

## Join in and Celebrate National Moth Week

The last week in July is when “moth-ers” celebrate National Moth Week. Anyone, including you, is invited to get outside, explore, and celebrate the beauty and mystery of these nocturnal insects. They may be over-shadowed by their showy butterfly relatives, but are no less deserving of our attention and protection.

**Moth Fact #1.** Many of the largest and showiest moths in Ontario (like Luna, Polyphemus, and Cecropia moths) do not have mouth parts as adults and instead survive off their fat stores. Their only goal as adults is to mate and produce the next generation. And they've only got one week – talk about pressure!

**Moth Fact #2.** Moths are rich in protein and are an important food source for bats, owls and other birds, lizards, amphibians, cats, dogs, rodents, and some bears. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, over 30 species of moth caterpillars are harvested and eaten by people.

**Moth Fact #3.** Some species of tiger moths (whose caterpillars are known as woolly bears in Ontario) can fool bats by unleashing ultrasonic clicks that disrupt the bat's ability to use echolocation to accurately gauge distances.

### Now you Try:

As a moth-er, you must first recognize if the insect you are examining is a moth or a butterfly. Let's start with butterflies. Butterflies are primarily diurnal, which means they come out during the day. Find a patch of flowers (preferably wild flowers) and look for butterflies. Butterflies typically have: 1) club-shaped antenna, 2) wings that fold up vertically over their backs, and 3) bright and colourful patterns on their wings. Be warned, there are some moths that are also diurnal with bright colours!

Now let's find some moths. Turn on an outdoor light (like a porch light) and go outside after dark. See any moths? Moths are mostly nocturnal (come out at night) and typically have: 1) feathery antenna, 2) wings that fold over their backs and hide their abdomens, and 3) wings that are more likely to be drab-coloured (but there are some species with dazzling colours!).

Moths are among the most diverse and successful insects on earth, with Ontario being home to over 3000 moth species. This means that only an expert moth-er will be able to identify all the moths they see! But don't fear, a free app is here to help you! Visit the iNaturalist webpage at <https://www.inaturalist.org/> and download the app. The app takes a picture of your moth (or any living thing), identifies it, and (most importantly) creates a record of your encounter. Your moth-er participation means you are now acting as a citizen scientist, and your moth sightings will contribute valuable scientific data to help researchers study the range, diversity, and distribution of moth species. Lastly, we want to see your moths! Tweet your best moth pictures to @BEANOntario.

### References:

- <http://nationalmothweek.org/>
- <https://www.inaturalist.org/>
- <https://ontariomoths.wordpress.com/>