

### **Vapourer *Orgyia antiqua* (Linnaeus)**

The Vapourer is a very conspicuous caterpillar, which advertises its unpalatability to predators through its appearance. The main body of the caterpillar (up to 35mm in length) is black or dark grey in colour, with red spots at frequent intervals along its length, projecting from which are tufts of hair. Those on the top half of the body are particularly dense, looking similar to the end of a small paintbrush.



*Photograph David Green/Butterfly Conservation*

This caterpillar is usually common in many habitats from May to September, including gardens, parks, woodlands, heathlands and scrubby areas, feeding on most native deciduous trees and several cultivated bushes.

The moths, which occur from July to October, show considerable differences

between the sexes in their physiology and appearance. When at rest the male's orange/brown forewings give it a very triangular-shaped appearance, other features include a white spot on each forewing near the trailing edge and darker brown lines crossing the wings, though these may be indistinct. In contrast the female Vapourer is wingless.



*Female Vapourer - David Green/Butterfly Conservation*

The male searches for the female by day following scent that is excreted by the female. The female moth remains on her cocoon throughout her life, on which she will lay her eggs after mating. The sedentary, flightless life-style of the female affords her greater protection from predators, as wings tend to be more conspicuous. Old cocoons with egg batches can occasionally be found where the moth occurs.