

Six-spot Burnet

Zygaena filipendulae

Insects · On the wing Jun–Aug · flies by day



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A day-flying moth with glossy blue-black forewings bearing six crimson spots, and scarlet hindwings. It is often taken for a butterfly. Six-spot burnets live on flowery unimproved grassland, coastal dunes and verges around the Solway, where bird's-foot trefoil grows, and are often seen in numbers on knapweed and thistle heads on a warm day.

BEHAVIOUR

The bright red-on-black is a genuine warning: the moth contains hydrogen cyanide, taken up from its foodplant as a caterpillar and also synthesised by the moth itself, and it advertises this rather than hiding. The flight is slow and heavy — it has no need to be quick. Papery yellow cocoons are spun part-way up grass stems and are easy to find in early summer.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Burnet moths (Zygaenidae)
WINGSPAN	3–4 cm
STATUS	Native; locally common on unimproved grassland

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