

The Common Grass Moths of Berkshire (VC22)

A guide to identification

Introduction The Grass Moths (Crambinae) are represented by 39 species in the British Isles. Most are associated with grasses or rushes, and can often be disturbed during the day, sometimes in significant numbers.

This guide covers the eleven species most commonly found in Berkshire (VC22). It should be possible to make a positive identification of all these species based on visual characteristics. Where there are similar species which are either uncommon or absent in the region the differences are described.

It will not be possible to identify all specimens unequivocally as there will always be oddities and worn individuals where there is room for doubt.

The species are grouped according to similar appearance, rather than in taxonomic order. Inset pictures are actual size.

Understanding the data

Flight season (phenology) graphs



These show the number of records from each month, as a percentage of the total (range 0-100%).

Key to text:

Status indicates national status.

Length is measured from palps to wingtip, with wings closed.

Classification numbers used are Bradley & Fletcher.

Key to distribution maps

■ Tetrads (2 kilometre squares) in VC22 where the moth has been recorded.

■ Tetrads where any recording activity has occurred (i.e. at least one record of any moth).

Total number of records is also shown. Data is taken from the VC22 County Moth Records database and includes all records up to December 2008.

Vernacular names

Taken from *A Label and Checklist of the British Micro-lepidoptera with Vernacular Names* by Jim Porter². Not as yet widely used.

Terminology

Apical

Towards or in region of apex.

Basal

Towards or in region of base.

Costal

Towards or in region of costa;
costal edge: edge facing costa;
costal half: half of wing adjacent to costa.

Dorsal

Towards or in region of dorsum;
dorsal edge: edge facing dorsum;
dorsal half: half of wing adjacent to dorsum.

Fringe

Long thin scales projecting beyond termen; also known as cilia.

Inner

Towards head/base of wing.

Longitudinal

Along length of wing, e.g.
longitudinal streak: streak running along length of wing

Oblique

At an angle to costa or dorsum, i.e. neither parallel nor perpendicular to wing edges.

One half/one-third/two-thirds etc

Approximate position along wing taken from base.

Outer

Away from head/base of wing.

Subterminal

Immediately before termen.

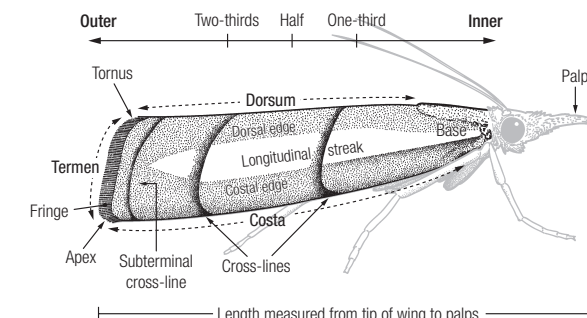
Terminal

At end of wing; towards termen.

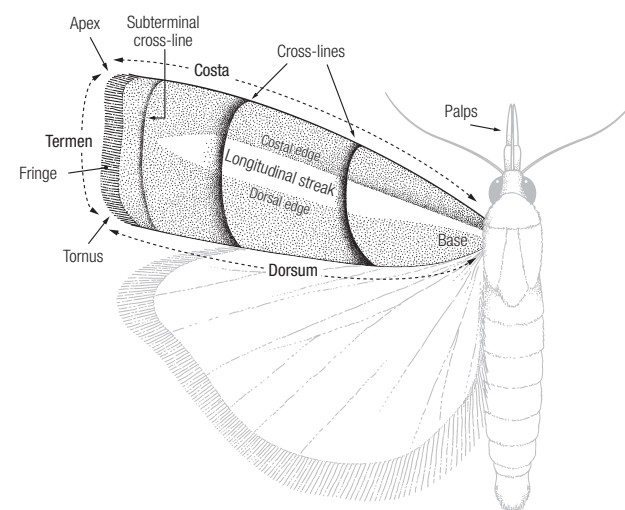
Tornal

Towards or in region of tornus.

