



Six-spot Burnet

(Zygaena filipendulae)

STATUS & ECOLOGY

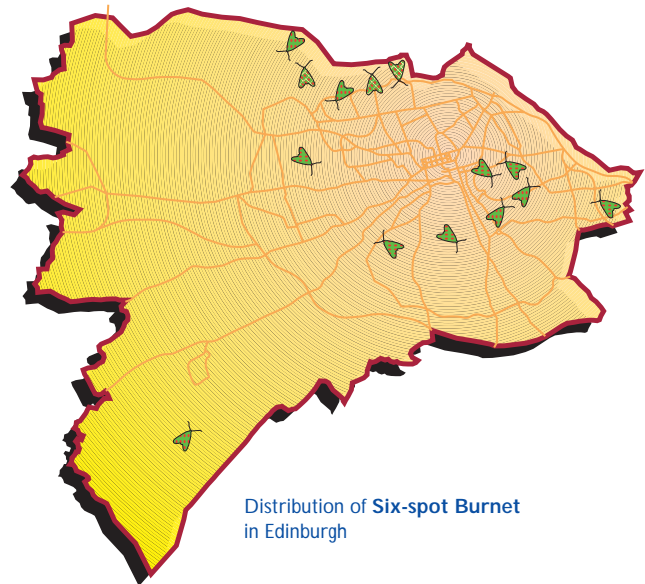
The six-spot burnet is a strikingly coloured day-flying moth that flies in warm sunshine and often in great numbers. It is found in coastal areas throughout most of Scotland, and to a lesser extent, inland, where its larval foodplant, bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) occurs. It can occur in large numbers on sunny, sheltered sites.

It has blackish blue front wings that have a metallic shine and are patterned with the six red round spots that give it its name. The hind wings are crimson with a very narrow dark blue/black border. These bright colours protect the six-spot burnet moth from predators by warning birds and animals that they are poisonous. Its antennae, rather unusually for a moth, are club shaped. They are used for feeling and smelling.

Apart from the unrelated Cinnabar moth (whose larvae feed on ragwort), it is the only red and black day-flying moth likely to be seen in Edinburgh. It is on the wing usually from July (sometimes June) to August/September, with just one generation a year.

It does best on sites with a mixture of short and longer turf, preferably in sheltered, sunny positions with some bare soil, such as coastal grassland, old quarries and roadside verges. The caterpillar feeds on bird's foot trefoil, clover and kidney vetch. The adult drinks nectar from plants using its proboscis, wild thyme (*Thymus drucei*) being a favourite nectar plant.

There is no specific legislation protecting the six-spot burnet moth.



Distribution of Six-spot Burnet in Edinburgh

“Burnets cannot fail to attract the attention of anyone walking in the countryside”
W Gerald Tremewan

FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

Impacts

Even though the six-spot burnet is still widely distributed, the loss, abandonment or agricultural improvement of semi-natural grassland, wildflower-rich grasslands and pastures has probably led to local losses and declines.

Threats

The main threat to six-spot burnet is the continued loss of semi-natural grasslands. “Ancient” grasslands are still being lost through agricultural improvement, while recent grasslands (eg in old quarries) can become dominated by scrub. Drought during dry summers can dramatically reduce colonies on dry, short-turf grasslands.

CURRENT ACTION

There is currently no action to conserve the six-spot burnet in Edinburgh. However, the creation and management of wildflower meadows under the Countryside Premium Scheme may be helping to maintain and extend the habitat for six-spot burnet on farmland.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Objective

To protect known six-spot burnet colonies in Edinburgh, particularly those on older semi-natural and “ancient” grasslands.

Targets

To find out the status and distribution of six-spot burnet throughout Edinburgh and identify the largest and most important colonies. To carry out appropriate conservation and management for the species and its habitat.

Actions

1 Undertake a survey across Edinburgh, from Summer 2001, to establish the location and associated habitat of six-spot burnet colonies.

(Actioned by: Edinburgh Biodiversity Partnership, Lothian Wildlife Information Centre & Butterfly Conservation)

2 Consider the protection of significant six-spot burnet colonies on old flower-rich grasslands in relevant local plans, from Winter 2002.

(Actioned by: City of Edinburgh Council City Development Department)

3 Encourage appropriate conservation and management of important six-spot burnet sites, from Winter 2002.

(Actioned by: Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Edinburgh Green Belt Trust & Pentland Hills Regional Park)

4 Use the decline of the six-spot burnet to highlight the loss of wildflower grasslands and their associated wildlife from Summer 2000.

(Actioned by: Butterfly Conservation, City of Edinburgh Council Recreation Department, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group & Pentland Hills Regional Park)

Key Contacts

Butterfly Conservation (East of Scotland Branch)
Lothian Wildlife Information Centre
City of Edinburgh Council (Recreation)
City of Edinburgh Council (City Development)
Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
Edinburgh Green Belt Trust
Pentland Hills Regional Park

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CHAMPIONS



Lothian
Wildlife
Information Centre



pentland hills
regional park



The Edinburgh Green Belt Trust

