand dunes, gardens and woodland rides.

**For further information regarding ragwort, visit the web addresses below:**

- <http://www.english-nature.org.uk/pubs/publication/PDF/RagwortENinformationnote20June03.pdf>
- <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/horses/topics/ragwort.htm>
- [http://www.defra.gov.uk/viron/weedsact/cop\\_ragwort.pdf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/viron/weedsact/cop_ragwort.pdf)