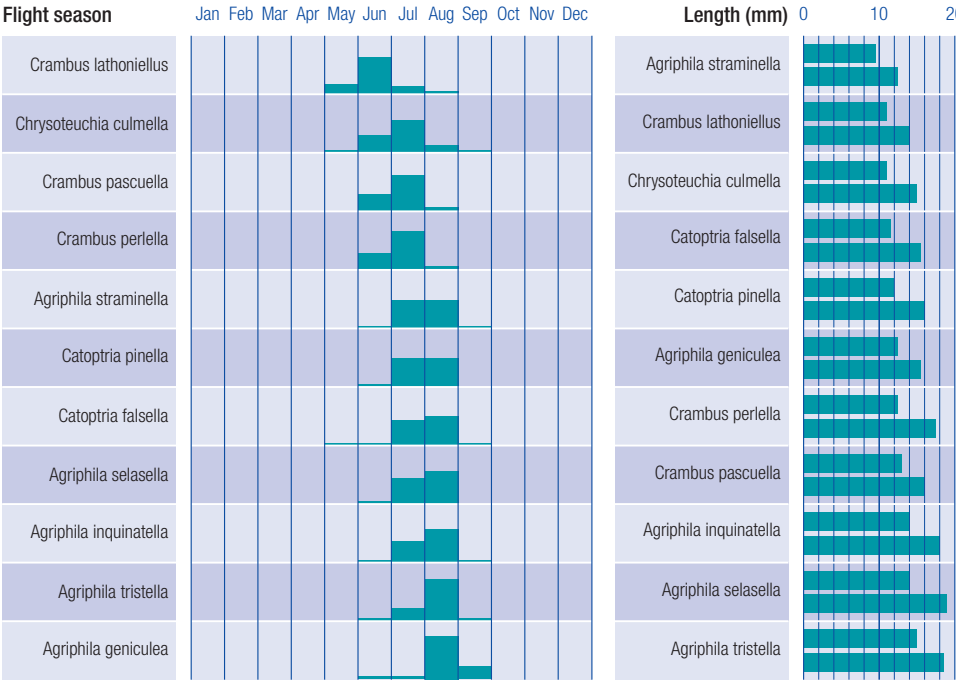
Side view – typical resting posture



Top view – wings spread



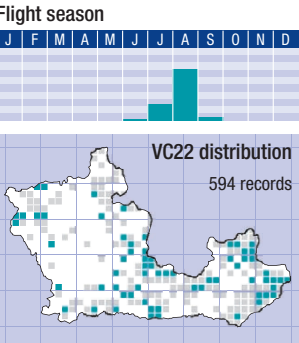
Species comparisons



Graphs show percentage of records for each month, on a scale of 0 to 100.

Bars indicate minimum and maximum lengths, although this is a guide only. If food sources are restricted (e.g. in drought conditions) smaller specimens may well be found.

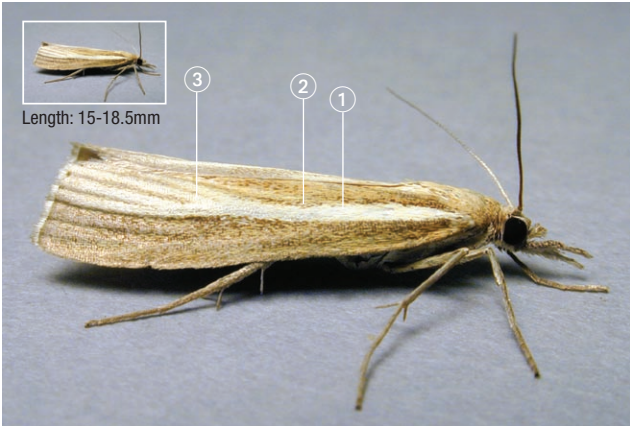
Agriphila tristella Common Grass-veneer 1305



Status: Common.
Habitat: Tall grasses. Often disturbed by day. Comes to light.
Distinctive features: Strong longitudinal streak ①, often narrowing at one third ②, splitting into four 'fingers' ③.

Similar species

A. selasella: Fingers less prominent. Streak splits into two fingers ① rather than four. Termen rounded and roughly perpendicular to costa. Streak pure white, of uniform width. Generally smoother appearance.



Variation

Generally very variable both in ground colour and strength of markings.

