

Bug of the Month

by Jim Revell / September 2015

White Flannel Moth ■ White-marked Tussock Moth



White Flannel Moth

Class: Insecta
Order: Lepidoptera
Family: Megalopygidae
(Flannel Moths)
Genus: *Norape*
Species: *ovina*



White-marked Tussock Moth

Class: Insecta
Order: Lepidoptera
Family: Erebidae
Genus: *Orgyia*
Species: *leucostigma*

We have two “bugs” this month thanks to pictures sent by Master Gardeners Vicki Raines and Sue Coleman. Vickie found the White Flannel Moth larva (caterpillar) on her Redbud tree. I believe I have done an article on this moth in the past but, that said, the White Flannel Moth’s habitat ranges from the fields and woodlands of Missouri to Washington, D.C., and south to Florida and Texas.

In most regions, there are two generations with mature caterpillars showing up from May throughout the summer. In the deep south, there are additional broods.

The caterpillar has distinctive patterns of yellow, orange and black markings. *See photo at right.* Some of the lateral hairs are more than two times its body width. This is one of the “stinging caterpillars” (the spines and lobes are clearly visible), so care should be taken if you decide to touch or move the caterpillar. An allergic skin reaction could occur, particularly around sensitive skin areas. Common food sources include Redbuds, Black Locust, Elm and other woody plants.



Sue Coleman’s “bug,” the White-marked Tussock Moth, is readily recognized with its bright red head and mid-dorsal white-to-yellow tufts. There is a broad black mid-dorsal stripe flanked by yellow stripes on each side of the caterpillar.



Another distinct feature is the two red spots (glands) on segments 6 and 7. *See photo at left.* The White-marked Tussock Moth can be found in fields, woodlands and forests from southern Canada to Florida and west into Texas.

The female moth is flightless and may lay up to 300 eggs in a single mass. The egg mass is froth-covered and covers the cocoon from which the female has emerged. The egg mass over-winters in the egg stage.

There are two or more generations, with mature caterpillars showing up from May to November. Common food sources range – in a wide variety – from Apple, Black Locust, Cherry, Elm, Oak trees, Spruce and conifers to rose bushes. This caterpillar could and does turn up on any woody plant in the eastern U.S. They are often found in late summer and are, occasionally, pests of Christmas tree farms in the northeast.

The White-marked Tussock Moth caterpillar can also cause allergic skin reactions, particularly when in contact with sensitive areas such as the back, stomach or inner arms.

Photo References:

- bugguide.net/node/view/989516/bgimage (White Flannel Moth)
(photo by Ken Childs, Henderson, TN; 2014)
- bugguide.net/node/view/72496/bgimage (White Flannel Moth Caterpillar)
(photo by Daniel Swofford, Van Buren, MO; 2006)
- bugguide.net/node/view/1027987/bgimage (White-marked Tussock Moth)
(photo by M.J. Hatfield, Plymouth Rock, IO; 2014)
- bugguide.net/node/view/1018624/bgimage (White-marked Tussock Moth Caterpillar)
(photo by S. Moorman, Gray Court, SC; 2014)

Research References / Resources:

- enpp.auburn.edu/outreach/web-publications/stinging-caterpillars
- pubs.ext.vt.edu/ENTO/ENTO-75/ENTO-75NP-jpg.pdf
- Princeton Field Guides "Caterpillars of Eastern North America" by David L. Wagner

Jim Revell is a Bedford Extension Master Gardener Volunteer.
Read more of his articles on the "Jims Bugs" page @ www.BedfordMasterGardeners.org