

## Why moths are hidden heroes

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Moths may be just as important as bees when it comes to pollinating plants, a new study has found. The research from the University of Sheffield showed that moths carry more pollen and visit more types of plants than experts had thought.



Plants with flowers use pollination to reproduce. This involves taking pollen from the male part of a flower (the stamen) and carrying it to the female part (the stigma). Some flowers have both a stigma and stamen, so they can self-pollinate, but others need help from pollinators, which are often insects.

Pollinators eat pollen and nectar – a sweet substance that many plants produce. When the creatures land on a flower, the pollen brushes onto them; when they fly off to another plant, the pollen brushes off onto the stigma. Once it has been pollinated, a plant produces seeds that grow into new plants.

The researchers collected insects at eight allotments (land that people can rent to grow food or flowers) around Leeds, England. The team tested the pollen on the insects to find out which plants they'd visited. This revealed that moths were pollinating lots of different plants, some of which bees would not visit.

The new research suggests that moths could be responsible for one third of all the pollination of flowering plants in towns and cities. Dr Emilie Ellis, who worked on the study, said, "People don't generally appreciate moths." She hopes the discovery will make people more aware of the important role that the insects play in creating a healthy environment. The number of moths in the UK has fallen dramatically over the past 50 years. Ellis says the study shows it is important to make sure that green areas, like gardens and parks, contain plants that are attractive to moths as well as to bees.