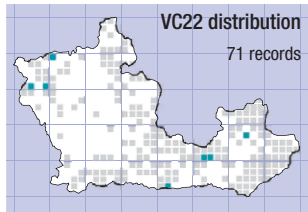


Agriphila selasella

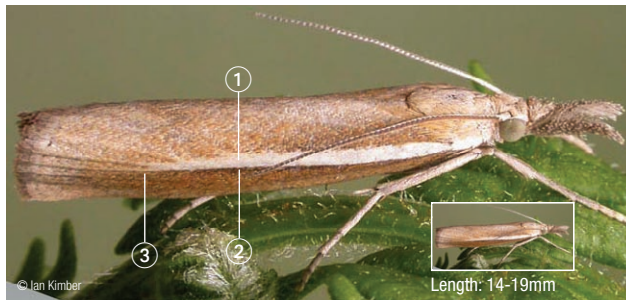
Pale-streak Grass-veneer

1303

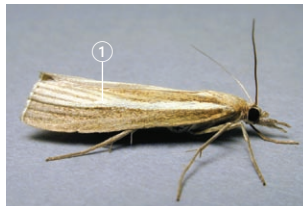
Flight season

**Status:** Local.**Habitat:** Grass. Can be disturbed by day. Nocturnal. Comes to light.**Distinctive features:**

Pure white longitudinal streak of roughly even width ① with dark costal edge ② dividing into two faint 'fingers' ③. Termen rounded, perpendicular to costa. Smooth appearance.



Similar species



A. tristella: 'Fingers' more prominent, four rather than two ①. Narrowing of streak at one third. Termen straight, not perpendicular to costa. Rough appearance.

Variation

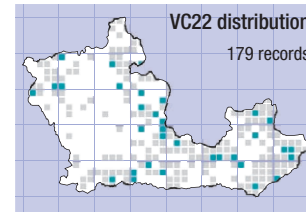
Ground colour quite variable.

*Crambus perlella*

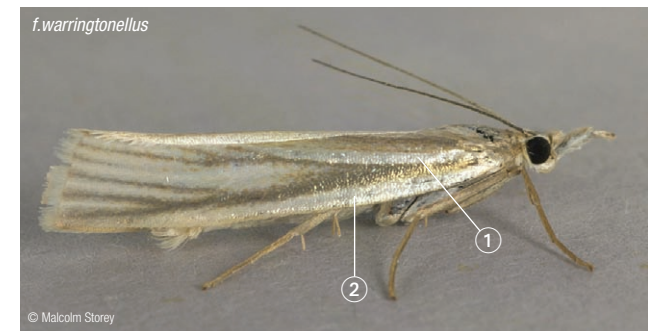
Satin Grass-veneer

1302

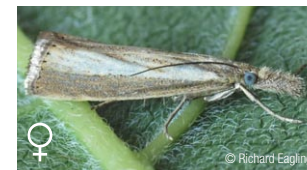
Flight season

**Status:** Common/abundant.**Habitat:** Tall grass. Very easily disturbed by day. Nocturnal. Comes to light.**Distinctive features:**

Shiny white colour, lack of markings. Variant *f. warringtonellus* (▶) has strong white longitudinal streak ① plus another streak along costa ②.



Similar species



A. straminea: Smaller size. More tapered overall shape.

Variation

Little variation in typical form. Some variation in strength of markings in *f. warringtonellus*.

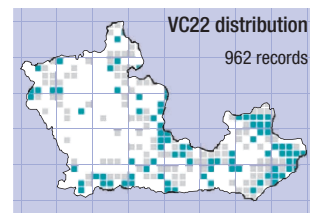


Chrysoteuchia culmella

Garden Grass-veneer

1293

Flight season



Status: Very common/abundant

Habitat: Tall grasses. Frequently disturbed by day. Comes to light.

Distinctive features:

'C' shaped outer cross-line (C for culmella) ①.

Brassy metallic sheen.

Fringe uniform colour ②.



Similar species



A.straminella: Smaller size. No cross-lines.



Platytes cerussella (no records):
Much smaller (Length 6-8mm).

Variation

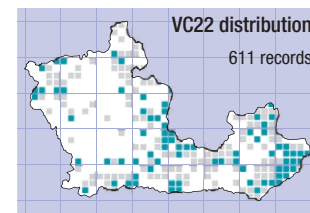
Ground colour and strength of markings very variable. 'C' shaped cross-line can be rather faint but is always visible.

*Agriphila straminella*

Straw Grass-veneer

1304

Flight season



Status: Common/abundant.

Habitat: Grasses, esp. Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca ovina*). Often disturbed by day. Flies by day and night. Comes to light, often in numbers.

