

Bug of the Month

by Jim Revell / February 2017

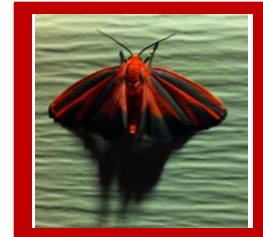
Scarlet-winged Lichen Moth



The *Hypoprepia miniata* / Scarlet-winged Lichen Moth is also called the Scarlet Lichen Moth as well as the Striped Footman. Its species name (*miniata*) is Latin meaning “colored with red lead or vermilion.” There are four species of the genus *Hypoprepia* found in America north of Mexico.

Adults have a range from British Columbia south to the western side of the Rocky Mountains; they’re found in Arizona and Texas and throughout eastern North America. Their habitat is open woodlands and forests, and they’re active in our area (the east) from April to September while, in western areas, adult fly in the month of July and August. They are nocturnal in nature and attracted to light. In some areas, such as Missouri, two or three generations can occur, with mature caterpillars seen almost year-round, but north and east, only one generation occurs.

The moth’s forewing is 14-17mm (25mm=1 inch). The forewing is entirely red, with two broad dark gray stripes extending the length of the wing, and one shorter stripe between the longer ones. The hindwing is red with a broad dark terminal band. The moth’s bright conspicuous markings – its wing color and pattern – signals predators of its possible toxic nature. Such conspicuous markings are called “aposematic” in that they warn predators (who learn to avoid the insects) of special capabilities for defense.



The larvae are dusky black with yellow, and sparsely covered with thick, barbed black bristles. They feed on lichen and blue-green algae and are often found on tree trunks, rocks, stones or fallen logs where lichen may grow. Larvae emerge in the Spring after overwintering in a thin, silky cocoon.

An interesting note on defense: *Hypoprepia* have a very effective defense mechanism which is referred to as “fecal flicking.” Their anatomy includes anal “combs” that allow them to eject (fling or flick) fecal matter at a distance of 30 or more times their body length! This confuses parasitic and predatory wasps that generally use such matter to locate their targeted victims.

Photo References:

- * www.bugguide.net/node/view/799516 (Photo, Carlee Oj, Prince William Co., VA, 07/07/2013)
- * www.msnbcmedia.msn.com/j/MSNBC/Components/Photo/2012/September/120906/pb-120907-winged-tapestries-kb-5p-03.photoblog900.jpg
- * www.butterfliesandmoths.org/sites/default/files/voucher_images/red_moth.jpg

Research References / Resources:

- * Princeton Field Guides, *Caterpillars of Eastern North America*, by David L. Wagner
- * National Wildlife Federation’s *Field Guide to Insects and Spiders of North America* by Arthur V. Evans
- * bugguide.net

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Read more of his articles on the “Jims Bugs” page @ www.BedfordMasterGardeners.org