



The greenish-gold body of the elephant hawkmoth is punctuated by shocking pink stripes, which act as camouflage on many surfaces.



When startled, the elephant hawkmoth caterpillar draws its trunk into its foremost body segment. This posture resembles a snake with a large head and four large eye-like patches.

as a shed or garage. However, in Britain, the winter climate is usually too cold for them to survive.

#### Night-time flier

The elephant hawkmoth leads a very different lifestyle to its cousin, being both nocturnal and resident. It is found throughout lowland Britain and Ireland, especially in large rural gardens, parks and woodland edges.

Bright golden-olive in hue, with vivid pink streaks across the body and wings, they are one of the most striking of all Britain's insects. These colours and patterns appear obvious when the insect is seen in isolation, but they provide surprisingly good camouflage when it is hiding among foliage. Here, the pink streaks help break up its outline.

Elephant hawkmoths have triangular-shaped wings, with a wingspan of  $1\frac{3}{4}$ - $2\frac{3}{4}$ in ( $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $7$ cm), and a broad body, tapering to the tip of the abdomen. The name comes not from the appearance of the adult, but from the larva. These are greyish-brown, and sport a proboscis that looks superficially

**TRAPPED BY LIGHT** Like other night-flying moths, elephant hawkmoths are attracted to light, which enables scientists and naturalists to catch them using moth traps. These work on the principle that nocturnal moths use the moon to navigate, keeping it at a particular angle to their body as they fly. Because the artificial light of the moth trap is so much closer than the very distant moon, the moths fly in ever-decreasing circles until they reach the light. They then assume it is daybreak, and so seek shelter inside the trap, usually hiding beneath cardboard egg boxes put there for that very purpose.

like an elephant's trunk. Two large false 'eyes' on the sides of its head accentuate this, and give it a snake-like appearance. When threatened by a predator, such as a bird, the 3in (7.5cm) long caterpillar swells up and waves its head in the air. This usually has the desired effect of frightening off the attacker.

In Britain, adult elephant hawkmoths are usually seen from May to July. They emerge from their hiding places among plant foliage at dusk to feed on nectar-rich plants. They have very good night vision, with light-sensitive cells in their eyes. These enable them to discriminate between different coloured flowers, when it would otherwise be too dark for them to do so. Their preference is for tubular, nectar-rich flowers, such as those of honeysuckle and willowherbs.

Eggs are laid on a variety of plants, including fuchsias, lady's bedstraw and especially rosebay willowherb. The caterpillars emerge from July onwards, and can be seen until September. When the weather begins to turn cooler in the autumn, the caterpillars pupate. They spend the winter in this form, hiding in shallow soil, or in low vegetation, before emerging as adults the following spring. >