Distinctive features:

Small size. Lack of cross-lines.

Fringe metallic, outer half lighter ①.

Faint longitudinal streak ②.

Often speckled with brown ③.

Strongly tapered overall shape.

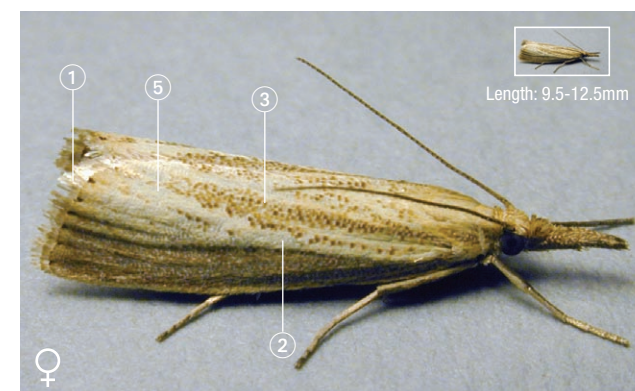
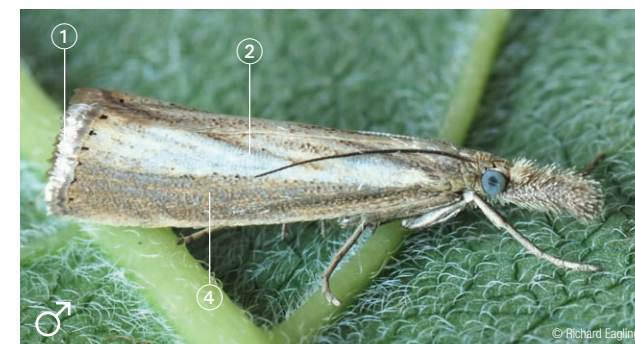
Male:

Two-tone appearance — dorsal half of wing light, costal half dark ④.

Female:

More uniform in tone.

Streak splitting into faint fingers ⑤.



Similar species



C.culmella: Larger size. Angled outer cross-line. Metallic sheen.



C.perlella: Shiny appearance. Larger size. More uniform breadth.

Variation

Degree of brown speckling and overall colour quite variable.

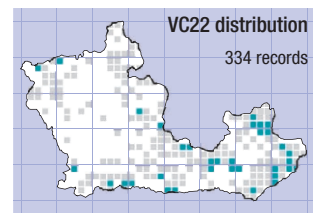


Crambus pascuella

Inlaid Grass-veneer

1294

Flight season

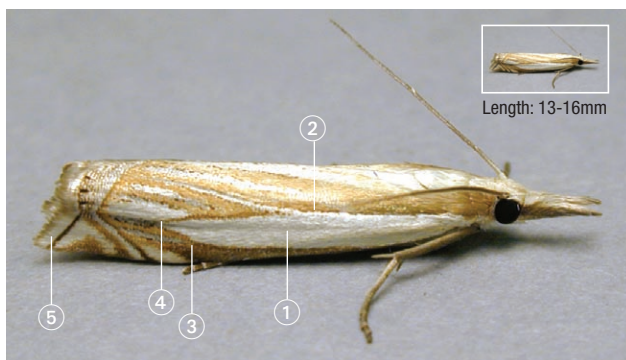


Status: Common/very common

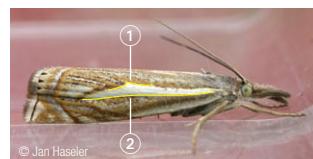
Habitat: Grasses and bushes. Easily disturbed by day. Comes to light

Distinctive features:

Thick, white longitudinal streak ①, dorsal edge more or less straight ②, costal edge angled at two-thirds ③, broken by thin oblique brown line ④. Triangularly shaped and marked apex ⑤. Hind wing pale.

**Variation**

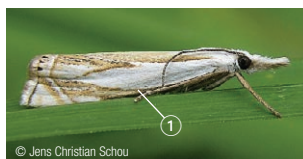
Ground colour, and hence apparent strength of markings, fairly variable.

Similar species

C. lathoniellus: Narrow, notched ① longitudinal streak, costal edge fairly straight ②. Less pronounced triangular apex. Hind wing dark.



Crambus silvella (1 unconfirmed record): Streak rounded not angular, extending beyond subterminal line ①.



