

Magpie *Abraxas grossulariata* (Linnaeus)

The Magpie moth is usually common and well distributed throughout England and Wales, and a sometimes frequent visitor to our gardens. In Scotland it is largely restricted to the lowlands and coasts, but can occur in numbers. The species is most abundant in northern heather moorlands though it is also found in woodlands, hedgerows and other habitats, where its foodplants occur.

The caterpillars emerge from August to mid June and survive the winter as a pupa attached to the foodplant in a flimsy cocoon, inside which the yellow and black pupa is usually visible. The striking white, black and orange caterpillars feed on a variety of plants including Blackthorn, hawthorn, Hazel, currants and Gooseberry.

The Magpie moth is a white "carpet" moth with black blotches, and to lesser extent, yellow stripes on the forewings. The hindwings are off-white with black blotches, and the abdomen and thorax are predominantly yellow with black spots.



Photograph David Green/Butterfly Conservation

This moth is larger (wingspan 42-48mm) than any other carpet moth with similar colouration, apart from the Clouded Magpie, but the forewings of the Clouded Magpie have much lighter blackish spots, and lack the black line running along the centre of the forewing.

The Magpie typically rests with both its forewings and hindwings on display, which is characteristic of the "carpet" family of moths to which it belongs. Bramble and other low vegetation are a favoured resting place and may provide an opportunity for a daytime glimpse of this species. If the Magpie moth is handled, however, it has been known to 'play dead'. The Magpie flies at night from June to August and may come to light, but usually only in small numbers.