

Moths

How can you tell a moth from a butterfly? By the antennae. Butterflies have a bulge at the end of their antennae while the antennae of moths are feathered.

Most moths are active at night and consequently aren't as well known as butterflies. Not all moths are pollinators, in fact most do not eat as adults. Since for butterflies and moths pollination is incidental to nectar collection, only those that actually seek nectar as adults are pollinators. Nocturnal nectivorous moths are attracted to pale red, purple, pink, or white flowers that emit a strong, sweet odor at night. Moth species known to occur in Hershey's Mill with very different habits are described below.



Both the **White-lined sphinx moth** and the **Glassy winged hummingbird moth** are called hummingbird moths because they can hover like a hummingbird while collecting nectar with their long proboscis. They are active from early evening through the night. Host plants for larvae of the White-lined sphinx are Evening primrose and plants in the apple family—apple, cherry plum. Larvae of the Glassy-winged can be found on honeysuckles, teasels, and dogbane.



The many types of night flying small brown moths are normally invisible unless one gets trapped in your patio doors at night. The **Tulip tree beauty** is one that lays its eggs high up in our tulip trees or magnolia, sassafras or spicebush. Moth larvae are favored food of birds raising young—it takes 9000 caterpillars to raise one clutch of Carolina Chickadees. The decline in populations of these anonymous moths due to loss of habitat and insecticides has a negative effect on bird food supplies as well as on plant pollination.



Another brown nocturnal moth is the **Isabella tiger moth**. Its caterpillar form is more famous as the Woolly Bear that any child recognizes. It feeds on a variety of low growing plants including dandelion, grass, nettles, and lettuce. The width of the orange band is a descriptor of the caterpillar's age—not a predictor of how cold the winter will be. Why does the Woolly Bear cross the road?—No one knows.



I include the **Luna moth** because even though it is not a pollinator, it cannot be overlooked. Its wingspan ranges from 4.5 to 7 inches. It is one of the moths that do not feed at all as adults emerging from the pupa to mate, lay eggs and die in a few days. It is a silkworm moth; one whose cocoon is made of silk fibers. However, all attempts to develop an American silk industry failed. Host plants are birch, black gum, hickory, sweetgum, and walnut.