Crambus uliginosellus (5 records in *Baker*): Smaller size. Longitudinal streak touches costa to half way ①.



Crambus hamella (4 records): Longitudinal streak unbroken.



Crambus pratella (no records): Longitudinal streak with sharply angled costal edge ①, notched in a similar way to *C. lathoniellus*. Hind wing dark.



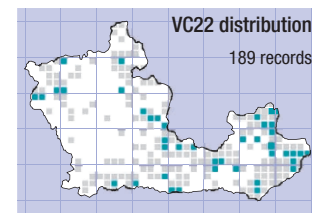
Crambus ericella (no records; northern moorland only): Much darker. Longitudinal streak narrower, well-separated from costa.

Crambus lathoniellus

Hook-streak Grass-veneer

1301

Flight season



Status: Common.

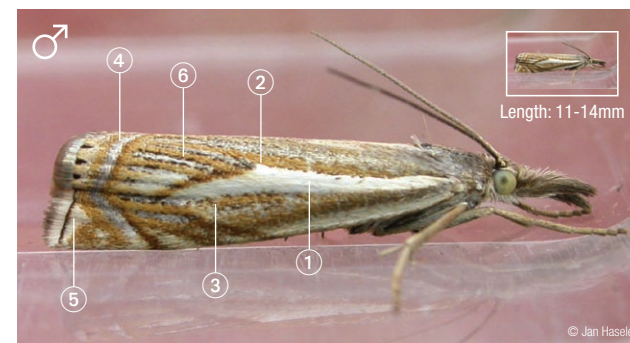
Habitat: Tall grasses. Easily disturbed by day. Nocturnal. Comes to light.

Distinctive features:

Longitudinal streak ①, notched halfway along ②, costal edge fairly straight ③. Strong, sharply bent subterminal line with dark inner edge ④. Triangularly shaped and marked apex ⑤. Hind wing dark.

Male: Streaks between veins greyish ⑥. Wing speckled with blackish scales.

Female: Streaks between veins white ⑦, fewer dark scales on wings, hence much paler overall appearance than male.

**Variation**

Overall colour quite variable. In male, blackish speckling varies in intensity.

Similar species

See previous page for photographs.

C. pascuella: Longitudinal streak broad, not notched. Hind wing pale.

Crambus hamella (4 records): Longitudinal streak unbroken.

Crambus silvella (1 unconfirmed record): Longitudinal streak broad, without notch.

Crambus pratella (no records): Costal edge of longitudinal streak sharply angled at about two-thirds.

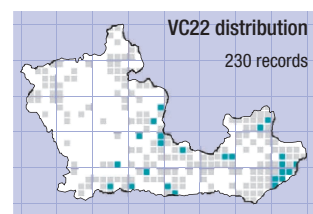
Crambus ericella: See previous page.

Agriphila inquinatella

Barred Grass-veneer

1306

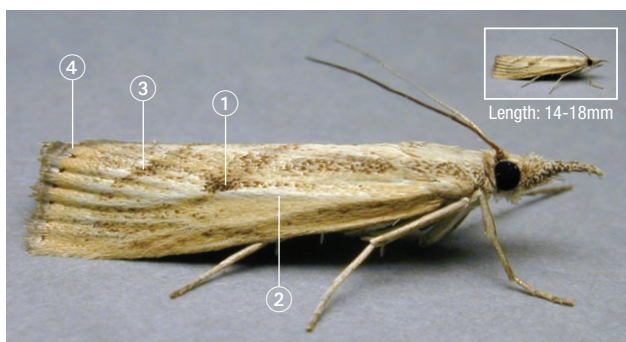
Flight season

**Status:** Local

Habitat: Short grass. Easily disturbed by day. Active from dusk onwards. Comes to light.

Distinctive features:

Strong, dark patch ① in middle of white longitudinal streak ②. Curved, outer cross-line, broken by branches of longitudinal streak ③. Black subterminal dots ④. Overall coloration straw.



Similar species



A. geniculea: Sharply elbowed outer cross-line ①. Usually smaller, although size ranges overlap.



Pediasia contaminella (5 records): Rests with head down, abdomen raised upward (as *P. aridella* below). Spot in place of dark patch ①.



Pediasia aridella (no records): Superficially similar but only found in coastal saltmarsh.

