

# Moths

By Dennis Skadsen

Unlike butterflies, very little fieldwork has been completed to determine species composition and distribution of moths in northeast South Dakota. This is partly due to the fact moths are harder to capture and study because most adults are nocturnal, and identification to species is difficult in the field. Many adults can only be differentiated by studying specimens in the hand with a good understanding of moth taxonomy.

Although behavior and several physiological characteristics separate moths from butterflies including flight periods (moths are mainly nocturnal (night) and butterflies diurnal (day)); the shapes of antennae and wings; each have similar life histories. Both moths and butterflies complete a series of changes from egg to adult called metamorphosis. The only difference being adult moths develop in cocoons and most butterflies in chrysalises. Like butterflies, the host plants that moth larvae feed upon are important. These food sources will determine when and where you will find larvae and adults.

Adult moths are most often found on warm summer nights lying on the ground below bright outside lights. It is believed moths are attracted to these nighttime lights, and upon reaching the source become trapped and disorientated. The moth circles the light trying to escape and may end up falling helplessly to the ground where they are vulnerable to predators. Some scientists believe the proliferation of nighttime lighting, deemed light pollution, may be one reason for declining populations of this and many other nocturnal insects.

A good book for beginners is Himmelman's (2002) book "Discovering Moths". Winter (2000) describes several methods for capturing and observing moths including the use of light traps and sugar baits. There are a few other essential books listed in the suggested references section located on pages 8 & 9. Many moth identification guides can now be found on the internet, the North Dakota and Iowa sites are the most useful for our area. Since we often encounter the caterpillars of moths more often than adults, having a guide like Wagners (2005) is essential.

Listed below are just a few of the species that probably occur in northeast South Dakota. The list is compiled from the author's personnel collection, and specimens collected by Gary Marrone or listed in Opler (2006). Common and scientific names follow Moths of North Dakota (2007) or Opler (2006).

## Moths Observed in Day, Grant, Marshall, and Roberts Counties, South Dakota.

### Leaf Rollers and Bell Moths



Linden leafroller moth (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)

**Linden leafroller moth** (*Pantographa limata*)

Geometrids/Inchworm Moths



Crocus geometer (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)

- Scallop moth** (*Cepphis armataria*)
- Maple spanworm** (*Ennomis magnaria*)
- The beggar** (*Eubaphe mendica*)
- Johnson's euchaena** (*Euchlaena johnsonaria*)
- Saw-wing** (*Euchlaena serrata*)
- Mottled euchaena** (*Euchlaena tigrinaria*)
- Snowy geometer** (*Eugonobapta nivosaria*)
- Confused eusarca** (*Eusarca confusaria*)



Straight-lined plagodis (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

- Chickweed geometer** (*Haematopsis grataria*)
- Pale metanema** (*Metanema inatomaria*)
- Honest pero** (*Pero honestaria*)
- Large maple spanworm moth** (*Prochoerodes transversata*)
- Straight-Lined Plagodis** (*Plagodis phlogosaria*)
- Sharp lined yellow** (*Sicya macularia*)
- White slant-line** (*Tetracis cachexiata*)
- Crocus geometer** (*Xanthotype sospeta*)

Giant Silk Moths



Cecropia moth (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

The largest moths found in this area, with wingspans up to six inches, are the Cecropia and Polyphemus moths. Both species are found in or near hardwood forests and occasionally urban areas.

- Polyphemus moth** (*Antheraea polyphemus*)
- Cecropia moth** (*Hyalophora cecropia*)



Polyphemus moth (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

## Sphinx Moths



White-lined sphinx moth (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

The sphingidae are one of the better known and identifiable moth families. Several sphinx moths fly during the daytime. The White-lined sphinx (shown above) is sometimes mistaken for a hummingbird when observed feeding on petunias and other flowers. The Bumblebee or Snowberry clearwing (shown on page 4) mimics a bumblebee to gain protection from predators. Several other diurnal moth's

mimic wasps. The larvae of sphinx moths feed on a variety of trees; therefore, adults are most often encountered in woodlands and urban areas. One species, the Willow-herb day-sphinx may be a prairie-specialist dependant on remnant tallgrass prairie plants for survival.

**Waved sphinx** (*Ceratonia undulosa*)  
**Hog sphinx, Virginia-creeper sphinx**  
 (*Darapsa myron*)  
**Lettered sphinx** (*Deidamia inscriptum*)



Hog sphinx (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)



Achemon sphinx (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)

**Achemon sphinx** (*Eumorpha achemon*)  
**Pandora sphinx** (*Eumorpha pandoris*)



Pandora sphinx (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)



Clearwing (photo by Doug Backlund)



Above and below are variations of Pandora sphinx caterpillars (photos by Dennis Skadsen)



Bumblebee clearwing caterpillar (photo by Dennis Skadsen)



