

Lackey *Malacosoma neustria* (Linnaeus)

The Lackey is a usually common moth throughout most of England but is less frequent in Wales and Scotland, preferring lowland and coastal areas. Not to be confused with those of the Brown-tail *Euproctis chrysorrhoea* (L.), the young caterpillars of the Lackey can be found from around April, feeding until June, usually in groups, in dense silk webs amongst the foliage of deciduous shrubs and trees, which provide shelter until they are nearly fully-grown.



Photograph Butterfly Conservation

The caterpillars bask on these webs in the sun, venturing out of the nest to feed on a variety of foodplants, including hawthorn, blackthorn, oaks, willows, cherries and cultivated shrubs. Fully-grown caterpillars disperse to find a suitable

pupation site. Lackey caterpillars are medium sized (up to 45mm), with a blue body with a white stripe running the length of the body bordered by black and orange-red stripes either side. This eye-catching appearance may serve as a warning to predators, as a coating of protective hairs cover the caterpillar's body making the caterpillar unpalatable to most birds, except apparently, cuckoos. The Lackey is usually found in sunny situations, on hedgerows, scrub, in woodlands and sometimes in gardens.

The adults fly from July to August and are quite frequently attracted to light. The colouring of the moths is subject to variation, from yellow to dark reddish brown. Characteristic and distinctive features of the Lackey are two; typically yellow, lines running across the forewings that are rarely absent, and brown and white dotted fringes to the wings. The wingspan ranges from 30-41mm, males are usually smaller than the females.