Variation



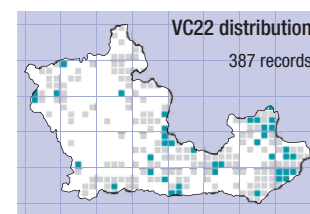
Ground colour variable both in colour and tone. Markings variable in intensity.

Agriphila geniculea

Elbow-striped Grass-veneer

1309

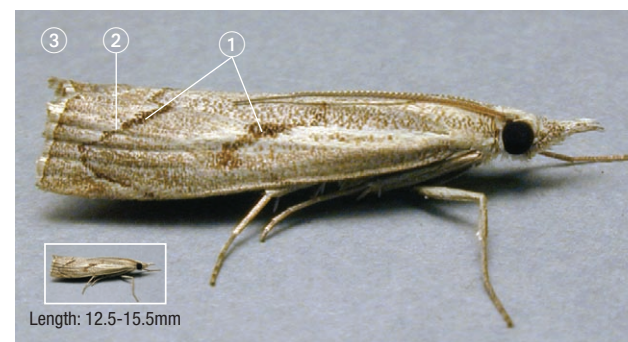
Flight season

**Status:** Common.

Habitat: Grasses. Can be found at rest in young conifer bushes among grass. Readily disturbed by day. Comes to light.

Distinctive features:

Two distinct cross lines ①, outer line strongly elbowed toward termen ②. Overall coloration greyish brown. Fringe metallic ③.



Similar species



A. inquinatella: Outer cross-line more rounded and broken by branches of longitudinal streak ①. Usually larger, although size ranges overlap.



Rests with abdomen raised upward (as *P. aridella* on previous page). Lacks elbowed cross-line.

Pediasia aridella (no records): Lacks elbowed cross-line. Habitat coastal saltmarsh only. See previous page for photograph.

Variation

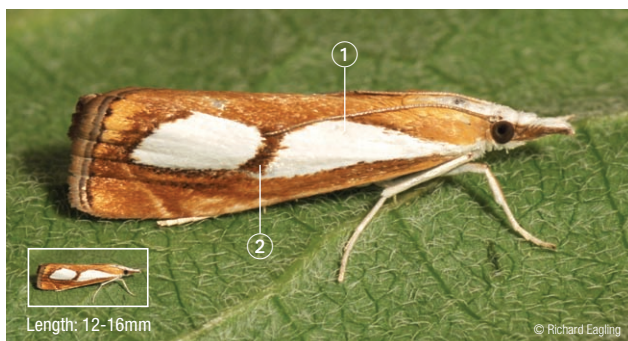
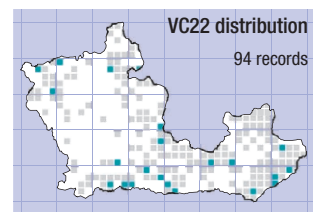
Some variation in overall darkness.

Catoptria pinella

Pearl Grass-veneer

1313

Flight season

**Status:** Local.

Habitat: Found during day amongst trees and bushes, particularly pine. Nocturnal. Comes to light.

Distinctive features:

Broad, widening longitudinal streak ①, cut by slightly oblique dark brown cross-line ②.

Similar species

Catoptria permutatella (only in Scotland), *Catoptria osthelderi* (only one UK record, Kent) and *Catoptria specularis* (only one UK record, Perth) all have thin white outer band beyond end of streak.

Variation

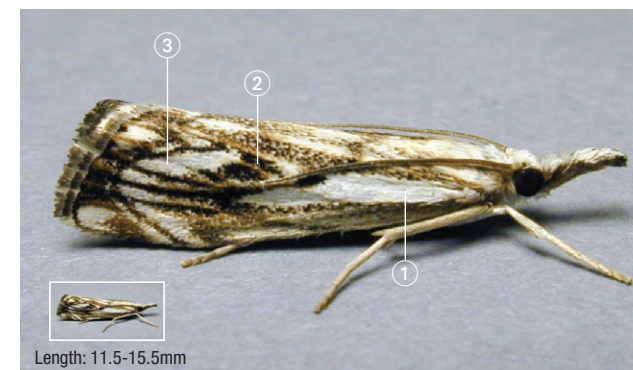
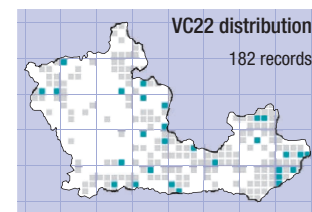
Very little variation.