- Bumblebee clearwing/Snowberry clearwing** (*Hemaris diffinis*)
- Bedstraw sphinx** (*Hyles gallii*)
- White-lined sphinx** (*Hyles lineate*)
- Five-spotted hawk moth** (*Manduca quinquemaculatus*)
- Big poplar sphinx** (*Pachysphinx modesta*)
- Blinded sphinx** (*Paonis excaecatus*)
- Small-eyed sphinx** (*Paonis myops*)
- Willow-herb day-sphinx** (*Proserpinus juanita*)
- Twin-spotted sphinx** (*Smerinthus jamaicensis*)

**Great ash sphinx** (*Sphinx chersis*)  
**Laurel sphinx** (*Sphinx kalmiae*)  
**Vashti sphinx** (*Sphinx vashti*)



Five-spotted hawk moth or tomato hornworm caterpillars (photo by Dennis Skadsen)



Twin-spotted sphinx caterpillar (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

Prominents

**Yellow necked caterpillar moth** (*Datana ministra*)  
**Gray furcula** (*Furcula cinera*)  
**Common gluphisia** (*Gluphisia septentrionis*)  
**Variable oakleaf caterpillar** (*Lochmaeus manteo*)

**White-dotted prominent** (*Nadata gibbosa*)  
**Elegant prominent** (*Odontosia elegans*)  
**Black-rimmed prominent** (*Pheosia rimosa*)  
**Orange-humped mapleworm** (*Symmerista leucitys*)

Owlet Moths

**Short-lined chocolate** (*Argyrostis anilis*)  
**Canadian owlet** (*Calyptra canadensis*)  
**Green leuconycta** (*Leuconycta diptheroides*)  
**Hitched arches** (*Melanchra adjuncta*)  
**Owl moth** (*Thysania zenobia*)



Sweetheart underwing (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)

Underwing Moths

Aptly named due to their colorful underwings, this group of moths is easily attracted to sugar baits. A slightly fermented mixture of stale beer and brown sugar painted on a tree will attract feeding adults at night. By approaching the bait slowly with a flashlight, you can easily observe and capture these medium sized moths. Most adult underwings emerge in August and are found in woodlands. The Three-staffed and Whitney's underwings are

associated with prairie habitats. McDaniel and Fauske (1981) published a taxonomic key to twenty-eight species of *Catocala* collected in eastern South Dakota that is useful for identifying underwings in this area.

**Alabama underwing** (*Catocala alabamae*)

**Sweetheart underwing** (*Catocala amatrix*)

**Three-staffed underwing** (*Catocala amestris*)

**Darling underwing** (*Catocala cara*)

**Sleepy underwing** (*Catocala concumbens*)

**Woody underwing** (*Catocala grynea*)

**Betrothed underwing** (*Catocala innubens*)

**Mother underwing** (*Catocala parta*)

**Ultronia underwing** (*Catocala ultronia*)

**Whitney's underwing** (*Catocala whitneyi*)



Whitney's underwing (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)



Underwing moth at rest (photo by Dennis Skadsen)



Ultronia underwing (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)

### Fruit Piercers



Herald moth (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)

**The Herald** (*Scoliopteryx labatrix*)

### Greens/Emeralds

**Blackberry looper moth** (*Chlorochlamys chloroleucaria*)

## Foresters



Beautiful wood-nymph (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)

**Beautiful wood-nymph** (*Eudryas grata*)  
**Pearly wood-nymph** (*Eudryas unio*)

## Flower Moths



Orange phlox moth (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)

**Orange phlox moth** (*Heliothis acesias*)  
**Prairie-sage flower moth** (*Schinia cumatilis*)  
**Hulst flower moth** (*Schinia hulstia*)  
**Leadplant flower moth** (*Schinia lucens*)

## Lichen Moths

**Painted lichen moth** (*Hypoprepia fucosa*)  
**Scarlet winged lichen moth** (*Hypoprepia miniata*)

## Tiger Moths

**Lesser milkweed tiger moth/Unexpected cynthia** (*Cycnia inopinatus*)  
**Dogbane tiger moth/Delicate cynthia** (*Cycnia tenera*)  
**Acreea moth/Saltmarsh caterpillar** (*Estigmene acreea*)  
**Parthenice Tiger Moth** (*Grammia parthenice*)  
**Virgin tiger moth** (*Grammia virgo*)



Virgin tiger moth (specimen by Dennis Skadsen)



*Grammia* sp. caterpillar (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

**Banded tussock moth** (*Halysidota tessellaris*)  
**Confusing haploa** (*Haploa confusa*)  
**LeConte's haploa** (*Haploa lecontei*)  
**Ruby tiger moth** (*Phragmatobia fuliginosa*)  
**Lined ruby tiger moth** (*Phragmatobia lineata*)



Woolly bear caterpillar (photo by Dennis Skadsen)

**Woolly bear/Isabella tiger moth** (*Pyrrharctia Isabella*)  
**Virginia tiger moth** (*Spilosoma virginica*)  
**Rusty virbia** (*Virbia ferruginosa*)  
**Immaculate holomelina** (*Virbia immaculate*)

## ❖ Suggested References

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### **Websites**

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Insects of Iowa  
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Moths of North Dakota  
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