

The Mullein *Shargacucullia verbasci* (Linnaeus)

The Mullein is most frequently seen as a caterpillar, often conspicuously, usually on the foliage of wild and cultivated mulleins, figworts and buddleias, feeding on these throughout the day and night.



Photograph David Green/Butterfly Conservation

The caterpillar is bluish-grey or whitish-green, with numerous large black and bright yellow spots along its length (up to 50mm), and can be found from May to July in a variety of habitats where the foodplants occur, including downland, waste ground, woodland clearings, marshes, commons and frequently in gardens.

The Mullein overwinters in an underground cocoon as a pupa, in which it has been known to remain for up to four or five years.

The Mullein adults occur from April to May, and may be seen feeding on flowers, or they are occasionally attracted to artificial lights after dark. The moth may prove difficult to find during the day as, when it is resting on vegetation, the Mullein's camouflaged form closely resembles a dead plant stalk.

The forewings are usually 19-24mm in length and typically reddish brown in colour, but the females are occasionally darker than the males. The hindwings are scalloped and tend to be off-white with distinctive darker veins in the male, but black to grey in colour in the female. The Mullein is common and widespread throughout England but is more local in Wales.