Catoptria falsella

Chequered Grass-veneer

1316

Flight season

**Status:** Local.

Habitat: Hides in moss, thatch or haystacks by day. Nocturnal. Comes to light.

Distinctive features:

Strong white longitudinal streak ① broken by strong dark brown oblique band ②. White 'c' shaped arc in outer half ③.

Similar species

Thisanotia chrysonuchella (14 records): First cross-line much thinner. Outer cross-line thin and less elbowed. Scattered black scales, particularly in dorsal half.



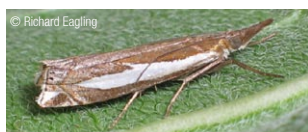
Catoptria verellus (no records): Lacks strong longitudinal streak. Rare migrant.

Variation

Strength of markings quite variable.



Other species recorded in VC22


Chilo phragmitella **Reed Veneer** **1290**

June–July in reed beds. 4 records on database between 1989 and 1998, from Thatcham Reed Beds, Cholsey Marsh and Fernham; *Baker*¹ mentions an old record (pre-1906) from Bulmershe Park, Reading.

Calamotropha paludella **Bulrush Veneer** **1292**

July–August in reed beds. 51 records on database between 1992 and 2006; *Baker*¹ mentions records from Didcot, Dinton Pastures and Sandford Mill. Recorded occasionally in North Hampshire. Nationally scarce/Nb.

Crambus silvella **Wood Grass-veneer** **1296**

July–August. 1 unconfirmed record on database from Silwood Park, 2003. Red Data Book 3: Rare

Crambus uliginosellus **Marsh Grass-veneer** **1297**

June–July. No records on database. 5 records in *Baker*¹ from Eaton Wood (1983), Snelsmore Common (1982), Crowthorne, Wellington College grounds (1983) and Silwood Park (1971). Nationally scarce/Nb.

Crambus hamella **Dark Grass-veneer** **1299**

Mid-July–August. 6 records on database between 1997 and 2006, from Mortimer, Wildmoor Heath and Swinley Brick Pits. Records in *Baker*¹ from Aldermaston (1987) and Wellington College (1983). Several recent records from North Hampshire. Nationally scarce/Nb.

Agriphila latistria **White-streak Grass-veneer** **1307**

July–August. 10 records on database between 1996 and 2006, from Mortimer, Earley, Windsor Forest, Padworth and Swinley Brick Pits. *Baker*¹ mentions records from Aldermaston (1985, 1986 and 1990), Earley (1978) and Silwood park (1971). Recorded in North Hampshire.

Thisanotia chrysonuchella **Powdered Grass-veneer** **1321**

May–June. 14 records on database between 1997 and 2007, all from the Streatley area, 13 from Lardon Chase, one from Moulsoford Downs. *Baker*¹ mentions Moulsoford Downs, Streatley and Unhill Wood. Nationally scarce/Nb.

Pediasia contaminella **Waste Grass-veneer** **1323**

5 records on database from 2002 onwards. Locations: Mortimer, Chawridge Bank. *Baker*¹ mentions records from Owlsmoor and Silwood Park in recent years, and Sandhurst in 1952. Probably under-recorded/overlooked. Several records from North Hampshire. Nationally scarce/Nb.

Further information

Goater B. *British Pyralid Moths*. Harley Books, Colchester, UK. 1986.

Baker B.R. *The Butterflies and Moths of Berkshire*. Hedera Press, Uffington, UK. 1994.

<http://ukmoths.org.uk/>

<http://www.uklepidoptera.co.uk/>

<http://www.hantsmoths.org.uk>

References

1. Baker BR. *The Butterflies and Moths of Berkshire*. Hedera Press, Uffington, UK. 1994.
2. Porter, J. *A Label and Checklist of the British Micro-lepidoptera with Vernacular Names*. Privately published. 2002.

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Editorial team

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Distribution maps and flight period charts based on data from the county database, compiled and maintained by Martin C. Harvey, Berkshire County Moth Recorder, from records submitted by a multitude of enthusiastic amateur recorders. Martin would be pleased to receive any further records of moths in Berkshire. Martin can be contacted by e-mail: kitenetter@googlemail.com

Photographs

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