

## SWORD-GRASS MOTH SPECIES ACTION

### SPECIES PROFILE

**Common name:** Sword-grass moth.

**Scientific name:** *Xylena exsoleta*.

**UK Biodiversity Status:** UK Priority Species.

**Relevant Priority Habitats:** Upland Heathland.

**Statutory Protection:** None.

### BIODIVERSITY CONTEXT

This species is widespread, but not abundant throughout the UK. Mostly recorded in Scotland, little is known of its ecology and habitat management needs. Substantial decline in the range of the species since the 1960s has led to the species being classified as Nationally Scarce in Great Britain.

### OBJECTIVES

**Objective 1** Establish the status of the current population of this species in the Stirling Council Area

Target By 2005, survey all sites with previous records.

Target Identify and survey key potential habitat areas.

**Objective 2** Ensure the viability of the Stirling Council Area's sword-grass moth population.

Target Identify exact habitat requirements of species.

Target Protect and expand existing populations.

### CURRENT STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION

The sword-grass moth is widespread, but not abundant throughout the UK. It was formerly widespread but, since the 1960s, has undergone substantial decline. There have only been occasional records in England since 1980, and most records are now in Scotland. In the Stirling Council Area, there are old records from The Trossachs and the Loch Lomond area, but it is thought to be under-recorded.

### ETYMOLOGY, CULTURE AND FOLKLORE

The Latin name of this moth comes from *Xylena* meaning wood and *exsoleta* meaning mature, old. Linnaeus's description of this moth's colour was that of an old piece of rotting wood.

## ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

The sword-grass moth is a species of open woodland and upland and moorland areas. Little is known of its ecology. Its larval foodplant is not known, but it may feed on grasses initially, then move onto broadleaved species. Larvae do feed on blackthorn *prunus spinosa*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and bird cherry *prunus padus* as well as broadleaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius* in captivity. It has two flying periods - March to April and September to October.

## CURRENT FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE AND FUTURE THREATS

It is not really known what is causing the decline of this species.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CURRENT ACTION

- Some known sites are SSSIs.
- Little is known of its distribution; an opportunity exists for further surveying in the Stirling Council Area.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Booth, A. 2000. **Stirling Area Biodiversity Audit**. Stirling Biodiversity Partnership. Stirling.
- UK Biodiversity Steering Group, Tranche 2, sword-grass Action Plan.
- Skinner, B. 1984. **Colour Identification Guide to Moths of the British Isles**. Viking, London.
- Kinnear P & Kirkland P, 2000. **Regional Action Plan for the Butterflies and Moths of South West Scotland**. Butterfly Conservation. Stirling.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Plan written by Sue Agnew, RSPB, on behalf of the Upland Working Group, February 2002.